

limited amount of education, could be regarded as in any manner fitted to carry out difficult, and sometimes most critical, medical and surgical treatment. We have opposed in these columns the various attempts which have been made to deceive and blind the public on this matter by specious and hysterical statements, and have frequently pointed out the manifest dangers involved to poor women in the proposed legislation. It will always be a satisfaction to us to remember that to this journal belongs the credit of sounding the first note of warning to medical men and the public in this matter, and that it was the statements which were made in these columns which led some medical men who have taken a most active part in the campaign against midwives, to devote their attention to the matter.

Resolutions have recently been passed, as we have duly reported, by some of the most influential medical bodies in London and the Provinces, against the proposal to legalise the practice of midwives. But, to a large extent, the effect of these resolutions has been neutralised by the action of bodies like the London Obstetrical Society, which have employed the whole weight of their influence, for reasons into which we prefer not to inquire, on behalf of these women. The event which has cast its large shadow before—the beginning of the ending of midwives—took place on the 3rd inst., when the following resolution was passed by the General Medical Council, in respect of the general principle of certificates granted to these workers:—

(a) That the Council, being of opinion that certain documents issued by various societies or persons as diplomas of education and examination in midwifery, are 'colourable imitations' of diplomas conferring a legal right to admission to the Medical Register, and both contravene the spirit of the Medical Acts, and are calculated to deceive the public, hereby give notice that, from the present date, the issue of such 'colourable imitations' by registered practitioners will be regarded as conduct 'infamous in a professional respect.'

(b) That in the opinion of the Council, the form of the certificate now before the Council, and purporting to be granted by the Obstetrical Society of London, on July 20th, 1894, is such that it may be regarded as a document coming within the purview of the foregoing resolution; and that this opinion be communicated to the President and Council of the Obstetrical Society."

Such severe and quite unexpected censure from the Medical Parliament upon the President and the Council of the Obstetrical Society is not only unprecedented, but must have the most marked effect. It may be taken for granted that, after such a strong and authoritative expression of opinion, the Society will never issue another such diploma, and it is quite certain that the distinguished

medical men who compose the Council were not aware of the light in which their Diploma would be regarded. It is not only the Obstetrical Society which is struck at in this judgment, but all the other bodies and persons which have bolstered up the midwife for so long. Failing their influential support, the last specimen of Sairey Gamp is doomed to speedy extinction, and the sooner that consummation arrives, the better will it be for the public at large.

DANGEROUS MIDWIVES.

A case which came before the South-Western police-court on the 4th instant, is very important as illustrating one great danger of untrained midwives to the public. The well-known coroner, Mr. Braxton Hicks, summoned this particular midwife for making a false statement concerning an infant whose case was recently inquired into before his Court. She had certified that it was "still-born," when, as a matter of fact, it lived for eighteen hours. It is a strange anomaly in English law that, at present, there is no supervision over the bodies of still-born children, and, therefore, it is not essential, according to statute, to register the birth of such infants. It has been pointed out that this laxity in legislation undoubtedly conduces very largely to the murder of infants, and indeed there is no dispute that a very large number of children are each year certified as still-born, and are therefore not registered, who were in very fact born alive, but whose existences were speedily terminated. And again, it is well-known that a very large number of infants, owing to the ignorance or carelessness of midwives, are so terribly injured during birth that their deaths soon follow, and that such cases are frequently certified by the midwife as "still-born" in order to obviate the inquest which might be necessary in the absence of a medical certificate, but which, of course, would almost inevitably cause the discovery of the midwife's malpraxis. It has been stated in an official return, that no less than 157,000 still-born children were buried in 1,300 different cemeteries in one single year, and that of this number more than 4,500 were interred without any medical certificate whatever. In this particular case, to which we draw the attention of our readers, if it had not been for the action of the coroner the death of this child would never have been heard of, and there were, unhappily, sufficient reasons why the mother should have desired that the birth of the child should not be known. However, there was no proof available that foul play had been committed, or that the mother had conspired with the midwife to give a false certificate, and, therefore, the latter escaped with a small fine for the infraction of the letter of the law. The case clearly demonstrates the necessity, to which Dr. Rentoul of Liverpool has so ably drawn the attention of the profession, in the columns of this Journal, and elsewhere, of a modification of the Act with regard to the Registration of still-births, and in favour of which a Select Committee of the House of Commons has already reported. We trust, therefore, that it will not be long before Parliament will deal with this matter, and meanwhile the case in question supplies a striking object lesson, were such needed,

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)