



Letters to the Editor.

(Notes, Queries, &c.)

*Whilst cordially inviting communications upon all subjects for these columns, we wish it to be distinctly understood that we do not IN ANY WAY hold ourselves responsible for the opinions expressed by our correspondents.*

PROPOSED NEW ORDER OF MIDWIFERY PRACTITIONERS.

To the Editor of "The Nursing Record."

MADAM,—The following petition is to be presented to the General Medical Council at its November Session. I should be grateful if you would give it publicity in your columns.—Yours faithfully,

ROBERT R. RENTOUL.

"To the President and Members of the General Council of Medical Education and Registration of the United Kingdom.

"The Petition of the undersigned medical practitioners, "Hereby sheweth,

"1. That certain registered medical practitioners, and medical societies have, without the permission of your Council, taken it upon themselves to deliver lectures on midwifery to women, and to grant certificates or diplomas to them, which are stated to give the holders the right to practice midwifery, or to act as midwifery practitioners.

"2. That during the year 1892 two Midwives' Registration Bills were introduced into the House of Commons with the view of giving legal recognition to a new order of midwifery practitioners other than those recognised by the Medical Acts, and that the Select Committee of the House of Commons in their report—issued August 1893—recommend that legislation upon this subject should take place.

"3. That if a new order of Midwifery Practitioners be established, such action would be retrograde and a danger to the public, as it tends to repeal the Medical Act, 1886, which enacts, that if any persons wish to practice midwifery, such persons must—as well as studying for five years—pass a qualifying examination, not only in midwifery, but also in medicine and surgery.

"4. That the great aim of the Medical Act, 1886, is to prove conclusively that to successfully practice midwifery and to afford efficient help to women, a complete knowledge, not only of midwifery, but of medicine, surgery, and therapeutics is necessary, so that those diseases and conditions which frequently complicate pregnancy, delivering, and the puerperal state may be recognised and treated; a like medical knowledge being needed for the proper treatment of new-born infants.

"5. That the weighty recommendation of the Royal Commissioners on the Medical Acts, 1882, bearing upon this complete education is as follows:—'There is no point of medical reform on which there is so general an agreement as that the holding of a license ought to imply the possession of a complete qualification for practice, that is to say, the attainment of a sufficient standard of proficiency in all the three essential branches of medical practice—medicine, surgery, and midwifery;' and your petitioners trust your Council will see there must be but one high standard of education in obstetrics: that the best obstetric skill may be within the reach of all so that those of limited means and the poor may not be dependent upon an inferior order of midwifery practitioners.

"6. That those Royal Colleges which had power to examine and grant a diploma or certificate in midwifery to those who had neither a medical nor a surgical qualification have allowed such power to lapse, thus showing they are opposed to any retrograde movement in medical education and examination, or a return to the dangerous system of 'single' qualifications.

"7. That if your Council permit medical practitioners to grant certificates or diplomas which profess to authorise monthly Nurses and other persons to practise midwifery, this sanction by your Council will encourage other medical practitioners to grant certificates or diplomas to medical or surgical Nurses and other persons, thus intensifying the present evil, and degrading the faculty of medicine.

"8. That the number of maternity patients now at the disposal of schools for teaching medical students being strictly limited, it follows that this number being encroached upon for the training of another order of midwifery practitioners, the present difficulty in securing the proper clinical instruction in midwifery of medical students will be increased. We would call the attention of your Council to the unpleasant exclusive dealing adopted by the authority of the Poor Law Infirmaries, the City of London Lying-in, the British Lying-in, and the Clapham Maternity, where male medical students are excluded from clinical instruction, but where pupil midwives are admitted for training.

"9. That a considerable number of confinements being conducted by midwives or such midwifery practitioners, and new-born infants being also treated by such persons, it follows that a wide and rich field is withdrawn from the newly-licensed medical practitioner whereby he might perfect his knowledge in midwifery and diseases of infants by means of such Post-Graduate course.

"10. Your petitioners have followed with interest the action of your Council at the November Session, 1892, in reply to a memorial upon the same subject, and also the remarks of the President at the May Session, 1893.

"11. Your petitioners would call your attention to Clause 34 of a Medical Bill which was introduced into the House of Commons by Messrs. Hawes, Ewart and Hatton, in February, 1841, and in which it was proposed that from and after a certain date, 'no corporation sole, or corporation aggregate, nor any university, nor any person whatsoever, except under the provisions contained in this Act, shall have the power of granting any diploma, certificate, or license to practise medicine . . .'

Therefore your petitioners humbly pray:

"(a) That your Council make a rule to the effect that if any medical practitioners—without the authority of your Council, or unless under the authority of the Medical Acts—take it upon themselves to grant or give any certificate or diploma to any monthly Nurses or other persons who have not complied with the recommendations of your Council relating to the preliminary examination and course of professional study, and which professes to authorise the holder to practise midwifery, such action will, when brought before your Council, be regarded by your Council as charges of 'infamous conduct' under Section 29 of the Medical Act, 1858.

"(b) That if any medical practitioners, without the authority of your Council, or unless under the authority of the Medical Acts, take it upon themselves to grant certificates or diplomas to medical or surgical Nurses, or to any persons who have not complied with the recommendation of your Council relating to the preliminary examination and course of professional study, such certificates professing to authorise the holder to practise any part of medicine or surgery, your Council still hold such action to be 'infamous conduct' under Section 29 of the Medical Act, 1858.

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