

# The Midwife.

## COMMON SENSE IN THE NURSERY.

A useful book recently published by Messrs. Christophers, 22, Berners Street, London, W.1, is "Common Sense in the Nursery," by Charis Barnett, M.A. Oxon, Certified Midwife by Examination, dedicated by her "To my Parents, in gratitude; to my Children, in hope."

In her introduction the author tells us that "Text Books on the moral and physical care of babies and small children are innumerable, but this one is intended to cover rather different ground. It corresponds in fact to the cookery book not yet written that will tell you how to fry an egg, how to make toast, and how to simmer a stew. 'But everybody knows these elementary things!' exclaim the writers of cookery books. Do they? At all events, it is only too obvious that the corresponding elementary facts about children, similarly omitted from the text-books, are not known to all modern mothers and nurses.

"The first thing I would say to a young mother, eager to show what results can be obtained by modern methods, is this: Do not expect to receive any credit whatever for your children's health or behaviour. You may strictly obey the laws of hygiene, study the fresh air, food and sleep questions, never for a moment forget the effect on the children of all you do and say, and your friends will remark: 'How fortunate you are that your children were born healthy and well-mannered. Now mine would never be able to bear all those open windows; they suffer so from colds in the head. And they are far too high-spirited to obey me, and far too imaginative to play alone. How fortunate you are to have such meek and placid children. . . . And if you are so amazingly cruel as to allow a baby to cry in his perambulator for a few minutes before he falls asleep, instead of picking him up and walking about with him, you will risk being told by a stranger, as I was on a similar occasion, that you 'are not fit to have charge of a Tom cat.'"

On the subject of fresh air the author writes: "I am well aware that very many people will differ greatly from me in my estimate of the amount of time that should be spent out of doors, and in fireless rooms. On the other hand, as time goes on, more and more hospitals, convalescent homes, schools, and other institutions are arranging for their inmates to spend the whole day, including meal-times, in the open air. Even town hospitals have their balcony wards. They claim that immense benefits result from 'fresh air treatment.' This being the case, why should we wait for our babies to develop disease before we let them, too, benefit by what science now recognises as one of the greatest curative agencies? Why not make use of the fresh air treatment to build our babies' bodies so strongly that they will not need to resort to it later as a cure? To quote

Dr. Truby King, 'At the Karitane Harris Hospital the babies live out of doors, all day, and a broad stream of pure cold air flows through the sleeping rooms all night long; tiny, delicate babies, after a week or more of gradual habitation, sleep well, grow and flourish in rooms where the temperature may sometimes fall almost to freezing point.'

"Life in the open air *does confer immunity* from the common cold, and as repeated colds conduce to lung trouble and other serious diseases, the fact that the fresh air treatment for young children involves a certain amount of inconvenience for the adult in charge, does not seem sufficient ground for depriving them during the body-building early years, of their greatest protection.

"In warm weather sun baths should be taken as often as possible; babies are always happy with no clothes on. The action of the sun on the skin and vital processes is highly beneficial, but a careful watch must be kept to see that the body does not get burned or chilled, and that the head is never exposed to the sun. In the winter the baby should have a free kicking time by the fire for twenty minutes before the evening bath. Most of the time in cold weather his limbs are necessarily more or less hampered by blankets and other coverings, so it is then doubly necessary to have a definite time for this free exercise. But remember that 'on the floor in front of the fire' is the draughtiest place in the room, and have a screen (a real one that stands flat on the ground and with close joined flaps, not hinges) round the baby. The ideal nursery has draught excluders all round the door, but a turned up rug is a partial substitute. If these precautions are taken there is usually no need to shut the windows during the baby's kicking time.

"The chief danger to a child from sharing a room with mother or nurse is the infected breath from bad teeth. It is incredible how little interest the average mother takes in her nurse's teeth and digestion. Night after night the children sleep in a steady stream of germs, and the mother regards it as fate when her baby 'cuts every tooth with bronchitis.' How many mothers know whether or not the nurse cleans her teeth every night? How many mothers try to protect their babies from clouds of decaying food?"

It will be seen that the work is primarily simple and practical, and that its claim to deal with "common sense in the nursery," which, after all, is far from common, is justified.

The Nineteenth Annual Meeting of the Association for Promoting the Training and Supply of Midwives will be held at 43, Belgrave Square, on March 23rd, at 3 p.m.

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