

THE HUMOURS OF MIDWIFERY.*

(Concluded from p. 474.)

The following is the remainder of Miss French's paper, read at the Nursing and Midwifery Conference, Yeomery Hall, Elverton Street, Westminster, considerably abridged:—

Some patients are amusing in the very simplicity and honesty with which they express themselves. One husband on being told that his wife was recovering from a really serious labour, said he "thanked the Lord it was all over, but he did wish He had given her an easier time." Mental patients are often very droll, though they have a rather trying way of suddenly appearing to be quite sane when the doctor or any visitor appears. On one occasion I had been telling the doctor how troublesome one of these was, always seeing things and trying to get out of bed after them. When we went into her, she spoke rationally and said she was well and comfortable. The doctor asked her what were those curious things she had been seeing; whereupon she smiled in a slightly superior manner, and said: "Oh, those were just delusions." Naturally the doctor thought I had been exaggerating, and remarked how sensible she seemed, but the next morning he was not so lucky, for after he had been talking to her for a few minutes, she turned to me with a shrug of the shoulders, and said: "Drunk again!" She was finally removed to the infirmary, still suffering from delusions.

A very good story comes from Westminster Hospital. The patient had been up to be examined, and was given her card which she was instructed to send up to Hospital when labour began. A few days later the letter was sent across by special messenger from the Labour Bureau, opposite the hospital. It had been left there that morning.

Pupils' errors are, of course, a fertile source of humour—very usually arise from a misunderstood word or half-grasped idea. One pupil was heard to remark that she could not understand how boiled milk could be constipating, if boiling changed the sugar into calomel! On another occasion Sister was speaking to them about the feeding of older babies, and the introduction of eggs into their dietary. A rather illiterate pupil asked if the child should have an "ole egg," and I shall never forget Sister's horrified expression as she replied: "No, nurse. *Never* give a child an old egg; they should always be new laid."

We are rather particular at York Road about the daily weighing of babies, and the nurses are quite accustomed to the question from Sister of whether they have gained or lost. I went one morning into a ward where there was a patient, rather recently delivered, and as she was looking ill, I asked a little sharply if she was losing. Nurse looked terrified, cast her eyes round in wild despair, and stammered: "I—I haven't weighed her, Sister."

* A paper read at the Nursing and Midwifery Conference, London, 1914.

It's nearly always fright that makes the nurses lose their heads. It is, of course, a grave offence to allow a baby to be born without a Sister present. I remember once Sister had been called to the Labour Ward to a case that seemed rather at a standstill, so she went away for a little while, saying nurse was to send again if the pains got stronger. In a very few minutes a nurse came tearing after her, and she returned to find the head born and the nurse on the case staring vaguely at it, instead of attending to the eyes. Upon being asked afterwards why she had not gone on with her duties in the usual way, she said quite seriously that her one idea had been to get the head back again before sister came.

Then, of course, there are the howlers of examination candidates. A nurse asked why she would wrap a warm towel round the child's trunk in a breech labour, replied: "To prevent respiration by the anus."

There is an old friend—Smellie, we all know him as a teacher, as a humorist he may be new to some of you. Here is a delightful account of a case to which *his* assistance was called:—

"A woman, it was not known that she was with child until she was in labour, when her mother had beaten and abused and exhausted her to such a degree that she became frantic, in *her* turn thrashed the mother, midwife, and all present, who had at length locked her in a room by herself." Can you imagine the scene?

And lastly, here is the description of an ideal wet nurse. It might be useful to private nurses who have to advise their patients:—

She should be mild, chaste, sober, courteous, cheerful, lively, neat, cleanly, hardy because bad conditions, as well as good, are sucked in with the milk. Therefore let not the nurses be of an angry, malefict, fancy disposition, shameless, scolding, or quarrelsome, not gluttonous. Again, that nurse were best that had borne a boy, for the milk of a male child will make a female nursing more spritely, and a manlike virago, and the milk of a girl will make a boy more effeminate.

There is just one more tip that I found in another old book, and that I thought district midwives might be glad of:—

"It is against fleas." "If you mark where your foot doth stand at the first time you do hear the cuckoo, and then grave or take up the earth under the same, wheresoever the same is sprinkled, there will no be fleas bred. I know it hath proved true."

The new maternity ward at the Cottage Nurses' Training Home, Govan, was opened last week by the Duchess of Montrose. Her Grace said that since the demand for rural midwives had so much increased they had felt the want of a maternity ward to give pupil midwives the opportunity of acquiring the aseptic methods so essential to maternity work. They now had a perfect institution for training rural midwives.

Why not stop at that and not claim for these midwives the title of nurse?

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