

The Midwife.

INCARNATUS EST.

The last sprigs of holly and mistletoe had been placed effectively, the parcels for the patients were all ready for the night nurses to put on their pillows before they woke in the morning, and tired, but expectant, the day staff foregathered over the fragrant cups of tea that followed the evening meal that Christmas Eve.

"I do hope there will not be a district call to-night," said the junior pupil.

"Don't mention it," said the House Midwife, wise with the experience of many years. "You'll attract one if you begin to think about it. There, what did I tell you!" as the door bell pealed vigorously.

The junior pupil went to the door. "Oh nurse! do come quick; the missus is took ill. I'm afraid she is real bad."

Quickly the nurses were ready. One regretful glance at the cosy fireside, and then out they sped into the night, where the snow was softly falling, and the wind blew a gale; but a human life—two human lives—were in the balance, and there was no time to lose.

No time to lose, indeed! On a pallet bed lay the patient, blanched, restless, barely conscious. There was every indication of that most dreaded of all midwifery emergencies—unavoidable hæmorrhage. Prompt, resourceful, skilful, the senior midwife did not waste a moment.

"Fill in the form for medical help," she directed her junior crisply, "say it is placenta prævia, and mark it very urgent. Then give it to me to sign. Explain to the husband that we must have a doctor at once." Her deft hands as she gave her instructions were making ready her requirements; then, with a reassuring word to the patient, she set about her task.

Soon the immediate crisis was over, the appalling hæmorrhage temporarily arrested, the patient made as comfortable as circumstances permitted, the restless tossing ceased, and presently the patient dosed.

"She'll do now for the present," said the senior midwife critically. "I hope the child will be born alive. Its heart is still beating—listen to it." And she showed her pupil how to listen for the fetal heart. "So often the children in these placenta prævia cases are born dead, and there is bound to be more hæmorrhage before the mother is delivered." Then her practised eye fell upon her assistant.

"You look tired out, nurse," she remarked. "Just rest in that chair for a while till the doctor comes. There is nothing for you to do at present, and we shall want you by-and-bye."

The junior pupil obeyed. She realised she was very tired. It had been a heavy day, and

the irregular hours, inevitable in midwifery work tried her. It was nearly midnight, and she repressed a sigh as she remembered that in the churches the midnight Christ-mass was being said and she was not there. Then suddenly it seemed to her that the air was full of voices singing the "Gloria in Excelsis," and, as she looked, the faces of that angel choir were the faces of those she loved who had gone before, and strangely comforted and uplifted she rested in the hard wooden chair.

"Wake up, nurse, that's the doctor; go down and bring him upstairs." With relief the senior midwife realised that her responsibility was now at an end. Quickly the doctor took in the situation, as quickly dealt with it. Many a time they had fought together, these two, over the bed of a patient for the saving of a life, and not in vain.

"Is the child alive, doctor?" asked the midwife, anxiously. She knew how the mother's heart was set on that child—her first born. "Yes, he'll do now. A fine boy; it would have been a pity to have lost him; his country will need him. Well, I must be off. A Happy Christmas."

The junior pupil took the baby in her arms and crooned over him before giving him his bath. Her own dreams of motherhood were shattered on a certain day when a yellow envelope was put into her hands, and the brief War Office message, from which the words, "killed in action," stood out, changed the current of her life; but she loved her work for the poor mothers, and the babies comforted her.

Later she placed the child in his mother's arms. It was just midnight. "Too late to go to the midnight service. *Incarnatus est*," she said to herself. Was she dreaming? Surely the sweet refrain of the ancient Christmas anthem floating through the air was chanted by heavenly voices:

"Oh, come, let us adore him, oh, come, let us adore him, oh, come, let us adore Him, Christ the Lord."

"Are you dreaming, nurse?" said the senior midwife. "Get cleared up quickly, and we'll go into St. Clement's for the end of the service. We shall be very late. They are singing the *Adestes Fideles* now. They sing beautifully, don't they? We'll keep a little bit of Christmas night after all."

But they had done so already.

"The Holy Supper is kept, indeed,
In what so'er we share with another's need.
Not what we give, but what we share,—
For the gift without the giver is bare;
Who gives himself with his alms feeds three—
Himself, his hungering neighbour, and Me."

M. B.

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