

# The Midwife.

## THE CARE OF PREMATURE INFANTS.

## SOME SCENES IN A BABY'S LIFE.

### II.

#### THE FEEDING OF PREMATURE INFANTS.

Premature infants should, if possible, be fed by the natural means; if the child is very small one of the great difficulties is that its mouth is not large enough to grasp the nipple, or perhaps the mother has flat or inverted nipples. These difficulties may be overcome by the use of a nipple shield, but a better plan than this is to draw off the milk or colostrum with a breast pump, and give it to the baby from a bottle with a small teat; this is better than feeding with a spoon, as it fosters the instinct to suck, with which every baby is born, and which, if neglected, will die a natural death. Sometimes sucking tires the baby, and the feed has to be finished with a spoon, but the baby should always be given the opportunity each time of taking the food naturally.

A day or two after birth the skin of a small premature infant assumes a dry, wrinkled appearance; this is due to lack of fluid. To meet this defect the baby should have warm water to drink several times a day; this should be given in the same way as the milk, each being given every alternate hour; beside supplying the necessary moisture, the action of the water is to keep the bowels free and healthy. Should the baby be unable to take more than a few drops at a feed, the water should be omitted and the milk given each hour; the moisture can then be supplied by means of saline injections per rectum. There are, however, several objections to this method, the principal ones being—

1. That the anus is apt to get sore with the constant insertion of the tube or nozzle.
2. That the disturbance and exposure of the baby are much greater than in giving the water by mouth.

Should the saline injections be necessary they can be given either by ball syringe or tube and funnel. A few drops only should be given at first, and the amount increased as the child seems able to retain it.

Should the mother not be able to suckle the infant, either Pepsencia whey or ordinary rennet whey may be given, if approved by the doctor, followed with barley water and milk, one to four parts, as the child gets stronger. The amount of whey or barley water and milk must be regulated according to the capacity of the baby; it is impossible to state the exact amount.

R. M. B.

The surroundings of the baby's home are such as may be seen in any town or village in the Punjab, and on all sides there are irregular clusters of low, flat-roofed mud huts, with narrow muddy paths winding between them. In front of the house in which the baby is to be found is a little yard, closed in by the backs and sides of neighbouring huts, and occupied by a big buffalo cow, which leaves little room for passage to the door. When the house is entered there is a rush of acrid wood smoke, which would temporarily blind eyes unaccustomed to such fumes, for there is no window, and only a hole in the roof to act as chimney. The outer room into which the door opens is the principal living room, and has a considerable number of occupants. A woman is stirring a pot placed on the smoking fire in the little mud fireplace; several men are squatting round on the mud floor smoking a hookah, which is conveniently placed in their midst so that the mouthpiece can be twisted round and each take a pull at it in turn. Another man is sleeping on a string bed, but is so covered over by his thick cotton shawl that he presents a mummy-like appearance. Several children are playing about; one little boy about two years—wearing only a muslin shirt—might surprise an unwary visitor into admiration of his plumpness; but this would horrify his mother, who would consider any complimentary remark ill-advised, as likely to bring ill-luck to her child.

From the outer room two small inner rooms open off, and each is the special property of one of the two families who make this hut their home. The right-hand room is almost dark, for it also has no window; its air supply comes through from the outer room, and the lamp, consisting of a little wick floating in an earthen vessel of oil, gives but scanty light. There is hardly space to stand, much less to move about in the room, for besides two string beds, which fill up the greater part of it, a couple of low stools, a spinning wheel, and earthen vessels containing grain litter the floor, while a pile of wood fills the corner, and numerous garments, hanging from long pegs driven into the walls, encroach on the limited space. When anyone enters there is a scuffle in the corner and a squeak from the mice, who have come in search of food spilt from the store jars. On one of the beds a still form is lying, covered over with a cloth. It is the body of the baby's

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)