

Pity that we've forgotten how to wonder

I WENT to see Isabel and her new baby some days after delivery.

She was standing at the kitchen bench tidying up some dishes, her husband valiantly trying to paper the dinette, whilst attempting, mostly unsuccessfully, to avoid the helping hands of their two-year-old son.

She was unruffled, although you couldn't have said that of him. The baby was happily asleep in a carry-cot in the corner of the dinette, dreaming on amongst the hubbub and the smell of paste and paper.

The delivery had been uneventful and at home, and a rather good homemade loaf was my reward for gazing benevolently in the background, whilst a very capable midwife did all the professional work.

When I asked Isabel, now that it was all over and successful, just what it was that she appreciated about having her baby at home, she thought for a few moments, and then said, "I can do as I like."

Expanding on this, she said that when she had her last baby in hospital, she frequently had to ask the nurses for the least little thing; she felt that she was being checked up on when they asked her whether her bowels had moved; she felt that her other bodily functions were normal, and that she was quite capable of deciding they were without questions from others; and,



By FAMILY DOCTOR

she felt that having to record in detail what she did for her baby ("She wasn't the nurses' baby, but you would have thought she was") was an imposition.

What, in brief, she was on about was what has been called the medicalisation of childbirth.

Childbirth has been the subject, so the protesters say, of a take-over bid (and a very successful one at that) by the medical and nursing professions, and on the altar of safety for the baby and mother there has been sacrificed all those little personal things, those facets of independence of the mother&baby unit, and the emotional needs of the mother, and to a greater extent also of the baby.

The question is, "Is the sacrifice worth it?" And there's a band of women who would shout an unequivocal "No" to that question.

Having officiated at a number of home deliveries now, I am in no doubt about the joy and serenity of the parents in their search for a united privacy, at what is surely a momentous time in their life. It's a joy and a

serenity that is impossible to obtain in hospital, no matter how good the staff, how prettily wallpapered the room, how dim the lights in the theatre.

The parents are sharing what is theirs with the constricting presence of the hospital, and no way can it be a private affair.

Perhaps not unexpectedly, the babies delivered at home seem to have few troubles. Again, a calmness and serenity, to the unaccustomed eye profound relaxation holds them.

One can't help but compare these babies with those whose entry into this chaotic world is in hospital. Indeed, at the risk of being labelled a feeble romantic, I wonder how many of the ills of the world have come about because of the violent and noisy entry of the babies who grow up to be the adults of our Western society?

Of course such romanticism is easily rebutted, but the point is surely that we should strive to make birth not a medical procedure for all, but a very much less medically orientated procedure for many.

All we doctors, who belong to a scientifically orientated profession, have to do is to acquire again what we patently had as children, what we had beaten out of us at secondary school, and what was lost forever in that sterile scientific brainwashing medical school, a sense of wonder.