

The Midwife.

MOTHERS AND BABIES.*

BEGINNINGS.

While thinking of this subject, the beginnings of many things, from the beginning of a world to the little beginnings of unimportant things, many intervening steps and subjects by the way, worthy of our serious consideration or calculated to interest and please, come to mind. And as this Journal is devoted to the betterment of the conditions of human life in its weakness and disease, we will talk a little of the utter helplessness and dependence of life in its commencement, and of some means of supplying some of its deficiencies suited to the present age. From the moment an expectant mother is aware of the fact of the immanence of life without making any radical change in her routine—provided it be a fairly natural one—her life should be lived in the consciousness that another life depends on her for its future; and whatever of health and happy temperament she enjoys, it is largely the outcome of another's thought for her; whatever she may have lacked, and missed, and known the want of, that may have been due to that other's thoughtlessness and neglect, she has it in her power to supply for the coming one. There is no need, and no reason, for undue anxiety about the life of the child or her own; pregnancy and parturition are natural processes, and although less easy and normal to civilised races than to primitive people, the former have advantage in the discoveries of science; and in these days of hospitals and homes and medical aid distributed widespread in every land none should have cause to fear.

It is true we have not the nerve and cool courage of our ancestors. But they in their time had not the remedies at hand for evils that might occur; we are not fighting our way for bare existence as they did, and in the fight developing those qualities so much esteemed in the race, but we should have the will to fight on a higher plane for the things that are more than bread and butter, for the intellectual qualities and mental training, and gifts of heart by which the race shall be raised. If we do not recognise this, a degenerate period will inevitably follow. Love of luxury is largely responsible for late marriages—small families—

and no families—and irritable children growing into nervous adults.

Women, who, a few generations back, would have been working with their hands all through the waiting months, can now afford to sit idle and fret because their social engagements are curtailed. They read some of the many inadvisedly published records of "bad cases" in their "books for mothers," and imagine all the horrors of one in ten thousand will happen to them—then fly to the last most sensational novel to drown the thoughts that distress. Now, from what I have gathered from the study of some three hundred mothers, those who have lived a sensible, contented, happy life, reap the reward in a contented, happy child, that sleeps and feeds as it should; and of those who were over-anxious, frightened at imagined horrors, or who did not anticipate with pleasure the coming of the little one, perhaps positively objected to its prospective presence, the results are apt to be disastrous in some form. Very fortunately for the present-day mothers, who know so much more than their ancestors, and have such vivid imaginations, things do not turn out as badly as they are often anticipated. The unwanted child becomes the darling of somebody's heart, and happiness reigns. Then ameliorations of science come to the rescue of the woman in labour and the child is born often without her knowledge. The last century horrors of puerperal fever are now almost unknown in civilized lands. Unfortunately, here in India, they still exist to a deplorable extent, but not amongst the properly cared for—be they Europeans or Indians, rich or poor. There is nothing natural about puerperal fever. It is always avoidable and invariably due to carelessness, ignorance, or wickedness on someone's part, whenever it occurs.

Have our tastes for quiet employments been altogether superseded by those for more exciting or boisterous entertainments? Is there no pleasure to be taken by the woman who is not fond of reading, in art work of any kind? in sewing, and in the preparation of the layette? in quiet out-door games and rural walks where life is lived in the country? The art of conversation seems to be dying out; and, as for ability to read aloud, well, it is indeed to be deplored that this inexpensive source of pleasure is not a universal accomplishment of every finished school-girl. To be able to play and sing are considered necessary, to draw and

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