

*Evil Practices of the So-called Midwife.*

GEORGINA GROTHAN (*ibid.*) says, in view of the advances made in antiseptic surgery and obstetrics, it is an indisputable fact that obstetrics is practiced to-day in a most careless manner, aseptic measures often falling far short of the mark. The resulting evils lie at the door of the careless physician and ignorant midwife. Midwives exist under many phases; some are graduates of recognized schools in that branch but far larger numbers have received no instruction

whatever. They have no knowledge of even a normal presentation and are grossly ignorant of all the dangers that surround the lying-in woman and her infant. Innumerable are the unfortunate cases that confirm this statement. Statistics by Dr. Rosenberg, given in the *N. Y. Med. Record*, vol. xliii, No. 8, and facts reported in the *Am. Surg. Bulletin*, August, 1893, show that in New York city there are about 50,000 births per annum. In 1891, 24,123 birth returns were made by midwives, this being nearly half of the whole birth returns (allowance should be made for unreported cases). The largest proportion of stillbirths and maternal fatalities were under the care of midwives; the maternal death-rate is reduced, however, by the fact that most of the serious cases fall late into the hands of physicians, who issue the death certificates. Berlin reports three per cent. stillbirths, while New York has eight per cent. Germany and France provide for the education and regulate the practice of midwives. They are taught to recognize abnormalities and compelled to call in physicians promptly. Physicians practicing in our cities and larger towns have come to associate the midwife with puerperal fever, and regard her as an evil of great magnitude. The State of Minnesota was one of the first to pay attention to this important matter. Its law compels all graduates in midwifery to present their diplomas to the State Medical Board, and procure a license for one year only, which can be revoked for improper conduct. If not graduates, they are subjected to an examination before license is given. In Illinois the State Board of Health issues licenses for practice in midwifery to graduates, and those passing examinations before the same board. In the State of Washington any one practicing midwifery without a license can be prosecuted. In Nebraska no provision is made for the admission of midwives to practice. The law states that any person not possessing qualification for the practice of medicine, surgery, or obstetrics who shall engage in such practice, shall be found guilty of misdemeanor, etc. The State is divided into districts with a secretary in each, who shall have power to prosecute all who engage in illegal practice in his own district. Often men of true science and ability are obliged to stand aside by popular opinion and view the malpractice of the ignorant midwife, who undertakes the care of two lives with all their perils. It is to the medical profession that we must look for a reformation—our silence means a perpetuation of the present conditions. Wherever this subject has received attention and strict legislation has been enforced, the results have been most gratifying to both the profession and the people at large.