

others have married. But it is certain that no one can form any estimate of the number of utterly ignorant women now practising intermittently or continually as Midwives throughout the length and breadth of the United Kingdom.

We cordially agree and sympathise with some of our correspondents in the indignant expressions they employ upon the subject of the license with which such women work untold evils in our midst. Several of our readers are convinced that we are wrong in the contention we have repeatedly advanced, and believe that an Act of Parliament could be obtained making it illegal for any unqualified women to practise Midwifery. To these we would specially direct the argument we have above advanced. If no data are available, if no definite facts are obtainable, as to even the number of so-called Midwives at work in England, how can Parliament be expected to make so stringent an enactment? No, we yield to no one in gravest reprobation of the atrocities committed by ignorant Midwives, but we counsel common-sense measures to avert—to cure the evil.

We ask those who object to the views we have frequently stated in these columns, to read, mark, and learn the weighty words uttered by Dr. Priestley at the recent Mansion House meeting of the British Nurses' Association—an Obstetric Physician of the first rank, an ardent worker for years for Midwifery reform, and one who took, as President of the Obstetrical Society, a leading part in drafting a Bill with this object in 1881. We point once again to the refusal of the Legislature, not once nor twice, but invariably, to enact clauses against professional quacks, and remind those who still differ from us that the Act prepared nearly eight years ago, has never yet seen the light of a Parliamentary day.

But some of our correspondents argue that mere Registration will be valueless in prevention of the evils of ignorant Midwifery. Granting that it will not work miracles, and will not cure all ignorance and all error, we would urge that it could not at least do any harm, and seeing the magnitude of the dangers and the suffering which might be saved, surely any scheme is worth a trial on the bare chance that it might do good. But we would confidently assert that the adoption of Registration of Midwives must inevitably be of the greatest value to all classes concerned. Once more let us refer our readers to the remarks made upon this matter both by Dr. Priestley and by Dr. Matthews Duncan, at the Mansion House meeting, and which were duly reported in these columns on August 1st. Both strongly support the proposal to establish Registration. Some of our readers may not be aware of the fact, of which we are informed on the best authority, that the

British Nurses' Association has only undertaken the scheme of Registering Midwives at the earnest and powerful request of these gentlemen and other leading Obstetric Physicians and Midwives.

In the first place, then, Registration will provide the best possible foundation upon which further advances may be based; facts, indeed, upon which Parliament might even be moved to enact future laws. For it will not only be a means whereby the skilled can be readily distinguished from the unskilled workers, but will speedily—by indisputable figures—show how many of the former class are engaged in practice, and by a process of exclusion it will afford an approximate knowledge of the numbers comprised in the latter section. In the next place, there can be no reasonable doubt that, as the existence of the Register becomes more generally known to the public, the demand for Registered Midwives will become constantly greater, and the difficulty of those who are not stamped by the professional "hall-mark" to obtain employment, will be increased to a corresponding degree.

It is easy to foresee from these results that Registration will be more and more highly regarded by Midwives for the status it will give them, and more and more valued by the public for the protection it affords. Then the tendency will be to raise the standard necessary for Registration, which implies the further elevation of the whole training, the knowledge and efficiency of the Midwife, and the still clearer distinction between the skilled worker and the ignorant quack. Then we believe the time would have arrived when Parliamentary aid might be invoked with success. Public opinion would be educated on the subject, definite facts could be given, distinct improvement could be proved, an organised professional body could be shown. Now the crying evils are only known to a few. Vague ideas, hypothetical statistics, chimerical visions are alone forthcoming—have done nothing, and can do nothing, to solve a mighty problem. Registration at any rate offers a simple, common sense, and safe basis, upon which a better state of things might, and we believe would, arise.

— ♦ —

WE do not always perceive that even the writing of a note of congratulation, the fabrication of something intended as an offering of affection, our necessary intercourse with characters which have no congeniality with our own, or hours apparently trifled away in the domestic circle, may be made by us the performance of a most sacred and blessed work; even the carrying out, after our feeble measure, of the design of God for the increase of happiness.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)