

gentlemen who can produce a certificate of having seen half-a-dozen or so cases of labour. This being so, what are we to suppose will be deemed sufficient experience for women who are to be registered as midwives. Indeed, one gentleman who is largely engaged in teaching (not midwifery, however), said to me not long since that he considered attendance on one case of labour was all that should be required from any student. I suppose that will be deemed sufficient, too, for midwives? but then they will be "registered," and what more can the advocates of the education of midwives require? Registration, not education, seems to be the great end in view. I only wish to reverse that. I advocate "education," not "registration."—I am, Sirs, yours truly,

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SIRS,—In the Committee's report which was published in the columns of *The Lancet* on the proposed legislation for midwives, such report concludes in the following terms: "Your Committee desire to refer to the apprehension expressed by certain witnesses belonging to the medical profession, lest their interests might be injuriously affected by an improvement in the status of midwives," and the Committee further state that "they are of opinion that the medical profession will not only be relieved of much irksome and ill-paid work," but they also point out in effect that medical men will derive advantage through being more frequently called to the aid of midwives by virtue of the improved knowledge of the latter. Now, Sirs, speaking personally, I should say that the "interest" of the medical profession is a question which should hold quite a subordinate position compared to a question of paramount importance, and that is: Would the proposed legislation decrease or increase the mortality amongst lying-in women? If the answer is in the affirmative I have no hesitation in saying, and most certainly too, that it should pass. On the other hand, however, it is quite conceivable that legislation might tend to increase the mortality and at the same time seriously affect the "interest" of the profession, and in this latter case such interest would be a matter of some moment considering the competition of the age. The idea of the Committee relieving medical men of "irksome work" is a notion which is totally repudiated by almost universal and everyday experience, because there are numbers of medical men both in town and country who are not only ready, but who actually undertake and conduct midwifery at the same rate of fees as uncertificated midwives. No

doubt the ultimate results of this kind of legislation, as, indeed, in any other kind, are a matter of uncertainty. Hence the wide difference of opinion on the subject; but it would seem to me that one is able to arrive at some approximate estimate, provided only one bases his calculations on facts instead of on mere opinion, and the facts are undoubtedly these—namely, that legislation must either decrease or increase the number of midwives, or it must retain them at their present ratio—*i.e.*, exchange the registered for unregistered, number for number. With regard to the first—*i.e.*, decrease—a fear was very properly and honestly expressed by the proposers of this legislation that the number of midwives might become too few, and no doubt this consideration is one that ought not to be lightly brushed aside, because it is evident that if an Act of Parliament were to have a very drastic effect in exterminating the "Gamps," and the void was not sufficiently filled by the registered, such country and other places which are sparingly provided with medical men must seriously suffer; hence we see the risks of a decrease. Secondly, with regard to a problematic increase; and to express my private opinion the Act is more likely to operate in this direction than any other. It is almost absurd to mention anything so self-evident as the fact that the expenditure of an unlimited number of "natural" cases in the hands of a class whose experience would be wasted, as they would have no authority to act in emergencies, must necessarily be such a waste of obstetric knowledge in general that its equivalent can only be expressed by saying that general practitioners must tend to degenerate in this knowledge. With regard to the question of the "improved status" of midwives, it seems to me that the Act could have no effect either in increasing or decreasing midwives except by such improved status; otherwise, how is it certificated midwives have not exterminated the "Gamps" already? It is well-known by all classes of the public that certificated midwives are to be obtained; nevertheless, in the very teeth of the latter, the "Gamps" still carry on their craft as heretofore. Lastly, with regard to the only other alternative—and this is indeed the only conceivable advantage to my mind that could be derived from the Act—namely, the maintenance of midwives at or about their present number, the only question that remains is, is it worth while to hazard an Act of Parliament which has been shown to be so perilous, either through increase or decrease, on the mere off-shot of retaining midwives at their present number?—I am, Sirs, yours truly,

CLEMENT H. SERS.

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