

The Midwife.

MIDWIVES AS EUGENISTS.

In a newspaper report of the recent Congress at Caxton Hall on the welfare of infants, the writer expressed, in conclusion, his opinion that there will be no improvement in the homes and the general care of infants by the scientific measures advocated, and that the only way to cut at the root of the evil is to teach simple baby care in the schools.

Personally, I am driven to the conviction that this too would be at best but a patching-up process, and would be continually breaking down. The bedrock of the whole evil lies in the utterly false view, held by the most, of motherhood and more especially of fatherhood. Here and there one encounters an enlightened person who has spontaneously realised early in life the marvel and beauty of human reproduction, and whose clean, simple and direct views of the subject cannot be shaken by the suggestions of conventional minds. Unfortunately, those holding these ideal views have not always the courage to assert them in face of overwhelming opposition, and so they fall short of the beneficence of personal influence.

No one can attempt to teach even elementary facts concerning infant training to children under fourteen without continuously coming up against the blank wall of complete ignorance as to a child's history *before its birth*. And in the case of many girls of twelve, who know more than their mothers and teachers think they do, any unconscious reference by younger children to the pre-natal life produces blushes, embarrassed laughs, smirking or giggling that turn one sick at heart with the realisation of all the nauseous ideas which must be swept out of their young minds before any wholesome teaching on the subject can be received. This is invariably the case with village girls.

The utterly senseless and illogical attitude of the mothers fills one with speechless amazement. Once a dear little friend of five came to me for verification of a pack of lies concerning their new baby which had been told her by her mother. I spoke to the mother asking her to allow me to tell the child at least something of the truth. I reminded her of my certain knowledge of the evil talk that goes on amongst the school children, and that it is an impossibility to shield the children from this except by giving

them the truth in its most beautiful form. "How did you learn of these matters?" I asked her. "Wasn't it by the nasty talk of your school companions and later of your fellow servants?" "Oh, I expect I was as bad as the rest of them," she answered lightly and evasively. She remained obdurate in her determination that her little daughter should go through the same horrible experience.

I know a charming little woman, the devoted mother of two adolescent boys. For months, on my weekly visits, she evaded me, and then one day I caught her in her shop. A glance revealed that another child was near its birth. I sensed her state of mind and refrained from inquiries. She avoided meeting my eyes, and was as overcome with shame as if the child were bringing disgrace.

A clergyman's wife, with several children and expecting another when in her fiftieth year, was so ashamed of the coming child that she never went out of doors except when compelled, and then only after dark.

A young wife, whose much-desired child was born in the month of August, explained to her friends that for six months before its birth she never left the house until after dusk. Oh, the pity of it! To defraud the coming child of part of its birthright by a continuous attitude of resentment and mortification or of false modesty during those critical nine months. When will all women learn the injustice and wickedness of this manner of bearing children? When will they learn to regard the state of expectant motherhood as invested with honour and dignity or else to refrain from motherhood?

I once spoke to a district midwife of the enviable opportunities she has of bringing before her patients the importance of giving their little ones true teaching concerning the fundamental facts of life. "But," she expostulated in a shocked tone, "you would never let them know how babies are born?" "Why not?" I replied. Now please just tell me *why not?*" She couldn't, and I have never yet asked that question of anyone who could find any better answer than, "It is *never* done." I do know of a few instances in which it *has* been done, and with the happiest results.

It is falsehood and evasion that weave the network of evil inseparable from the subject with so many children. Not even the most

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)