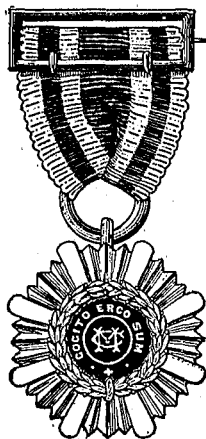


## The Matrons' Council.

(Continued from page 442.)



The next business on the Agenda was to receive a Report of the Meeting of the National Council of Women from Miss Hay Forbes, Delegate.\*

The Report was adopted, and the Hon. Secretary was directed to place it upon the Minutes, and to write to Miss Hay Forbes in the name of the Council, thanking her for her interesting and exhaustive Report, and for the trouble she had taken in drawing it up.

### THE ANNUAL LICENSING OF MIDWIVES.

The next business before the Meeting was to consider a Notice of Motion by Mrs. Bedford Fenwick :

"That as it has been publicly announced that a Midwives' Bill will be brought before Parliament next Session providing that women who desire to practise as midwives must obtain an Annual License to do so from County Councils or County Borough Councils, and, as no women are eligible to sit upon such Councils, Midwives would therefore be placed under the control and supervision of entirely unprofessional bodies, composed moreover of men only.

"The Matrons' Council consider it necessary to point out that such legislation would place Midwives in a most anomalous and defenceless position; that this would undoubtedly deter well-trained women from undertaking such work, and that in various ways it would be most detrimental to the interests of the poor."

The Hon. Secretary here read the following letter from Miss Barling, Matron of the Infirmary, Kidderminster:—

DEAR MISS BREAY,—I am sorry that it is quite impossible for me to get up to town next week to attend the meeting of the Matrons' Council, as I should like to give a very emphatic protest against the Bill for the Annual Licensing of Midwives by County Councils or Borough Councils. I think such a Bill would be dangerous because the women would be under the control of an unprofessional body of men, and moreover in local matters there is much favouritism. . . . I intend speaking to two members of Parliament on the subject next week or so, and both are men of sound judgment who are already in favour of State Registration of Nurses, and I hope to be able to induce them to see the right side of the Midwives' Bill question.

Believe me,

Yours sincerely,  
ANNIE BURLING.

\* We regret that great pressure on our space prevents our publishing in this issue the text of this Report.

Letters from Mrs. Groves, Member of the League of St. Bartholomew's Nurses, Bristol, and from Miss Richmond, Matron of the Women's Hospital, Sparkhill, Birmingham, on the same subject, were also placed before the meeting. The resolution having been proposed by Mrs. Bedford Fenwick, and seconded by Miss Beatrice Jones, Matron of the Victoria Park Hospital, Mrs. Fenwick said:—

I was present at the Annual Meeting of the National Council of Women, of which we have received an excellent report from our delegate, Miss Hay Forbes, and in which she refers to a resolution dealing with the Registration of Midwives, proposed by Mrs. Heywood Johnstone, in the following terms: "That this Council, having regard to the urgent need for legislation to control the practice of Midwives, resolves to use all means in its power to obtain promises of members of Parliament to ballot for the Bill next session, and further to urge upon its local members the importance of holding public and other meetings in support of the Bill."

To be brief, I expressed the opinion that as the text of the Bill was not before the National Council, it would be highly improper to pass such a resolution without full information and discussion, as the Midwives' Bills had always been contentious measures, and vitally affected the interests of both the medical and nursing professions.

Ultimately the resolution was passed in a somewhat altered form, substituting "and further to urge upon its local branches the importance of holding public and other meetings to call attention to the need for the supervision and education of midwives," instead of "in support of the Bill."

Subsequently a meeting was held, upon the invitation of Mrs. Heywood Johnstone, to discuss the Midwives' Registration Question, and in answer to questions we were informed that the Bill, a copy of which was on the table, provided for the Annual Licensing of Midwives by Local Bodies such as County and Borough Councils, upon which women were ineligible to sit, and not for their State Registration by a Central Board, upon which Midwives would have a self-governing majority. It was pointed out that so many interests had to be "squared" that the more liberal legislation was impossible. Now, no woman can have carefully read the correspondence in the Medical Press on the Midwives' question without apprehension and without gauging the danger of furthering legislation which incorporates principles of control over women's labour which would not be tolerated by men, and from my Resolution you will grasp the fact that in the proposal to substitute Annual and Local Licensing by unprofessional bodies composed of men, for State Registration of Midwives we have before us a suggested form of very restrictive legislation for women—more or less associated with trained nurses—which incorporates the most dangerous of principles, that of placing the work and personal character of a class of women at the absolute mercy of their employers and competitors, a most unsound and unjust proposition from an industrial standpoint. The very basis of personal and industrial liberty is at once sapped and undermined.

My opinion on the question of legislating for specialists is well known. I am opposed to it; the

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)