

The Midwife.

MOTHER.

"Where's mother?"

There was a ring of sharp anxiety in the man's voice, and a tired look in his eyes. He was working overtime in the rush preceding Christmas, and for two nights he had had broken rest. On the first his wife had wakened him. "Bill," she says—so he told the story to me—"you'd better go for the doctor," she says, "for I'm in strong labour." The little child, the seventh, came unexpectedly and prematurely, and did not survive its birth 24 hours, so on the second night the father sat with it by the fire endeavouring to warm the cold little limbs, and watching it fighting for breath till it drew the last. Then he composed the pretty baby face, nor roused the mother, who was sleeping, until he took her an early morning cup of tea, told her his sorrowful news, kissed her goodbye, and went off to work.

"Where's mother?"

The eldest girl, her mother's right hand, sat on the sofa crying; a forlorn little group of the younger children gathered round her. "They've been and took her away," she sobbed. "Whatever shall we do without mother?"

By degrees the story came out. Mother had been very hot, and had a bad pain, and when the doctor came he fetched the head doctor, and they called a taxi, rolled mother up in the bed-clothes, and took her off to the hospital, so when father hurried home from work to do what he could for his wife's comfort, he found only the empty bed, with the little body of his youngest born lying on the mattress covered with one of his disused coats, and the nurse who came in had left an urgent message that it should be removed before night.

Poor father—he and his wife had had many hard times in their married life, but they had faced them together. He had always been greeted with her smile, and assured of her sympathy. Now he had to face the situation alone. An undertaker for the sum of 7s. 6d. agreed to remove the child, and give it reverent and suitable burial, and a few white flowers were placed in the tiny coffin. Father is a good father, and fond of his children, and the tears came into his eyes as the tiny form in the white shell was carried out.

"But I could have faced this," he said, "if the wife had been here, but to leave her here and come back and find her bed empty." His

voice broke. "What's the matter with her, that's what I want to know? It stands to sense they don't take a woman out of her bed the day after her baby's born, not unless there's something very wrong."

It was sound arguing, and, like him, I felt very anxious. In my time I had done a good deal of maternity work, and I knew well that if things went wrong at all they were apt to go very wrong. What would happen to that family in such a case it was difficult to contemplate at all calmly. Mother had often told me how careful she had to be of father; how quickly he went down if he had to go without his food, or got overstrained or overdone. A delicate man, he needed all her care. "He can't stand things not like I can," she said; and so, to augment the family income, and to help keep warm, clothed, and fed five sturdy little bodies, mother took her share as a wage-earner, and between whiles, and with father's help when he was at home, for he is a handy and willing man, she cleaned and scrubbed, mended and cooked, to keep the home together.

There was one crumb of comfort. Mother had been in the hospital when her last baby was born, and her husband was satisfied that she would have every care and attention. To the hospital, though late, I found my way, but the pleasant-faced Sister could only tell me that mother had seemed very ill, and the doctor had thought it better to bring her in. Her pulse was 110, and her temperature up. She volunteered, however, to send for the house physician, who was cautious in his pronouncements. He would not like to say what was the matter—yet. The patient needed care, and they thought it better to have her in the hospital, so that she might be under observation. He hoped she would be all right.

With that one had to be content, and hope for the best. What would happen if things went seriously wrong with the smiling, cheerful, hard-working mother one could only dimly surmise.

And what about the other thousands of mothers who annually die in England and Wales in childbirth? If the possible loss of one mother means so much, that inflicted by the loss of several thousands is quite incalculable.

Two days later there was better news of mother. She had had a good night. Next day she was "very comfortable," and on Christ-

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)