

THE POSSIBILITIES OF THE FUTURE.

It is slowly being recognized that, in the trained midwife, the nation has a social worker of the very greatest value. In the homes of the poorest she grapples with conditions which find the man of science helpless. He does his best in spite of them, the modern midwife brings order out of chaos, and leaves the patient and child clean and comfortable, her room in nursing order, and supervises, and gives directions for, its cleanliness. For let us claim here and now that, as a routine practice, the actual cleaning of the room is not the midwife's duty, nor is it desirable that she should undertake it. Her first duty is to keep her hands in a suitable and safe condition for the delivery of the patient, and emphatically hands which are roughened by manual labour, and continually engaged in turning out dirty corners, are not surgically safe; and a delivery, be it remembered, is a surgical procedure.

The only reason for expecting the midwife to combine her professional duties with those of a charwoman, as is the case with some associations training and employing midwives, is that the last ounce of service may be extracted from her before she earns the miserable pittance at which such societies appraise her services; for it is almost invariably possible to secure efficient help in this connection; and if the midwife is to keep herself in fit condition for her primary work, the efficient delivery of the mother, and her care and that of the child for the following 10 days, she should decline manual labour as incompatible with her main duties, which impose a severe physical strain.

Further, it is essential in the interests of the community that a professional worker of such value to the State should command a decent income, which at present she rarely does; as, if harassed and worried about money, and oppressed by sordid cares, her work cannot fail to be injuriously affected. Her impulses to keep abreast with the latest professional knowledge and the latest social movements are quenched by the daily douche of poverty, and the necessity for securing the necessaries of life, and her mind is not free to consider the development of her work.

It says much for the heroism—yes, heroism—of the average trained midwife that under present conditions she has proved herself able to do so much for her patients, that she is a power for good in their homes, their trusted adviser and friend. These facts serve to indicate the potent force she might become under happier conditions, for her economic condition at present is notoriously disgraceful.

THE DESIRABILITY OF LONGER TRAINING.

One of the first necessities for the development of the work of midwives is that they should receive a more thorough education for their work. In the opinion of many of those best qualified to judge, the time has come when the Central Midwives' Board should require a longer training of candidates, and raise the standard of its examination. Hundreds upon hundreds pass this examination every year, but what is needed is quality, not quantity. The period of training, not necessarily in hospital, of three months—a very usual term at present—may suffice when added to a three years' general hospital course; for a woman with no previous training it is quite insufficient, and a most experienced and successful teacher of pupil midwives recently told us that she felt much in the position of a farmer fattening Michaelmas geese for the market, and ashamed to make her pupils assimilate all the knowledge with which they must be crammed in a short three months—knowledge, moreover, which it is to be feared they largely forget once the examination which is the portal to the Midwives' Roll is safely over.

To raise the standard of examination would be beneficial in two ways. First, there would be the gain in thoroughness and sounder knowledge; and, secondly, the output would be limited, and there is no doubt that at the present time the output is in excess of the demand. Pupils who, with considerable difficulty and self-sacrifice, have saved (or borrowed) the sum required for their training fees and expenses, and pass out of their school with high hopes as duly certified midwives, frequently return later with their hopes dashed, and the oft-told tale of "no work." There is opportunity, therefore, to consider the quality rather than the quantity of the output.

RECOGNIZED TEACHERS OF PRACTICAL MIDWIFERY.

And our last point is that some further qualification, or at least evidence of ability to teach, should be required of those midwives who are recognized by the Board for the purpose of signing the forms of pupils. Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Service requires such evidence before Sisters can be promoted to the position of Matron, and nothing would have a more beneficial effect upon the quality of the practical instruction given to midwifery pupils than to require midwives desirous of recognition to demonstrate their fitness, by giving a model lesson before examiners appointed by the Board.

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