

## The Midwife.

### "THE BIRTHRIGHT OF THE BABY."

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We are only beginning to think scientifically of the problem of infant mortality. The scientific significance of lactation and maternal nursing, of birth registration, of infant feeding before and after nine months of age (which is about the time that a change should be made from maternal nursing to another mode of nourishment)—one and all of these have scarcely been considered by the average citizen, or even by the average physician. What medical school gives thorough instruction on these points? Space will allow consideration of but one of these—the first-mentioned—and but briefly.

The mammary gland, then, is first of all a gland like any other gland. One would think it was some unknown and recently-discovered structure, if one were to judge by the general ignorance that seems to prevail about it. Its function is no more likely to fail, given the normal necessary physiological stimuli, than the function of the salivary glands, or the liver. Lactation is established as a part of the drama of birth. The uterus and other organs and accessory structures connected are also closely and wonderfully linked with the mammary gland, proofs of which are well known to all physiologists, and some of which were indeed referred to by the ancient classic writers centuries before modern physiology began. This linking is not by way of a secretion nerve supply, however, but by hormones. The most important of these physiological stimuli is furnished by the baby itself. It is the act of nursing or suckling performed by the baby. The new-born baby, on arrival, knows how to do three things: 1. Its lungs can breathe; 2, its fingers can grasp; and 3, its lips can close upon the nipple and suck if the nipple is presented and suitably adjusted for it. If the doctor took as much pains to teach the baby to nurse as he does in asphyxia neonatorum to teach the baby to breathe, then the reproach of our infant mortality records would be largely taken away. It is time that the Professor of Pediatrics and the Professor of Obstetrics, and the Professor of Medical Jurisprudence, and, indeed, everybody who is responsible for the preparing and licensing of a candidate to practise medicine, taught clearly that the duty of the doctor to the younger of his two patients in an obstetrical case is not done until he has made sure that the baby is nursing well. As soon as the mother has rested a few hours and the baby has been washed and dressed, within six hours, if possible, the baby should be placed at the breast, and the baby should be weighed occasionally, before and after nursing, to see exactly how much milk that baby has ingested at each feeding. Sometimes it will be found to be half an ounce

only. Then something must be done to increase the quantity of milk. And something always can be done. "Never desert a baby," as Sir Thomas More has it in his "Utopia." "Every mother is nurse to her own child unless either death or sickness be the lot."

Where the doctor personally and thoroughly manages the establishment of nursing at the right time, and in the right way, I have never known a case where a mother could not nurse her baby. It is now generally held that the activity of the mammary gland is caused by hormones circulating in the blood. It is known that an extract from an uterus undergoing evolution will stimulate the mammary gland, while the reverse is the case with extract of the placenta or of the fœtus. But the most important of this group of facts is the time at which the attempt to teach the infant to nurse is made. Within six hours it is usually easy, within twenty-four hours it is fairly easy, over twenty-four hours difficult, over forty-eight hours more difficult. So it comes about that the fate of the baby is often sealed before it is one day old. For the deaths of thousands and thousands of babies are due to this one simple fact—they were not mother-nursed.

Finally, the outlook is hopeful. All we have to do is to put our shoulder to the wheel. If we displayed half the energy and used half the money freely spent by our friends, the manufacturers of the "Ideal Infants' Food," the thing would be done. When the mother and father once get firmly into their heads the true idea of maternal nursing, then we shall have a great and permanent improvement in our present sad showing as to infant mortality.—*The Canadian Nurse.*

### MIDWIFERY TRAINING.

The Treasurer of the Maternity Nursing Association, 63, Myddelton Square, E.C., sends the following notice to the Press:—"Owing to several of our pupil nurses being called to the front, we are in immediate need of others to take their places. My Committee offers at once one free vacancy for midwifery training for the Central Midwives Board Examination, and owing to the shortage of trained nurses, has vacancies at very moderate fees for several untrained women. This is a very practical way for women to help our country, for in the present crisis the care of motherhood and the healthy preservation of infant life are of paramount importance. As we have offered to nurse cases recommended by the various War Relief agencies in our own districts, we must make provision for a large increase of work. All further information can be obtained from the Matron."

Excellent training is given by the Maternity Nursing Association. We hope some good pupils will avail themselves of it.

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