

The Midwives' Bill.

The Midwives' Bill on Friday last was read a third time in the House of Commons after an interesting debate, interesting more especially to nurses, because in this, as in other debates on the midwife question, it proved impossible to avoid the subject of the trained nurse, and especially notable for the assertion of Sir Walter Foster that the measure before the House was only part of a much larger measure that was required to deal with a great public question. The registration of nurses was as necessary as that of midwives; and the Home Office ought not to have left the initiative in legislation to private members.

This is the first time that a suggestion has been made in the House that it is the duty of the Government to bring in a Bill for the legal registration of trained nurses, and is significant as showing the trend of public and medical opinion.

On the proposition of Mr. Heywood Johnstone some verbal amendments were made to the Bill. These were adopted without discussion, their object being to give effect to the expressed intentions of the House.

Mr. Boscawen (Kent, Tunbridge,) pointed out that the Bill had been very much altered on the report stage, and, though he did not oppose it, said that the principle of it was contrary to Parliamentary procedure for many years past. The previous object of Parliament had always been to strengthen the law against quacks and unqualified persons. This Bill instead of making qualifications more strict relaxed them.

Mr. Renshaw (Renfrew, W.) expressed the opinion that the amended Bill would cause difficulty in outlying districts where the cost would be too great to bring down a qualified nurse, and Mr. Flower (Bradford, W.) supported this view, and also hoped the Midwives' Board would be strengthened.

We must however point out that the Bill deals with midwives not nurses.

Dr. Thompson (Monaghan, N.) said the medical profession was by no means satisfied with the Bill. He considered the penal clause of the Bill absolutely necessary in order to prevent unqualified women from practising as midwives, but he thought a great deal more should be done to improve the medical care of the poor.

Mr. Parker Smith (Lanark, Partick) while recognising the value of the services of the medical profession, said that it was found in practical experience that only a small proportion of the women of the country could obtain the assistance of the medical profession. It was a matter of common knowledge that much mischief was done by ignorant and dirty midwives, and the object of the Bill was to improve the *status* and

education of midwives, but it would make the Bill unworkable to demand too high qualifications in the first instance. In the future he hoped that they might be able to make another advance in the qualification of midwives.

Sir Walter Foster said that the sudden agreement which had been reached in regard to this Bill was due to the change of its provisions in regard to unqualified practice. He hoped this change would be maintained in its future stages.

Mr. Banbury (Camberwell, Peckham,) thought the Bill on the whole a good one, but there was a danger in the Bill as amended of the creation of a "midwife-ring."

Mr. T. P. O'Connor (Liverpool) thought that the governing body might be further improved. The board as at present constituted, was to a large extent a London board. He thought arrangements might be made for provincial representation. He sympathised with a proposal to place a representative of the Jubilee Nurses upon it. He thought the very important rules regulating the whole practice of midwifery through the country should be allowed to lie on the table of the House for thirty or forty days before becoming law. He also strongly urged that nursing was at the root of the whole midwifery question, and hoped that eventually the English system would be assimilated to the Irish one for the care of maternity cases, which he described as almost perfect. In Ireland poor women were entitled without fee to the assistance of the dispensary doctor and a thoroughly trained nurse. Village communities ought to be attended to, and he advised that pressure should be brought to bear upon localities to imitate the example of Ireland in this respect.

We have frequently urged in this journal that a thoroughly trained obstetric nurse, working under medical direction, should be available for the working class mother, whether provided out of the rates, as the parish doctor, or by the benevolence of the public in connection with the Queen Victoria Jubilee Institute.

Mr. Collings (Birmingham, Bordesley) made it plain that the Bill was not a Government measure, but he thought it a thoroughly good measure and intended to vote for it. At the same time he feared it would press hardly on the large and very deserving class of monthly nurses who attended women of the working classes in childbirth, and for seven or eight shillings a week attended the wife in her confinement and undertook all the menial domestic duties of the household.

These women may be, and are, many of them admirable cottage helps, but they cannot be regarded as monthly nurses by any who know what this term implies.

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