

## The Midwife.

### AN URGENT SOCIAL PROBLEM.

One of the urgent social problems of the immediate future is the care of the many unmarried girls about to become mothers, in districts where large masses of troops have been quartered; and it is one which requires the finest statesmanship of both men and women which can be brought to bear upon it.

For nurses and midwives the issue is a straight one, uncomplicated by any question of morals—for the claim of humanity upon the medical and nursing professions is not the claim of moral rectitude. It is their privilege and their pride to extend their skilled help to all who need it.

The position is simple.

We are confronted by a situation which should not have arisen, the outcome of exceptional circumstances, to which it is unquestionable that the billeting of troops in overcrowded houses has contributed.

And the sequel. The man marches out to bear his part heroically in the fighting line, to the strains of "The Girl I left behind Me." And the girl, with a dry sob, watches the troops swing by, and returns home, dreading that the secret which she has hugged so close will soon be a secret no longer; and that relatives and friends, in happier circumstances, will spurn, not aid her in her coming trouble.

Our soldiers—some of them—will, please God, march through the streets of London again. King, Archbishops, Bishops, Statesmen, and the whole nation will acclaim them heroes, and do them honour. And rightly. They have borne themselves right gallantly, they have vindicated the honour of the Empire in her hour of need; the nation will forgive. Indeed, for the most part, it will completely forget.

What of the girls they left behind them? When their heroes return, will they be there again to see them swing past once more, or behind the closed doors of the penitentiary, leading the hard life which their virtuous and untempted sisters demand as evidence of their contrition for the sin of a moment? If that is an unattainable counsel of perfection for a girl whose moral sense is not acutely developed, there remains life on Piccadilly, and Leicester Square, attractive by reason of its brightness, softness, and seeming luxury—but which quickly leads to degradation and death.

That is most often the only alternative to the unmarried mother, without resources, who wishes to maintain her child; and it is a monstrous one.

"Then you propose to condone sin," says a chill, disapproving voice.

"No, happy wife and mother, I do not, but the punishment of sin, if sin there be, committed conjointly, should not fall solely upon one of the two while the other goes scot free. There is no virtue

or justice in that. Yet you yourself will go to the wedding, if you are not engaged in promoting the match, between your son, your friend, who has "sown his wild oats," and now proposes to take to wife a young and innocent girl, and to invoke the blessing of the Church upon their union.

If your displeasure fell equally upon the erring man and woman I should have more faith in the sincerity of your plea for the maintenance of a high moral standard. As it is, forgive me if I try to lighten the unjust weight placed upon the frail shoulders of the woman.

Am I wrong?

Under the Jewish dispensation the punishment of unchastity was death by stoning. Do you remember how the Divine Master dealt with the problem of the woman taken in adultery when brought to Him by the Scribes and Pharisees? Here was no question of contrition and expiation. She was taken "in the very act." With the wisdom of a greater than Solomon our Lord declined to discuss the situation with her accusers. "Let him that is without sin first cast a stone." That thrust went home, and the censorious crowd melted away, no man condemned her; then the Master dealt with the woman. "Neither do I condemn thee," but—neither was it possible for Him to condone evil—"Go and sin no more."

In the situation which has arisen in this country how is it possible to take a better model? Let us "judge not," but whole-heartedly strive to make the best of it. Certainly the Government, through the War Office, or the Local Government Board, should open "Mothers' Hospitals" without delay if voluntary institutions are unable to cope with the need. These could be worked mainly by midwives, medical assistance only being necessary in the small proportion of abnormal cases, and the help of such agencies as the Church Army and the Salvation Army, the latter of which already possesses a model Mothers' Hospital, might well be sought. It were shame to allow the mothers of babes whose fathers have fought, and maybe fallen, on the battlefields abroad to have no shelter but the workhouse ward, and their children to have their workhouse birth to live down all their lives.

Let women make their voice heard with no uncertain sound, and let it be uplifted in the cause of justice and Christian charity.

M. B.

In connection with a resolution passed by the Clones Board of Guardians, Mr. James Maxwell, J.P., enquired at a meeting of the Armagh Board of Guardians whether it was legal to charge people of the labouring classes during their period of confinement, and if it was justifiable to charge a fee for signing certificates. It was decided to consult the Local Government Board.

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