Editorial.

THE MIDWIVES QUESTION.

Last week the Midwives' Bill passed through its Committee stage in the House of Lords; various more or less important amendments being made in the measure. It is most probable therefore that the Bill will now pass its third reading in the House of Lords without much delay. It will then be returned to the House of Commons for that body to decide whether it will agree or disagree with the amendments made by the Upper House. At this period of the Session, it may be expected that the Commons will agree with the alterations made by the Lords, and in that case the Bill will speedily receive the Royal Assent and become law. This is therefore a fit occasion to consider some of the remarkable features of the Bill as it now stands. We say "remarkable" advisedly, because this little measure, introduced into the House of Commons by private members and without the direct sanction or support of the Government, contains provisions which must act as precedents for future legislation, and which are entirely novel in their character. It is, therefore, impossible to exaggerate the importance of the Midwives' Bill or to forecast the wide-reaching consequences it may produce.

In the first place, the Bill makes it a penal offence for any woman to term herself, or to act habitually for gain as, a midwife unless she is registered under the new Act. Hitherto, Parliament has strenuously objected to throw any penalty upon quacks, with the inevitable consequence that no civilised country in the world is so overrun with bone-setters, herbalists, and such like charlatans, as the United Kingdom is. The first result, therefore, of the new Act will inevitably be to produce an agitation, which Parliament will find it difficult to resist, to make medical quackery in this country a penal offence. Such an outcome of a private member's Bill is so revolutionary as to be almost unprecedented.

In the next place, the Bill provides that the expenses of the Midwives' Board in particular, and of working the Act in general, are to be paid by the county or district councils throughout the country. In the case of every other profession the expenses of its control and government are paid by its members themselves. The second principle therefore introduced by the Midwives' Bill is that the rate-payers throughout the country may be called upon to defray the expenses of controlling the professions. It is, moreover, noteworthy, as *The Medical Times* some weeks ago pointed out, that in foreign countries where the same provision was originally introduced the principle has been so far extended that either the taxpayer or the ratepayer has now to pay the costs not only of controlling the profession but also of the education of midwives; and in one country even of the board and lodging of the pupil midwives. Such an outcome of the principle now adopted in this country would be merely logical, but it apparently is one of which the contingency has not been anticipated by the promoters of the Midwives' Bill. It is certainly not a development which will be eagerly welcomed by English and Welsh ratepayers.

The third development to which we have alluded is still more extraordinary. The profession of midwives is to be controlled by a Board composed of representatives of two or three Nursing societies and of medical practitioners; and, so far as we can observe, it will not be essential that a single midwife should be placed upon the controlling body of her profession. In every other instance, Parliament has naturally ordained that the profession legislated for shall be controlled by representative members of the profession; and therefore the novel and startling principle has been accepted that professional matters may be confided to, and controlled by, persons who are not engaged in, and who may therefore be entirely ignorant of, the work. We confess that this ap-