

## British Medical Association Congress.

### MIDWIVES' REGISTRATION.

EXETER HALL, both inside and out, presented a very lively appearance on Tuesday afternoon, when medical men from all parts of Great Britain assembled at 2.30 p.m., to discuss, among other interesting subjects, the vexed question of the Registration of Midwives. A goodly collection of notables in the profession soon gathered on the platform under the large organ, while others hurried about in quest of friends from the country, with whom to argue out the various points of view of the coming debate.

"What a charmingly frivolous colour the gentlemen have chosen for the bows distinguishing them as taking part in the Congress," said a well-known leader in the Nursing world, who had come to the meeting anxious to learn what turn the debate would take in dealing with the registration of obstetrical *Nurses*—as opposed to the scheme for the Registration of Midwives. And the remark was quite true, the bows in question being of a pretty geranium pink.

After the formality of electing Sir Russell Reynolds as President for the ensuing year, and the transaction of some necessary business of a financial and administrative character, the more interesting part of the proceedings began. It is such a novelty for women to be members of the British Medical Association, that most of the early speakers fell into the error of prefacing their speeches by "Gentlemen," until Sir Russell Reynolds took the lead in including the "ladies." Even after this some of the speakers, from sheer force of habit, ignored the fact that the "ladies of the medical profession" had to be included in their calculations.

Dr. Ward Cousins, the Chairman of the Council, in presenting the annual report, made special mention of the action taken by the *British Medical Journal*, with regard to Nursing in provincial workhouses, and how this agitation had called the attention of local authorities to the subject. He remarked that it was a great sorrow to the medical profession to see the sick and suffering in the hands of "frauds"—a sentiment which was received with applause. Furthermore, the Council had given very earnest consideration to the matter, and had concluded that the present state of things was intolerable, and that a change was very necessary. The Council also thought a scheme might be developed to include the Registration of all classes of Nurses, and recommended the abolition of the title of Midwife, and the substitution of the title of Midwifery Nurse.

Dr. Ward Cousins further said that the Council were of opinion that the care of parturient women should not be in the hands of a class of inferior medical practitioners such as would be formed by the Registration of Midwives, but that it should be in the hands of qualified practitioners and registered Nurses.

In speaking of the prosecution of quacks, he said that the medical profession was still unprotected, and that quackery would still have its way till the Medical Acts were reformed, which they should be on the ground of their injustice to the sick. Dr. Cousins did not say so, but doubtless he holds that it is an equal injustice to the sick to be in the hands of quack *Nurses*.

Mr. Lawson Tait then moved a rider to the adoption

of a Report, and speaking against the proposed Registration of Midwives, complained that the Council of the British Medical Association had not done its duty, in that it had not strongly opposed the proposed Midwives' Registration—a scheme of which the great majority of the members of the Association entirely disapproved. He also complained that the Council, when called upon to take any action approved of by the body of members, invariably sheltered themselves behind the *non possumus*—"we are not able"—policy, and took Counsel's opinion.

It may be interesting to Mr. Tait to hear that in this particular the Council of the British Medical Association is not unique, this policy having been for some time pursued by another professional Association.

Other speakers echoed Mr. Tait in strong objections to the formation of a "new order of practitioners," and advocated on public and professional grounds the improvement in the *quality* of the attendance on the sick poor. The proposed Registration of three months' trained Midwives, instead of being in harmony with the spirit and progress of the age was, they all considered, a downward and a backward step. It was pointed out that hundreds of unqualified male practitioners would be delighted to get on to the Register, and it would be impossible to deny them a privilege that was accorded to the women.

Mr. Lawson Tait proposed the following resolution: "That we, the members of the British Medical Association, while anxious to improve the training and supervision, and, if need be, to support a practical scheme for the registration of medical, surgical, and midwifery Nurses, emphatically condemn any proposal which has for its object the formation of a class of medical or surgical or midwifery practitioners other than those recognised under the Medical Act, 1886, as now existing."

Dr. Colin Campbell, in seconding, said that for the past twenty years it had been the practice of the Obstetrical Society of London to issue certificates of proficiency in midwifery to women after three months' training, and that, as a result of this, a new and a more dangerous race of midwives had been established. The new style of midwife was armed with certificates, measured "by the yard," to which were appended a long list of doctors' names and titles—gentlemen who were presumably proud of their pupils. Dr. Campbell said that a certificate in midwifery was equivalent to a certificate in the science and art of midwifery, and this these smatterers could not have. It was a very false philanthropy to provide the poor, parturient woman with "a three months' midwife"—something akin to the substitution of margarine for butter. In his opinion the State should provide skilled medical assistance to the poor, parturient mother, and this should be done without any stigma of pauperism being allowed to rest on the patient or her family. He also thought that skilled Nursing should be afforded to needy women during and after labour, and in his opinion skilled Nursing played the most important part in the parturient condition, and he was much in favour of thoroughly trained Nurses taking the place of the "modern Gamps."

Two or three speakers agreed in favour of the "smattering system," and an amendment recommending the Registration of Midwives was proposed by Professor Murdoch Cameron, of Glasgow, and supported by Dr. Hayward, but on being put to the meeting it received very little support, in fact, the

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)