

excuse him but mother knows. It was a stile born and not in the according to the regulations please to say if it is not I don't think.

"NELLIE BURTON, Age 10."

NEIGHBOUR NURSES.

It has (says Dr. Thomas) been already pointed out that a large number of Finsbury mothers are attended in their confinements by students and pay nothing for such treatment. These mothers engage neighbours self-styled "nurses" to help them during the lying-in. Such "nurses" are the modern representatives of Mrs. Gamp. They abound in the Finsbury mean streets. They are engaged without any very clear notion of the duties they may be asked to perform, though some regard their presence at the mother's churking as the most important service they can render. Many are decrepit, shambling, leaden-footed, deaf, halting, old cronies, dirty and ignorant. Some receive the Old Age Pension. They are inclined to be "independent." In the words of a mother, "It's hard to get them to come to you, if you are too particular—I am so thankful of her that I couldn't order her about. I am afraid to tell her to wash herself for fear she would leave me and not come back to me again."

One such nurse washed the mother once only during her lying-in.

They neglect the mothers and their babies. Some admit they do not understand babies.

They wash the mother occasionally on request, and then only partly. They do not wash their hands before attending to the mother.

They give the mother gruel for the first three days of her confinement, alleging that "it is healing to the insides"—they advise that the mother should, during this period, drink gin, because "it keeps the insides sweet."

Some neighbour-nurses wash the mother's diapers, others merely throw them under the bed and leave them there until their offensive smell is noticed.

Sometimes the nurse may prepare food for the father and elder children—if she does, she expects beer money. Generally the father gets his food outside in a coffee shop—while the children are either fed by the eldest of them, who may be only 12 or even 10 years old, or they are received at meal times at the table of a relative or near neighbour.

Some of the more considerate "nurses" scrub the floor, wash the household utensils, come in at 3 p.m. to give the mother a cup of tea, and toast, and at 7 p.m. to give her gruel. They are responsible for many of the foolish practices which obtain in the borough. They are expected to wash the baby, and in so doing wrongly pull away the cord prematurely, leaving an open wound, which they dress improperly with Fuller's earth or with burnt rag. They are eager to give the newly-born baby butter and castor oil, and worry the mother unnecessarily because "its little bowels hasn't acted." They bathe its eyes with stale milk and water, regarding this treat-

ment as a specific for enabling it to "get the sight into its head." They look with indifference upon "thrush." One "nurse" averred that "Thrush was a natural complaint with babies, and showed their stomachs was working all right;" she had had 13 children, and they had all had thrush.

By the Midwives Act, 1902, they are forbidden to act as midwives save under circumstances of great emergency, but there is no doubt that many do so act, staying with the mother during her labour until the child is born, and endeavouring to help her during her trial by numerous artifices which are as useless as they are popular.

When the child has been born, they send for a student from one of the large general hospitals. In this way the neighbour-nurse is "covered" should any calamity occur.

These "nurses" have their obsessions and their old-time beliefs. They assert that—

1. Breast milk and cows' milk will not mix, so that the baby should be fed on one or the other, and not on both.

2. Cow's milk is never twice alike.

3. Cow's milk for babies should be from one cow, and there is always one cow for every baby, whose milk alone suits the baby.

4. A baby can't make enough heat to sleep in a cot by itself.

5. It is unlucky to weigh a baby, and dangerous to cut its nails. The nails must be bitten off with the teeth until the baby is a year old.

6. A baby must not be put out in the fresh air, or it will get sore eyes.

7. A quick cure for "thrush" is to wipe out the baby's mouth with its wet napkin.

8. If a baby cries without any apparent cause, this is due to some wish of the mother ungratified during her pregnancy.

9. Puerperal Fever is due to the washing of the lying-in mother.

10. Prolonged suckling prevents conception.

These and many others are the crude ideas which are kept alive in London slums by "nurses" of the type now under review.

It is a pity that the hospitals which now work in the district do not establish an efficient service of maternity nurses to displace some of these noisome and unsavoury "Gamps."

Otherwise, the Borough Council might subscribe to the funds of the Royal Maternity Charity or Maternity Nursing Association, on condition that these bodies provided a nurse to attend to Finsbury lying-in mothers on the request of a lady health visitor. It is computed that one nurse devoting her whole time to this work could attend to 300 mothers during the year.

Surely if such legends still have credence with the women attending maternity cases it is time that some comprehensive scheme was organised throughout the country to provide poor mothers with better care.

(To be concluded.)

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)