

### The Futility of the Royal British Nurses' Association.

We observe in a report of the annual meeting of the Medical Defence Union, in the *British Medical Journal*, that the Council has, during the past year, "addressed a communication to the Council of the Royal British Nurses' Association, expressing the opinion that the use of the words 'qualifying' and 'diploma,' in connection with a 'list of nurse members, who have obtained certificates qualifying them to act as midwives' was objectionable," the result of this action being "that the Royal British Nurses' Association has recognised that a clerical error had been made, and has directed that in future editions a foot-note should be appended to each page, that these certificates were for the training of nurses, and not diplomas qualifying for the practice of midwives."

So this is the impasse to which the hon. officers of this once prosperous and dignified association have brought its members. After recently boasting in its official organ that the association can show a list of midwives, who have *added to their obstetrical training three years' training in medical and surgical nursing* (think of it, oh, trained nurses), on being called upon to defend this list they immediately "climb down," and speak of "a clerical error," whereas this error has appeared in two consecutive issues, and promise to amend their ways and behave themselves for the future, quite ignoring the fact that the nurses who hold the diploma of the London Obstetrical Society *are* qualified to act as midwives, and to assert that they are not, is not only untrue, but calculated to injure these nurses in their professional work.

We have before us, as we write, a diploma of the London Obstetrical Society. It asserts that the holder is a "skilled midwife, and competent to attend cases of natural labour," a statement which is signed by some seven leading obstetricians. While the wisdom of this society in having issued such documents to persons having only three months special training may well be called in question, the fact remains that this is the recognized "qualification" under which women practice midwifery, and if the Medical Defence Union object to it they would do well to represent their views to those members of the medical profession who form the Council of the London Obstetrical Society, and who, for cash paid down, issue, annually, many hundreds of these certificates.

But there are many other points which arise but of this report. We should like to know whether the communication of the Medical Defence Union, which was addressed to the

Council (the governing body) of the R.B.N.A., was ever received by it, and if so, how it happens that no report of the action taken upon it has appeared in the official organ of the association. The policy of "suppression," which has been characteristic of this association in the past few years, appears to be still in force.

The issue of a list of persons holding a midwifery qualification in a roll of qualified nurses, is, of course, objectionable in the highest degree, and it is a significant fact that this separate list was published for the first time when the register was abolished and the roll of members substituted for it. Had the experienced matrons who founded the association still had a voice in its counsels this recognition of specialism would never for a moment have been permitted. A special list of midwifery practitioners might as well be published in the *Medical Register*. Until 1899 the midwifery experience of members of the Royal British Nurses' Association was very properly stated with their other qualifications, but the issue of the separate list having been made, we are of opinion that if the hon. officers attempt to cover their mistake by appending a foot-note to each page of this list, stating that the certificates notified are "not diplomas qualifying for the practice of midwives," they will not only cover themselves with ridicule, but the nurses who hold these certificates can obtain redress in a court of law, as they could prove both professional and financial damages.

Take a concrete instance. Suppose a member of the Royal British Nurses' Association, holding the certificate of the London Obstetrical Society, settles down in a district with the object of taking up midwifery work. She is known as a member of the R.B.N.A. Some curious person looks her up in the roll of members, finds it asserted that her certificate is "for the training of a nurse," and does not qualify for "the practice of midwives." This statement circulated in all good faith on the authority of the R.B.N.A. will be fatal to the member in question, and the work she desires will fall into other hands than hers. Even the most subservient supporters of the hon. officers of this association must recognize the danger and injustice of their proposed foot-note to the list of nurse members qualified to act as midwives. The proper course for the members to adopt is, unquestionably, to insist upon the deletion of this superfluous list. Whether in these days they will have the courage to do so remains to be seen, but it is certain that they can only take their proper position on a nurses' roll by placing their names in a list of the thoroughly trained. If they hold a midwifery certificate the proper course is to note this amongst their qualifications.

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