

## The Midwife.

### LETTERS OF A WIDOWED PHYSICIAN TO HIS DAUGHTER.

The "Letters of a Widowed Physician to his Daughter," recently published by Messrs. Bailliere, Tindall & Cox (8, Henrietta Street, Covent Garden, London, price 2s. 6d. net) are, as their title indicates, an endeavour to acquaint his motherless daughter with the essential facts of life. These separate letters, enclosed in a cloth folder, are written to a girl at puberty (12½ years), at maturity (18 years), at marriage, and at motherhood.

The widowed physician says in his preface: "Ignorance is not innocence, and yet one does wrong in giving too strong meats to young stomachs. I, therefore, suggest that these letters be handed out to their recipients at the proper ages."

"These letters are, perhaps, more suited to modern girls than to those of the early Victorian age, but one feels that the greater liberties which are universally allowed to modern girls necessitates also deeper knowledge, so as to warn them of some of the pitfalls, which they may be able to recognise as dangers before it is too late. I hope that one has been able to tender advice on these intimate subjects without being indelicate."

#### FIRST LETTER.

The first letter, written to "Dear Little Babs," when away for a holiday, expresses the recognition of the writer, with just a tinge of regret, that his youngest born is "developing into a little woman." He proceeds: "I wish to explain to you one of the problems of life, which I know from the many and varied questions you shower on your elders, has not escaped those wonderfully observant, dear little eyes of yours." He then explains the "Law of Reproduction of Species" and tells his little daughter that it is a lesson "which I send you to learn while you are in the country on your holidays, where you can so easily come to understand it by watching the trees and flowers in the woods and gardens; the cows, sheep, and other animals in the fields and farmyards." He also explains to her the facts which she should know in view of her approaching maturity, and the way in which she should receive attentions from those of the opposite sex. He concludes this letter: "I am beginning to fear that my little Babs is beginning to laugh at her old Daddie, and is saying to herself, 'The stupid old dear. As if I didn't know all this years ago.'"

#### SECOND LETTER.

In the second letter the Widowed Physician writes, "The 'law' says you are a woman, having reached the stupendous age of eighteen, but to me you are still my child. . . . Some little

bird has told me that there are various young men hovering round the light of your sweet presence, and I fear that you may be losing your heart to one of them. . . . Your Father is going to be bold enough and stupid enough to give you some tips for selection." This he proceeds to do.

#### THIRD LETTER.

The third letter is addressed to the "Dear Wee 'Bride-to-be'" when the day is fixed. Here is one amongst many bits of advice: "Man is essentially a hunter, and if the prey is elusive he will continue the chase."

The father writes:—"There are many girls in English homes who have been brought up to womanhood in what one can term an asexual environment. They have always been taught to avoid thinking of their bodies, and especially in connection with their possible future duty of Motherhood. How futile it seems to me to send out from such carefully guarded homes such ignorant, ill-prepared women to tackle the wonderful problem of the Reproduction of Species. I have known in my experience, over and over again, refusal on the part of the newly-wed bride to consummate the marriage; and when the nature of her marriage contract has been explained to her, she, in her sublime ignorance, has vulgarly described the act as bestial. Well, my dear, I hope you will never be so silly, and please do not imagine for one moment that, should you instinctively object to the act of consummation, that you stand on any higher plane of morality than your husband who naturally desires you."

#### FOURTH LETTER.

The fourth letter is addressed to the "little mother," and amongst the advice given on this occasion is, "Do not let his little majesty make you forget the claims of your 'good man.'"

The letters are much to be commended, and will be useful both to fathers and mothers who find difficulty in conveying to their daughters the knowledge which is their right, and which it is a parent's duty to place in their possession.

### OVERCROWDING IN MATERNITY HOSPITALS.

The rise in the number of births, from an average of 167 a day in December to 203 a day in the first fortnight of January, has (says the *Lancet*), occasioned much overcrowding in Paris maternity hospitals. The fact is aggravated by an evident desire for economy on the part of certain members of the population. One distressing consequence of the situation must, unfortunately, be chronicled; puerperal fever has recently appeared at several places, and its incidence must be attributed to overcrowding, inadequate equipment and lack of stores.

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