

were debarred from obtaining the services of the dispensary midwives. The Local Government Board consider that the proposals contained in the scheme of the Women's National Health Association might interfere with the arrangements made locally for the supply of skilful midwifery nursing for maternity cases throughout the Union, and also that as Maternity Benefits under the National Insurance Act will shortly become available, they think the Guardians would do well to wait for further information before agreeing to the fundamental alteration proposed in the duties and present system of control and remuneration of the dispensary midwives.

We are glad to find in this pronouncement an endorsement of our own views expressed some weeks previously.

JAVANESE MOTHERS AND BABIES.

J. F. Scheltema, in an interesting article in *The Englishwoman*, states that in Java "However poor a married couple, every baby is a welcome addition to their happiness; babies are cherished like 'jewels dropp'd from heaven,' and long before their arrival the evil spirits that might harm them are pacified by offerings according to the parents' means. Father and mother lest both have to be careful in many respects lest harm should befall their as yet unborn child.

"When the moment approaches for ushering the new guest into life, the mother, to ensure an easy confinement, asks the father to pardon whatever she may have done amiss. The sins most frequently to be atoned for are a hasty temper, a habit of excessive scolding, the small but continuous provocations proceeding from feminine words more like aloes than honey, *quædam parva quidem, sed non toleranda maritis*, in short, a wayward and contumacious attitude with respect to her lord and master. In the same manner and for the same purpose, the father unburdens himself to his expectant spouse of whatever he may have on his conscience as regards conjugal trespasses, and they give each other a draught of water in token of mutual absolution. While the female relatives, with or without the services of a *duhoon* (medicine woman), assist the wife, the husband very often aids their efforts by preparing a second potion for her to swallow, dipping into it the handle of his kris, or he transmits the hidden virtue of that weapon, especially efficacious if it is a *pusaka* (heirloom), by placing it at her right side with the sheath at her left, addressing it and invoking its help. He must unsheath all his weapons, see to it that all the doors of the house are kept open, loosen the knot in which his hair is taken up under his handkerchief, and comply with a long list of equally weighty rules laid down for such occasions.

"As soon as the baby has had its first bath, the *duhoon* strikes with both her hands the mother's couch, and says: 'To-day let evils come, and fits, and children's complaints; after to-day I

shall not admit them!' This is to avert sickness and a timorous disposition. Nevertheless, if the baby is born about sunset, little hope can be entertained of its growing up in health and strength, and even supposing it does, the malignant spirits will incite the tigers in the woods to track and devour their marked victim. If, on the contrary, the baby has the good fortune of being allowed to make its bow to the world about sunrise, prosperity and happiness all round will fall to its lot.

"The third day after a baby's appearance is generally devoted to the ceremony of giving it a name which, however, it does not keep throughout life, changes occurring frequently according to changes in its condition and other circumstances. The right thing to do is to convoke a meeting of the principal men of the village, whom the father consults on this grave affair. Very often the baby is named after one of its grandparents, if these are still alive; or it receives, in aristocratic families, an ancient Hindu name; or, among the pious, the name of a Moslem Saint; or, among the lower classes, it will have to do with some common appellation as Kromo or Wongso; or, opinions disagreeing, it will simply go, during its infancy, by the name of the market-day on which it was born. Occasionally, if the parents have lost one or more children, and are afraid of the new baby dying too, or if Heaven has blessed them with too many girls, a boy being wanted, or the reverse, they select a very ugly name to deceive the hostile demon playing tricks upon them. If the baby turns out sickly, despite this precaution, and its accompanying the mother to the market or even a festive entertainment of friends and neighbours, does not have the desired effect, a change of name is resorted to. This may imply a corresponding change of name for the parents, and transitions of the kind are easily affected on any pretext, but always subject to established usage.

"It is not advisable for babies, any more than for adults, to be exposed to the hot glare of the sun just before and one or two hours after noon—the most auspicious time for the evil spirits to annoy the sons and daughters of Adam. Not that the shetans and jins are ever negligent in obeying the behests of Eblis (the puffed-up with pride), as is evident from babies crying at night for no apparent cause and refusing to be soothed; but in the dark they can be driven away by the crackling sound of a handful of salt thrown into the fire, exactly as they can be called by whistling to serve the ends of those skilled in *guna guna*, magic and sorcery. Chalk smeared on a baby's ears is an excellent thing to prevent the calamitous consequences of a death in the neighbourhood; and when a family removes to a new dwelling it should be remembered to carry off a little dirt from the floor of the old one, to make the children feel at home. The clothes of a baby, if too old for mending, must never be burnt, but thrown out of doors; the neglect of this precaution will cause it to suffer from an eruption of the skin known as *sawang wédang*."

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)