

The Midwife.

THE TRAINING OF MIDWIVES.*

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The training of midwives is a subject which has attracted a large share of public interest during the past twenty years, culminating, in England, in the passage of the "Midwives Act."

Prior to 1902 the teaching of midwifery in England was partially in the hands of amateurs—anyone with a little practical knowledge being at liberty to constitute himself or herself a teacher. In Ireland private tuition was never customary, midwifery being taught for the past 160 years by qualified teachers at maternity hospitals. As proof of this, we find in the Charter of the Rotunda Hospital, dated 1756, the following:—

"That by admitting and instructing in such Hospital, women, who after some time spent there, being duly qualified, may settle in such parts of our said Kingdom, as most stand in need of such persons, it will be a means of preventing the unhappy effects, owing to the ignorance of the generality of country midwives." And again, we read that "all Students in Physic, whether men or women, as intend to practise Midwifery, and shall be approved of by the Master, shall and may have full liberty to attend the said Hospital, and be instructed under the said Master and his two Assistants."

At a later period, in the Bye-laws and Ordinances dated 1786, we read:—"That as six months will be found sufficient for the instruction of female pupils, two at a time, four (if they offer) be received in each year," and "That a printed Certificate signed by the Master and one of the Assistants, be granted to each Pupil, male or female, who shall have served and attended a regular Course in the said Hospital."

It will thus be seen that in those far-off days not alone were the needs of poor women during their confinement the subject of serious consideration, but also the ignorance of country midwives. Necessarily, as the requirements of that age were few, so was the actual teaching of midwifery limited in amount, and—equally necessarily, with the advance of medical knowledge has come a proportionate increase in the teaching and knowledge of the midwife.

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In considering the constitution of an efficient training, there should be no distinction between the monthly nurse and the midwife, since it is impossible that a woman can intelligently follow the symptoms from the beginning of labour, diagnose abnormal presentations, or distress of the foetus, and know the precise moment to send for medical assistance, unless she has learned the complete subject. The Central Midwives Board has drawn up an excellent curriculum of training, but the minimum time given to the Pupil in which to grasp it is all too short.

Trained Nurses should spend six months, untrained women twelve months in learning their work. Many of the latter at one time possessed the rudiments of a good education, but have lost the habit of study, many never attained even an average standard of education, yet both classes have to plunge into what is really a very difficult study, side by side with those better equipped by reason of a previous general training.

For such, I can imagine no better preparation than that afforded in a preliminary training school attached to a Hospital, such as we heard discussed yesterday, or what might prove less expensive both to the Hospital and to the individual, a Central School or College, as suggested by our President, Miss Huxley, some time ago. In such a College the Pupils would be taught the principles of domestic hygiene and economy, the simple chemistry of food, the principles of ordinary and invalid cooking, and of the preparation of infants' foods. She would also learn the use of weights and measures, and something of the drugs and lotions used in Midwifery practice, elementary Anatomy and Physiology, Note-taking, the Keeping of Charts, the various thermometers and their uses, and the elementary theory of sick nursing. Such studies would occupy two months of the twelve months' course, and would be a most valuable introduction to the subsequent practical work.

The Pupil would then pass on to Hospital and begin with monthly nursing, say, for three months at least before she is allowed to work in the Labour Wards, though she should be permitted to see deliveries, and have time to observe something of the Midwife's duties.

She should then enter the Labour Wards for a further period of three months. When Gynæcological Wards are connected with the Hospital, it is a great advantage for the pupil.

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