

The Registration of Midwives.

THE result of the Special Session of the General Medical Council, summoned to consider Mr. G. B. Balfour's Bill for the Compulsory Registration of Midwives has been embodied in the following Report:—

"(i) That the title of the Bill should be: 'A Bill to promote the training of women as midwives, and to provide for the regulation of their practice.'

"(ii) That the term 'Midwife' should be defined as meaning a woman who undertakes for gain, to attend cases of natural labour, and who is not registered under the Medical Acts.

(iii) That the answer of the Council to the Lord President of the Privy Council should be as follows:—

"(1) That the Council adheres to its previous Resolutions affirming that it is desirable that measures should be taken to protect lying-in women of the poorer classes from the grave risk which they now incur from the unregulated practice of midwives, many of whom are ignorant and unskilful, and most of whom pursue their calling without due medical supervision.

"(2) That to this end it is desirable that every woman who, not being a registered medical practitioner, engages for gain in practice as a midwife, should be subjected to legal regulation and control.

"(3) That any measure which proposes merely to protect the title of 'Midwife,' however defined, and does not make illegal and penal the unlicensed practice of midwifery for gain, cannot be regarded as offering a sufficient safeguard in the interest of the public health.

"(4) That some central body should be established by Parliament whose functions should include the framing of the conditions under which midwives may be licensed, and of the regulations under which alone they shall be allowed to practise.

"(5) That the conditions and regulations so framed should be subject to the approval of the General Medical Council, and if and when so approved should be issued to the local sanitary authorities by the State Department which is concerned with the public health.

"(6) That provision should be made by Parliament for reimbursing the Council for any expenditure which it may have to incur in performing the duty hereinbefore referred to.

"(7) That every woman, before beginning to practise as a midwife in any district, should be required to take out a license, to be granted by the local sanitary authority of the district under the prescribed conditions and regulations. That such license should be subject to annual renewal, and should be revocable at any time in case the holder is proved to have infringed any of the prescribed regulations.

"(8) That any unlicensed woman, whether calling herself a midwife or not, who not being registered under the Medical Acts, practises as a midwife for gain in any district, should be made liable to a substantial penalty.

"(9) That the conditions under which licenses are granted should include the production of satisfactory evidence of character, and of training and experience in the conduct of natural labour, and in the after-care of lying-in women and new-born infants.

"(10) That the regulations under which licensed midwives are required to practise should include provisions securing that the midwife shall immediately

seek qualified medical assistance in every case which presents symptoms of difficulty, abnormality, danger, or disease on the part of the mother or of the new-born infant.

"(11) That in so far as the Bill submitted to the Council is not in accordance with the general principles above laid down, the Council do not regard it as offering a solution of the question under consideration, and would earnestly deprecate its passing into law in its present form."

The report having been read, it was moved by Dr. MacAlister, seconded by Mr. George Brown, and agreed to—"That the portion of the Report of the Committee proposing the form of an answer to the Privy Council, as now read and amended, be adopted as the answer of the General Medical Council to the Lord President of the Privy Council."

On the requisition of Dr. MacAlister the names and numbers of those who voted for and against the motion and of those who did not vote were taken down, and found to be as follows:—For—twenty-six: Dr. MacAlister, Mr. Bryant, Sir Dyce Duckworth, Dr. Pettigrew, Dr. Church, Sir William Roberts, Dr. Atthill, Dr. McVail, Sir Wm. Gairdner, Sir C. Nixon, Sir Wm. Thomson, Mr. Teale, Dr. Glover, Mr. Tichborne, Sir Philip C. Smyly, Dr. Bennett, Mr. Horsley, Dr. Philipson, Mr. Brown, Dr. Reid, Dr. Cameron, Dr. Leech, Dr. Bruce, Dr. Little, Mr. Carter, and Sir J. Batty Tuke. Against—none. The President did not vote, and Sir Richard Thorne and Dr. Heron Watson were absent.

The Medical Times says:—"The resolutions embodied in the above report will, we feel sure, meet with practically unanimous approval by the medical profession, and Dr. MacAlister is to be congratulated on having brought the whole Council into line in passing, with absolute unanimity, a resolution "earnestly deprecating" the passing into law of Mr. Balfour's Bill in its present form.

This resolution is, we believe, the death-knell of the Bill, for we cannot think it possible that any further steps will be taken in Parliament to promote its passage into law. The report of the Medical Council on the Bill is of a very different character to what we might have expected, judging from previous debates on the subject, which have taken place in the Council. The gratifying change is, we feel sure, due to the public expression of professional opinion, especially as emphasized at the last general election of Direct Representatives."

Mr. Victor Horsley, as one of the Direct Representatives of the medical profession in the Medical Council, has taken the useful step of issuing a short report on the midwives' question to his constituents, in which he says that the three principles embodied in the report of the Subcommittee of the Medical Council, have been embodied in the Report to the Privy Council.

"Of these principles, the first and most fundamental is that the only possible method of arresting the notorious evil committed by midwives at the present time, is to provide, that an ignorant person who practises as a midwife for gain shall be punished."

"The second principle is that the trained midwife shall be limited to the attendance of cases of natural

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