

StartI. *What Persons Are Fit to Become Midwives?*

3. This paragraph is of use to prevent fruitless work and the teaching of unfit persons too accommodatingly. A suitable person will be literate, with her wits about her, possessed of a good memory, loving work, respectable and generally not unduly handicapped as regards her senses, sound of limb, robust, and, according to some people, endowed with long slim fingers and short nails at her fingertips. She must be literate in order to be able to comprehend the art through theory too; she must have her wits about her so that she may easily follow what is said and what is happening; she must have a good memory to retain the imparted instructions (for knowledge arises from memory of what has been grasped). She must love work in order to persevere through all vicissitudes (for a woman who wishes to acquire such vast knowledge needs manly patience). She must be respectable since people will have to trust their household and the secrets of their lives to her and because to women of bad character the semblance of medical instruction is a cover for evil scheming. She must not be handicapped as regards her senses since there are things which she must see, answers which she must hear when questioning, and objects which she must grasp by her sense of touch. She needs sound limbs so as not to be handicapped in the performances of her work and she must be robust, for she takes a double task upon herself during the hardship of her professional visits. Long and slim fingers and short nails are necessary to touch a deep lying inflammation without causing too much pain. This skill, however, can also be acquired through zealous endeavor and practice in her work.

II. *Who Are the Best Midwives?*

4. It is necessary to tell what makes the best midwives, so that on the one hand the best may recognize themselves, and on the other hand beginners may look upon them as models, and the public in time of need may know whom to summon. Now generally speaking we call a midwife faultless if she merely carries out her medical task; whereas we call her the best midwife if she goes further and in addition to her management of cases is well versed in theory. And more particularly, we call a person the best midwife if she is trained in all branches of therapy (for some cases must be treated by diet, others by surgery, while still others must be cured by drugs); if she is moreover able to prescribe hygienic regulations for her patients, to observe the general and the individual features of the case, and from this to find out what is expedient, not from the causes or from the repeated observations of what usually occurs or something of the kind.⁵ Now to go into detail: she will not change her methods when the symptoms change, but will give her advice in accordance with the course of the disease; she will be unperturbed, unafraid in danger, able to state clearly the reasons for her measures, she will bring reassurance to her patients, and be sympathetic. And, it is not absolutely essential for her to have borne children, as some people contend, in order that she may sympathize with the mother, because of her experience with pain; for <to have sympathy> is <not> more characteristic of a person who has given birth to a child. She must be robust on

⁵ Soranus rejects the dogmatists who base their therapy upon an inquiry into the causes of disease as well as the empiricists who mainly rely on observation.

account of her duties but not necessarily young as some people maintain, for sometimes young persons are weak whereas on the contrary older persons may be robust. She will be well disciplined and always sober, since it is uncertain when she may be summoned to those in danger. She will have a quiet disposition, for she will have to share many secrets of life. She must not be greedy for money, lest she give an abortive wickedly for payment; she will be free from superstition⁶ so as not to overlook salutary measures on account of a dream or omen or some customary rite or vulgar superstition. She must also keep her hands soft, abstaining from such woolworking as may make them hard, and she must acquire softness by means of ointments if it is not present naturally. Such persons will be the best midwives.

5. Since we are now about to pass to the section ~~on gynecological hygiene~~, it will ~~first~~ be necessary to explain the nature of the female parts. Some of this can be learned directly, some from dissection.⁷ And since dissection, although useless, is nevertheless studied for the sake of profound learning, we shall also teach what has been discovered by it. For we shall easily be believed when we say that dissection is useless, if we are first found to be acquainted with it, and we shall not arouse the suspicion that we reject through ignorance something which is accepted as useful.

⁶ Among the ancient physicians, Soranus is remarkably free from such superstitious beliefs as we find them even in Galen (see Introduction, p. xxxi).

⁷ Soranus does not specify whether he refers to dissection of human cadavers or of animals only. His own criticism of dissecting as useless for medicine reflects the attitude of the methodist sect which rejected the scientific research of the dogmatists (see Introduction, p. xxx). On the whole subject of dissection in antiquity cf. L. Edelstein, *The Development of Greek Anatomy*, *Bull. Hist. Med.* 1935, vol. 3, pp. 235-48.