

# The Midwife.

## THE MIDWIFERY CONFERENCE.

### AFTERNOON SESSION.

(APRIL 29th.)

Dr. Elizabeth Sloan Chesser presided at the first Midwifery Session at the Conference held last week in the Hall of the Westminster Yeomanry, Elverton Street, S.W., in connection with the Exhibition at the Royal Horticultural Hall.

We last week gave a summary of the first paper on "The Eugenic Consideration of Venereal Diseases," by Dr. Burnett Ham.

### THE INFANT'S FIRST WEEK OF LIFE.

Mrs. Lucy Naish, M.B., Assistant Physician Sheffield Municipal Infant Consultations, who presented the next paper, said that the first week of life was the most crucial time of every human being; in this time the seeds of bad health and habits were sown, forming a harvest of worry and nursing for many a tired mother, often for months and years afterwards. Every detail of the newly-born child needed careful attention, and trained observation was most essential, and this training was, most unfortunately, lacking in the majority of monthly nurses. We think Dr. Naish's experience of nurses must have been unfortunate if she has found them liable to all the faults of which she complains. These include wasting time getting the things ready for the bath, so that the infant is allowed to get thoroughly chilled before the bath is ready; lack of care in the first bath; dropping lotions into the baby's eyes without mentioning the fact to the doctor in attendance (these lotions were often too strong, and set up a bad ophthalmia, causing needless suffering); anointing the umbilicus with vaseline which had been in use for a year, with many different fingers dipped into the pot; dusting the umbilicus with boracic powder, "as was done by so many nurses who had had a little hospital training" as a matter of routine, thereby causing intense suffering to the infant; administering castor oil—a fruitful cause of trouble later—without mentioning it to the doctor; giving food during the first three days. Many nurses, Dr. Naish asserts, give a milk and water mixture during the first three days of life, and in country places "dreadful things like butter and sugar" were given, and there was no doubt that cow's milk introduced into the delicate stomach of a newborn child set up irritative gastritis, causing green motions and much pain. This gastritis persisted for weeks and months, and was a most effective deterrent of the baby's progress.

Many breast abscesses were caused by putting the baby to the breast during the first three days and keeping it there for long periods, breaking the nipplestrings, and allowing little cracks to develop, and when pain occurred the most usual thing was

to wean the baby straight away, without making any attempt to cure the cause.

"Why," asked the speaker, "were nurses turned out of hospital with elaborate notes on artificial feeding which they were all too anxious to practise when they were on their own?"

Dr. Naish hoped to eradicate the "mistaken view held by people that the nurse is the authority to turn to for advice over the baby," and looks forward to the time when "the nurse will have been trained to look upon the doctor in attendance on the mother in the same light that she looked upon the physician in charge of the infants at the lying-in hospital where she was trained."

Frankly, we should have supposed that Mrs. Naish was addressing herself to bona-fide midwives rather than to trained nurses, who, as a class, are certainly not guilty of these practices. Of course, a few months' district or special training is quite insufficient as a preparation for maternity nursing.

### THE DEVELOPMENT OF INFANT CONSULTATIONS.

The next paper was presented by Miss J. Halford, Secretary of the Association of Infant Consultations and Schools for Mothers. Miss Halford explained that these consultations were places where mothers could obtain the most expert advice for their infants. The work was almost entirely preventive. Medical inspection of school children was now carried out for children over five. It was the object of the Infant Consultations to keep the children under this age under supervision.

In the discussion which followed the chairman said it was a mistake to regard venereal disease from the point of view of retribution, the point from which it should be regarded was that of treatment.

Miss Elsie Hall said that midwives were paid deplorably little, they could not afford longer training.

Another point raised was whether it was better for a mother to be attended by a doctor and a handy woman, or by a midwife.

Dr. Naish said that the Royal Free Hospital had opened a Baby Clinic, and was the first of the London Hospitals with a medical school to do so. University College Hospital and St. George's were also coming into line.

In reply to questions from Mrs. Lawson, President of the National Association of Midwives, Miss Halford said that the Board of Education was considering the question of grants to schools for mothers.

### SESSION II.

Miss S. M. Marsters, Superintendent of the Paddington District Nursing Association, presided when the Conference reassembled at 5 o'clock.

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