

The Midwife.

MIDWIVES IN ANTIQUITY.

In the course of a paper read at the recent Nursing and Midwifery Conference at the Royal Horticultural Hall, Westminster, S.W., Miss Gilligan referred, as follows, to midwives in antiquity:—

Everyone knows that midwives (Shiprah and Puah) are mentioned in the Bible, and there is no more familiar incident than the story of Moses in the bulrushes.

But midwives can authoritatively lay claim to an even greater historical antiquity. There exists in proof of this an Egyptian midwifery primer, which has been deciphered—the Ebers Papyrus (date 1550 B.C.). The management of normal labour by the skilled Egyptian midwives (accustomed to the tedious parturitions of their effete patients) is not considered worth inclusion. But the manual contains prescriptions for promoting labour, curing luterine displacements, and, I regret to add, procuring abortions.

Throughout classical antiquity, irrespective of the degree of intellectual advancement, culture, wealth or civilisation attained, midwifery was in the hands of the midwives.

In Greece, in 400 B.C., when Hippocrates, the "father of Medicine," wrote and flourished, it is clear that midwifery was as separate a branch as are now the two professions of surgery and of medicine. Among his writings, accounted genuine, are instructions and considerations treating of sterility, gestation symptoms, the expulsion of the placenta and abortifacients.

About the reign of Augustus, Celsus says that Roman surgeons were called in *by women attendants*, to deliver, without destruction of the infants, *by turning*.

Before quitting the subject of midwives in antiquity, I must refer to one who was born the son of a midwife in the year when Greece was so highly cultured that the plays of Aristophanes were being performed, and who was the most influential Athenian citizen at about the death of Pericles; a man who died, at the decree of that much-misguided State, at the age of 80, possessed at that ripe age, of all faculties, as befitted the son of a midwife. I refer, of course, to Socrates. As sons derive from their mothers, I like to think it probable that it was from her Socrates learnt to teach by questioning and let the answerer find out truth for himself; that it was from her he learnt and taught that nothing should be taken for granted; that life is deceptive, and only the soul lives.

THE CHANGES IN MILK UNDER CERTAIN CONDITIONS.

A constant reader writes, "I wonder if you could find room in your invaluable paper for two questions on the subject of milk: (1) What is the difference between ordinary cow's milk and

pasteurized milk after being kept for two days? (2) What chemical change takes place in burnt milk?"

I have looked up numberless articles on milk, but have not yet found an adequate answer to these questions. The *B.J.N.* has helped me in lots of ways, and I feel quite confident that I am appealing to the most reliable source of information."

A medical correspondent kindly contributes the following note:—

"Unboiled cow's milk contains bacteria of many kinds. Some of these ferment the milk sugar, and produce lactic acid (souring); others attack the proteins and produce putrefaction.

It will therefore be easily understood, that after milk has stood for two days—in warm weather—souring, putrefaction and proliferation of bacteria will occur.

In pasteurizing milk, all non-spore-bearing organisms are destroyed. Therefore, provided the milk is kept in the vessel in which it was pasteurized and from aerial contamination, there will be no putrefaction or souring at the end of two days.

In burnt milk the milk sugar is caramelised and the proteins become insoluble."

CENTRAL MIDWIVES BOARD.

EXAMINATION QUESTIONS.

The following is the Examination Paper set by the Central Midwives Board at its examination on April 3rd, 1922:—

1. Describe the vagina, its orifice, and the perinæum. What changes do these undergo during labour, and how do you protect the perinæum from laceration?
2. What investigations would you make of a woman advanced in pregnancy who has had previous labours? State the reasons for these investigations.
3. What is meant by the second stage of labour? What symptoms would lead you to consider it to be unduly prolonged? What are the common causes of delay?
4. Describe the care of the breasts during the lying-in period. What difficulties may arise, and how would you deal with them?
5. What are the causes of retention of urine during (a) pregnancy, (b) labour, and (c) the lying-in period? How would you recognise it? What would you do in each case?
6. Describe a case of inflammation of the infant's eyelids. What are the causes, and how may it be prevented? What are the requirements of the Board in such a case?

The Tenth Annual Postgraduate Week will be held at the General Lying-in Hospital, York Road, Lambeth, S.E., May 22nd to 26th, inclusive. Further particulars can be obtained from Miss K. V. Coni, Secretary to Post-Graduate Week.

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