

The Midwife.

A JURY OF MATRONS.

THE appointment of a jury of matrons at the Old Bailey last week to test the truth of a statement by a woman, on whom sentence of death had been passed for the murder of her eldest boy—viz., that execution should be stayed, as she was about to become a mother—raises two interesting points.

The first is whether, in view of the scientific and exact methods available, it is expedient to appoint a jury of matrons to decide this momentous question.

We do not desire to be understood to object to juries of women—or to women judges for that matter. If a jury of women had been empanelled for the whole case we should have considered it appropriate. No man, however comprehending, could estimate, as a woman could, the stress and strain upon prisoner before she committed the crime. Her eldest boy, born before her marriage, was a cause of constant dispute between herself and her husband, who ultimately left her, and the money she received under a maintenance order was totally insufficient for her needs. One day she fetched the boy from a woman in whose charge he was, and next day returned accompanied by her husband, saying she had lost him. The police were communicated with, and the woman confessed to having murdered the boy. The murder was verified by the police who found the child's body at the mother's house, wrapped in paper, partially dissected, and that portions had been burnt with the object of hiding the crime.

The act was surely not that of a sane woman, and it is well known that the nervous system of many women is affected when they are with child; for which reason they should be encompassed with care, and kept from worry at such times.

It is not, however, the custom in this country to empanel juries of women except for one purpose—namely, to decide whether or not a woman condemned to death can truthfully plead that the death sentence should not be carried out, because not only her own life, but that of her unborn child is at stake.

On this point the decision of twelve matrons cannot be considered as final or conclusive, and in the present instance we are glad to note that medical evidence was offered, and the jury found that the prisoner's statement was correct. The execution of the sentence was thereupon postponed till after the birth of the child. Under ordinary circumstances no woman would think of accepting the judgment of other matrons as to whether or not she was pregnant; she would depend

upon that of a doctor or midwife, and in a case where the issue is so momentous the best expert opinion available should be obtained.

The last time a jury of matrons was empanelled at the Old Bailey was thirty-four years ago, when a woman, condemned to death, pleaded her approaching motherhood as the reason why the sentence should not be carried out. The jury of matrons thereupon empanelled found that her statement was untrue, and she was hanged.

Suppose they were wrong.

Surely it is time that this obsolete method of discovering a medical fact should be abolished, and with the abolition should come the recognition that women should not be debarred from serving on juries on account of their sex, and that, in some cases, their sex constitutes a very strong reason for their being empanelled.

Secondly the reason advanced by men who object to the proposal that women should serve on juries is that they would be swayed by their feelings, and yet, with utter lack of that logic which is supposed to be the exclusive prerogative of the male sex they recognise the right of women to serve in the one class of case in which their feelings must be harrowed to the utmost extent.

Upon their verdict rests the decision whether or not the extreme penalty of the law shall be visited upon a fellow woman.

It may be an extremely difficult matter to decide. Surely, if ever women were swayed by their feelings instead of their judgment they would be prompted to give the prisoner the benefit of the doubt in such a case.

Our contention is that in a case of this nature, in which the facts can be definitely ascertained by a medical practitioner or experienced midwife, the judge should receive and rely on expert advice founded on scientific knowledge, not on rule of thumb methods.

ON BEHALF OF THE BABIES.

A deputation from the Stepney Council of Public Welfare, introduced by Mrs. Paget, wife of the Bishop of Stepney, attended the meeting of the Stepney Borough Council last week with the object of urging the appointment of an additional Health Visitor.

Mrs. Paget, who introduced the deputation "On behalf of the babies," said that statistics proved not only a heavy mortality during the first five years of infant life, but an impaired vitality in after years. The deputation aimed not only at saving the weaklings, but also at saving normal infant life where ignorance reigned supreme. Many women, she said, were fatalists on the subject of newly born children, nevertheless, it was not God's will that they should die, when

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