

The Midwife.

STUDENT *versus* MIDWIFE.

Among expectant mothers in the East End of London there is a fashion in medical attendants, and at the present time, in at least one corner of the East End, students are in vogue.

Not that any woman ever calls her medical man a student: he is always "the doctor," just as the student in the Rotunda Hospital learning to wash his hands for his first midwifery case is addressed as "Doctor," often to his own mystification.

There are many reasons given by expectant mothers why students are preferred to midwives (or nurses, as they are generally called), and if the reasons do not sound convincing, they at least satisfy the person most concerned. Here are a few chosen at random:—

"I feel safer with a man."

"I have very bad times, and I need a doctor."

"The doctors are so kind, and don't leave you till all is over."

"The doctors give you more help, and they send for 'the physician' if you don't get on all right."

"The doctors must be clever or they wouldn't be in the A— Hospital."

"I have been in the hospital with a bad face or foot, and I have faith in the doctors."

"I couldn't go past the doctors after all they have done for my Jimmy."

A reason that is not so often given, but that is sometimes confessed to, is—

"A doctor does not need so much hot water, and he doesn't fuss over clean clothes, like the nurses."

Another reason, and the one that is often given, is—

"A doctor keeps one better covered up, and when the baby is born he will go away and leave you to the old woman."

Nearly all poor mothers object to having their toilet done, and being left to "the old woman" is equivalent to saying leaves you alone.

Sometimes a mother will prefer a nurse because she likes her bed shaken up, or because a nurse takes more care of the baby.

One East End mother now asks for a nurse because the A— Hospital once sent a black doctor, and she was afraid her child would be born black.

Perhaps the principal reason why students are popular rests with the old woman "what

follows the doctor," to use her own expression. Very few of these so-called nurses have had any training; often their only qualification is that they were once (or ten times) patients themselves.

One of the most respectable of these "motherly souls" explained to me the other day where she got her experience.

"I was in the A— Hospital myself," she said. "I was there for ten months, and in that time I was wardmaid in the F—, the C—, and the M— wards, and then I was in the Nurses' Home. They were keen to keep me in the hospital," she continued, "but my daughter-in-law had a room to let, and I came out to do private nursing. I don't wear the uniform; not but I might, if I could afford it, for Nurse F— said to me the other day:

"Mrs. O'Hara, why don't you wear uniform same as me, and nurse the rich people; you are far too good to be nursing the poor."

"I told her I had no certificate."

"You don't need no certificate," says she, "to wear uniform and follow the doctors. You could get your pound a week if you liked to ask for it."

Here Mrs. O'Hara sighed and pulled her bonnet straight.

"As it is, I am working my fingers to the bone for nothing. I have the woman at the fish shop summoned to the county court for 10s. for the week I was with her, washing and scrubbing and nursing, and she offered me 6s., etc."

Another explained that she nursed for the "head doctor," which meant the local practitioner who had most panel patients; she had the extra qualification of having once been recommended by a lady who was an infirmarium nurse herself.

These old women advocate "the hospital doctors" every time, and it is not only that the student is preferred to a midwife, he is often preferred to a local doctor.

One of the hardships of being thought better off than your neighbours is that you cannot get "a letter" for a hospital doctor, but must have a private one. The "old woman" has something to do with this, too. She is more likely to get a gentle reprimand from a local doctor if she fails in her duty than from the student, who above all things minds his own business in dealing with the poor in their confinements, and the nursing of the patient is not his business.

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