

# The Midwife.

## THE MIDWIFE'S RESPONSIBILITIES.

One of the chief distinctions between a profession and a trade is that, beyond the carrying out of skilled work for payment received, the members of a profession realise that by reason of that membership they have public duties which are not to be estimated in terms of pounds, shillings and pence.

Regarded from this point of view, midwifery may certainly claim to be a profession, for the best type of midwife realises, and endeavours to discharge, public responsibilities of a highly important character.

The physical care of the mother before, during, and after parturition, and also of the infant, is part of the recognised duty of the midwife as a public health servant, or in private practice; but the conscientious midwife does not consider that her duty ends there. Most women, during the time they are in a midwife's care are particularly amenable to advice, and the pains taken in studying the patient—her point of view, her special needs, and then in giving her the necessary guidance—is work which, while not strictly in the bond, is of the greatest public utility, and frequently bears fruit of the utmost importance.

That is in the legitimate practice of her profession in the pursuit of which many a midwife finds a satisfying life's work, and consequently happiness.

### THE DESTRUCTION *versus* THE SAVING OF LIFE.

But there is another direction in which the influence of a midwife can be potently exerted for good. The frequency of criminal abortion on the part of women who have "got into trouble," or who do not desire that the children they have conceived should come to full term, is well known. And to midwives, as well as to members of the medical profession, overtures are made to apply their professional skill for the purpose of the destruction instead of the preservation and saving of life.

The midwife will, of course, at once repudiate any connection with such criminal practices; but more than that, those who thus come to her are by no means always radically bad, but women—often young girls—in sore trouble, distracted with the result of wrong doing and fearful of its consequences, the burden of which they have not sufficient moral courage to shoulder. There is the midwife's opportunity to point out that two wrongs do not make a right. Nor should she stop there; any amount of care and trouble will be well spent if she can help a woman at her first lapse, so that she becomes once again a useful member of society, instead of sinking down—as can be done with such fatal facility—into the abandoned and criminal classes, earning her bread in shame,

and becoming a temptress to others and a menace to the youth of the country.

To what better end can a midwife turn her professional knowledge and influence, or discharge her responsibilities as a member of a profession, than by raising moral standards, and throwing all the weight of her considerable influence in the struggle against criminal abortion and prostitution?

### A PERPETUAL OPEN SORE IN THE BODY CORPORATE OF THE NATION.

On Monday last the Lord Mayor presided at a meeting at the Mansion House in aid of the London Diocesan Council for Rescue Work, which he said had primarily its religious and spiritual side, but was also a work of great civic and national importance. The existence of the social evils which rescue work was out to combat was a perpetual open sore in the body corporate of the nation. The association aimed at saving from a life of shame, and from conditions which made them a danger to the community, women and girls who, but for the help offered them through the Society, must inevitably sink lower and lower into the depths. It also aimed at saving for Society the children of unmarried mothers, who were terribly handicapped in the race for life. Very large sums were already raised and expended, and the Ministry of Health has given generous grants in aid, but much wider interest and support were necessary if these evils were to be adequately coped with.

The Bishop of London said the Association was out to help the large number of girls brought into London year after year on a promise of marriage and seduced, and then deserted by their lovers. They were not abandoned creatures at all, but mostly young girls whose lovers had tired of them, broken their promise to marry them, and flung them on to the London streets. They saw them dying in rows in the London Lock Hospital, year after year—dying in agony, few of them over 26 years of age.

The Bishop of Kensington said notwithstanding the immense benefit of the work of the Diocesan Council to the public, they were completely unable to get people to take an interest in rescue work, with the result that the Council was starving for money. It was a disgusting subject according to the ordinary man, and he wanted to have nothing to do with it. The Bishop shocked the consciences of his audience when he spoke of children between the ages of 4 and 13 who were the victims of the male parent, and said that 112 of such had passed through the rescue workers' hands in a year. It was not economy to take money from this work.

Again, to what better use could a midwife put her professional influence than to help on the work of such a Society as the Diocesan Conference for Rescue Work?

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