

## The Midwife.

### A TEXT-BOOK FOR MIDWIVES.\*

When we drew attention to the publication of the third edition of "A Text-Book for Midwives," by Dr. J. S. Fairbairn, F.R.C.P.(Lond.), F.R.C.S.(Eng.), we had only space for a brief notice, but in truth it is a book which might be quoted from with advantage at length. All teachers of midwives should absorb its information, while midwifery pupils will be well advised to possess themselves of it, and use it extensively as a book of reference.

In his preface to the first edition, as we pointed out at the time, Dr. Fairbairn stated: "This text-book contains more than has hitherto been considered necessary for midwives, and is open to the criticism of going beyond what is required by them and of them. On this score, however, those who know the more advanced school of practising midwives will make no demur. That school is possessed with an insatiable thirst for knowledge, and is rarely content with what has hitherto been given it in books written solely for midwives. Formal medical works are in constant use, and my hope is that the scope of this book has been made wide enough to render the purchase of such unnecessary."

In the present edition, the first three chapters of Part VII, which deal with "The Infant," have been entirely re-written. They deal with Physiology and Hygiene, Normal Development and Management, and the Feeding of the Infant. Otherwise, only slight alterations and additions have been made, such as those rendered necessary by the revision of the rules of the Central Midwives' Board, which came into force in July, 1921, and others as the result of suggestions from approved teachers, practising midwives, and pupils. Dr. Fairbairn acknowledges with gratitude the interest shown by these correspondents.

#### THE INFANT.

Concerning the infant we read: "The transformation from foetus to child in the crisis of birth is no less startling than that by which the chrysalis becomes the butterfly. Within the uterus the foetus is kept at a uniform temperature, and protected from shocks and jars by its waterbed of liquor amnii, and its respiratory, nutritive, and excretory functions are performed for it by the mother through the medium of the placenta. With the plunge from its cosy quarters into a cold and cheerless world there comes, almost in the twinkling of an eye, the heavy responsibility of the maintenance of an independent existence. No longer a foetus, the child must forthwith find its own oxygen from the air it breathes, maintain its own body-warmth, use its own excretory apparatus to get rid of its waste products, and set to work to learn to suck its food

from its mother and digest and assimilate it." The general characteristics, and the circulatory, respiratory, digestive, excretory, and nervous systems are then described in detail.

Concerning the regulation of body temperature, we read: "The mechanism by which the body heat is maintained is only gradually developed, and hence the new-born infant is very sensitive to changes in its external temperature, and great care should be taken to keep it as far as possible at the ordinary temperature of the body, which, in nature, would be obtained by close contact with the mother. The temperature of the new-born infant is often sub-normal, but during the first days of life, before breast-food is available, temperatures above normal are sometimes recorded, especially when there is a marked loss of weight. It is difficult to say whether the loss of weight or rise of temperature are cause or effect, but the coincidence is frequently noticed on the charts of new-born infants in hospital."

The author shows how "nature's effort for the reproduction of the species will assert itself even under unfavourable conditions. The midwife will often be struck by noticing how a plump and well-covered baby may be born to an ill-nourished and half-starved mother, and how such a mother may even have a plentiful supply of milk for her infant. . . . The whole purpose of the infant welfare movement is to lessen the waste of infant life and the damage to sound physical development from preventable causes. A check to the normal development of the young and growing child may result in serious and permanent damage, much more so than if the trouble occurred at a later age when growth was less rapid or was completed."

Very instructive is the section on "Infections and their prevention." We must realise that the general resistance to bacterial invasion in the newly-born infant is very low, and that it is particularly liable to infections of the respiratory and digestive tracts. "To the new-born child it is important that the bacterial invasion of the digestive canal should occur slowly, so that it can accommodate itself to the new conditions, that no septic or virulent varieties of organisms should be present, and that the mucous lining of the tract should not be injured." Dr. Fairbairn lays an embargo against putting comforters or dirty fingers into the infant's mouth, and of the kissing of the child by all and sundry, many of whom are sure to have bad teeth and septic mouths.

There is a very necessary and lucid chapter on venereal diseases in relation to their signs, symptoms and dangers in women and children, and to the risks of contagion to others, with a summary of certain points which the midwife must specially bear in mind.

The numerous illustrations, some of which are beautifully coloured, add greatly to the value of the book.

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