

### The Midwives' Question.

THERE is a tremendous flutter in medical dovecots over the Midwives' Registration Bill. I am told by the wife of a Liberal M.P., "that if the Bill passes it will be largely owing to the influence of women who have watched the treatment of the nurse members of the Royal British Nurses' Association, and believe the whole opposition to the registration of midwives is actuated by the same tyrannous attitude of medical men to midwives, and, indeed, to the independence of women." It is a fact that members of the National Union of Women Workers, the Women's Liberal Association, and other important bodies are using immense pressure to procure the passing of the Bill on the 11th of May. We are not surprised at the conclusions they have drawn. The new code of Bye-Laws, and the methods by which they have been passed, will prove an immense lever in future in procuring the State Registration of Trained Nurses.

The *British Medical Journal* devotes five columns to the Midwives' Question, in which the "Humphreys Bill" and the "Horsley Bill" are discussed at length. We most strongly disapprove of the British Medical Association's Bill, because a midwife is not necessarily an obstetric nurse, and we do not see why our profession should be the dumping ground of this new hybrid. No woman has the right to the title of obstetric nurse who is not a trained midwife in addition to being a trained nurse, and we quite agree with Dr. Cullingworth, that it is best to call a spade a spade—or rather, a midwife a midwife. The Horsley Bill also denies the fundamental justice to midwives of representation upon the Board which is to control their profession. Such legislation is obsolete, and very dangerous—a system suitable for slaves, but not for free women.

Indeed, there is but one wise course in regard to this very vexed question—which we hope will be adopted—and that is that Parliament should appoint a Select Committee to deal with the whole Nursing Question, because, sooner or later, it will have to be tackled—and there is no time like the present.

The *British Medical Journal* gives the following interesting information concerning midwives in Italy:—

#### THE ITALIAN LAW AS TO MIDWIVES.

Attendance on women, during and after confinement, is regulated even in minute details in Italy. Under Article 14 of the Law of December, 1888, on the protection of the public health, each commune is compelled to have at least one mid-

wife (*levatrice*). Where the locality is too poor to offer a field for independent practice, it is provided that the municipality shall pay a midwife to attend poor women gratuitously. In case of need, two or more communes may combine to retain the services of a midwife.

#### RECORD OF CASES.

A midwife on taking up her residence in a commune is provided with a register in which she has daily to enter the name, age, and address of all women delivered by her, their previous confinements and miscarriages, the mode of termination of the last pregnancy, the duration and result of labour, the sex and condition of the child, the course and issue of the case, and accidents that may have occurred during its progress. When filled, this register is handed in to the communal authorities.

The rules to which the midwife is subject are defined by a Ministerial Ordinance, dated February, 23rd, 1890.

#### CIRCUMSTANCES UNDER WHICH MEDICAL AID MUST BE SOUGHT.

The midwife is required to call in the help of a medical practitioner whenever the course of the labour shows any abnormality, and in particular as soon as the temperature taken in the axilla (the thermometer having been kept there for fifteen minutes) rises beyond 38° C. If no medical practitioner is available the midwife must report the case to the municipal authority, failure to do so being punishable by a maximum fine of £20, and in serious cases by imprisonment.

#### OPERATIVE MIDWIFERY.

Midwives are forbidden to use surgical instruments and to practise manual operations on the fœtus within the uterus, except in cases of exceptional urgency, or where it is impossible to obtain medical assistance; in such circumstances she must take the responsibility of her acts. Breach of this regulation is punishable by a fine of £4.

#### PUERPERAL FEVER.

A midwife who has been in attendance on a case of puerperal fever, must abstain from the practice of her profession for at least five days in places where other obstetric aid is procurable. During the period of abstention she must change her clothes, linen, etc., and disinfect them by immersion in boiling water during ten minutes. Before attending another case, she must obtain the authorization of the sanitary officer, who must satisfy himself that she has disinfected herself properly.

#### ANTISEPTIC PRECAUTIONS.

The midwife is bound to carry the following instruments: Brush, scissors, a file for the nails; two hundred grammes of boric acid, divided into

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