

The Midwife.

THE FUTURE OF MIDWIVES.

One of the serious questions which women who are thinking of training as midwives have to face is the prospect of self-support after they have passed the examination of the Central Midwives' Board and become certified midwives. It must be confessed that the prospects are of the poorest. As Matron of a Maternity Hospital, as Head Nurse or Sister, it is possible to maintain oneself in a fair amount of comfort, and to obtain a salary sufficient to meet modest needs, though not sufficient to save an adequate income for the time when working days are over. But such posts are usually, and rightly, reserved for trained nurses who have taken midwifery as an additional qualification, for, to assume the responsible duties involved, considerably more experience is needed than the three months' training on which, at present, midwives can obtain their legal status.

We have no desire to underrate the value of the services of midwives to the community; on the contrary, we believe no section of workers can render services of greater value. For this reason we hold it to be essential that their training should be thorough and of sufficient length to give that confidence which can only be obtained through experience. Fully trained nurses have many times assured us that not until after a year's continuous midwifery work can they attend a lying-in case confident that, whatever emergency arises, they will be able to deal with it satisfactorily.

If this is the case with nurses whose general training has taught them to meet emergencies with readiness and resourcefulness, what is the position of a midwife with only three months' special training? We are sometimes told that the three months' midwife is better and less diffident than the one who is also a trained nurse, who has been taught to refer to the doctor in all difficulties, and is therefore unwilling to assume responsibility.

We say unhesitatingly that the assurance of the short term midwife is most frequently the assurance of ignorance. She does not comprehend the seriousness of the issues involved, and is, in short, an illustration of the proverb concerning those who "step in where angels fear to tread."

Those concerned in the training of midwives are ready enough to concede the three months usually allotted to such training as quite

insufficient, and the results unsatisfactory, although experienced teachers may be able to impart sufficient knowledge to their pupils to enable them to pass the examination of the Central Midwives' Board. Why, then, do not the maternity hospitals lengthen their term of training? The question is mainly one of finance. If one hospital, in the interest of more thorough education, lengthened its term of training, and consequently raised its fees, other hospitals would still take pupils for the shorter term, and the probability is that the pupils, not realizing the ultimate advantage which they would gain by entering for the longer period, would enter the short-term training-schools. Therefore, unless all the hospitals lengthened their training at the same time, the result must be unsatisfactory to those giving the more thorough training.

The way in which a change for the better could be most readily effected would be by the Central Midwives' Board raising its requirement as to the length of the period of training, not necessarily the number of deliveries required of each pupil, because the difficulty at the present time is that pupils have to learn so much theory and do so much practical work in a short time that they become bewildered, and grasp neither thoroughly. To be able to give a definite time to preliminary training in anatomy and physiology, and details of practical nursing, such as bedmaking, &c., before being entrusted with the care of patients, as is now the rule at Queen Charlotte's Hospital, and to serve for a certain period as maternity nurses in the ordinary wards learning, and by practice becoming skilful in, the care of mothers and infants, before going on to the midwifery department, would certainly be productive of greater practical efficiency than is the case at present. As an ideal to be aimed at, at the present time, we suggest that one year at least should be spent in training by a woman with no previous experience in general nursing. For a nurse with three years' general training, six months' special training in midwifery might suffice.

But what prospects are there for the midwife when trained and certified. Frankly they are very poor for one engaged in general practice on her own account. We hear of women raising their fees for training with difficulty, and going out into the world with high hopes to earn their living as certified midwives, only to find after a prolonged struggle that work is scarce and fees low, so that self-support is im-

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