

# The Midwife.

## THE SPHERE OF THE MIDWIFE.

Those who realize best the power for good of the well-trained midwife are jealous that her preparation for her life's work should be as wide and thorough as possible, and for this reason that it should extend over a period sufficiently long to enable her to assimilate the knowledge which will be necessary to her in her practice as a midwife, as well as to enable her to pass the examination of the Central Midwives Board.

There seems to be a general consensus of opinion that the three months' training, which is all that is at present insisted upon by the Central Midwives Board, is far too short a practical preparation, and authorities such as Miss Ramsden, Matron of the Rotunda Hospital, Dublin, suggest a year as the minimum period, unless the pupil has already passed through the full term of training as a nurse.

It is manifest to those who consider the question that, in three months, it is impossible to teach a raw pupil a tithe of what she ought to know. In the first place, she has to adapt herself to the new surroundings of hospital life. The mode of life, the terms in use, the everyday duties to be performed for the patients, all are strange to her, and she has barely settled down to her work before once more there is dislocation, and she leaves the hospital to work in the district, and perhaps to live in the house of the district midwife also. At the end of about eleven weeks she must be "signed up" for the Central Midwives Board Examination. During this time she must learn not only how to wash a patient and make her comfortable, how to take pulses and temperatures, how to keep a room in nursing order, how to wash and dress a baby, and how to observe the indications of variation from the normal; also the general care of the mother, including the management of the breasts, and the danger signals revealed only to an experienced eye.

She must learn the technique of asepsis, the mechanism and management of labour, the skilful delivery of the patient, the alertness, the confidence, and the coolness in emergency, bred not of ignorance, but of knowledge, for the false confidence resulting from ignorance is a grave danger. Further, the art of writing examination papers, not an easy matter, as anyone accustomed to teaching a succession of

pupil midwives will know, has also to be acquired.

It seems incredible as well as illogical that while at the end of three months' hospital training a probationer is only entrusted with the most elementary duties (and that under supervision), a three months' midwife is expected to be able to conduct a labour, and meet all the emergencies which may occur, entirely unsupervised, and perhaps many miles from medical assistance, with skill and resource, and to treat and diet mother and child in the critical ten days following labour, provided that in her judgment there is no indication that she should advise medical assistance being sent for in accordance with the rules of the Midwives Board. Nothing is more certain than that a much longer period of preparation is necessary.

But every experienced midwife will know that a variety of knowledge beyond that enumerated above should form part of her equipment. If women with child are to be in the best condition to meet the strain of labour they must be kept under observation during the preceding months, advised as to the management of their health and diet, and should the midwife suspect any abnormality, advised to consult a medical practitioner, so that the labour, if possible, may be normal, and not abnormal. Ante-natal hygiene is, indeed, receiving increased attention as its importance is increasingly recognized.

The careful midwife will also either keep under her own supervision—or place in touch with agencies for the purpose—the infants who have come under her care, for the first year of their lives; she will also endeavour to secure the proper nourishment of the mother during the period of lactation. She must therefore acquaint herself, and get into co-operation with agencies which are working for this purpose, with hospital and district nursing authorities and others. In short, she must study her work from the sociological as well as the practical and theoretical sides.

This is obviously impossible in a three months' course, and the indications of the present day are that the midwife of the future should, from her training, be entitled to rank as a valuable social worker, and that, as the labourer is worthy of his hire, she should be adequately paid. At present the salaries offered as a rule to district midwives are miserably insufficient.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)