

The Midwife Question.

We entirely agree with the following opinion expressed in the *Lancet* with relation to the Central Midwives' Board and Workhouse Nursing. It appears to us that if the standard of education laid down by the Central Midwives' Board represents the lowest standard which can be held compatible with efficiency in a midwife—and it must be remembered that a minimum not a maximum standard is invariably laid down by law—then all midwives, wherever working, should be required to conform to it, if the Act is not to be meaningless. The *Lancet* says:—

The Local Government Board appears to have taken up a position decidedly open to criticism as regards the qualification of midwives in workhouses. Section E of the rules of the Central Midwives' Board which were approved by the Privy Council in August last, and a copy of which appears in our issue of August 22nd, 1903, p. 555, expounds an elaborate scheme for "regulating, supervising, and restricting within due limits the practice of midwives." With the details of this scheme in so far as it insists upon the necessity for care and cleanliness on the part of the midwife we have no fault to find, but its beneficial effects are nullified to a great extent by the extraordinary provision which concludes the Section. In Article 21 it is laid down that "nothing in this Section (E) shall apply to certified midwives exercising their calling in hospitals, workhouses, or Poor Law infirmaries under the supervision of a duly-appointed medical officer." If this paragraph means anything at all it means that a workhouse midwife may practically be as indifferent to hygienic principles as she pleases, for, as anybody with experience of workhouses can testify, the amount of restraint which the "duly appointed" but usually non-resident medical officer can exercise upon her is very small. If, further, the midwife has received her certificate under Section D 4 of the rules as "having been in *bona-fide* practice as a midwife for twelve months previous to July 31st, 1902," she will be able to add to such indifference some of those quaint observances which have in past years done so much to maintain the rate of infant mortality. "Do you think that to wipe a newborn baby's eyes with the corner of a coarse dirty sheet is the proper way for a midwife to work?" Thus asks a correspondent in a nursing journal in reference to a practice met with in a workhouse. We, at any rate, do not think so; on the contrary, it seems to us that if there is any place where sanitary precautions are urgently called for it is in the labour ward of a workhouse. Hither drift the victims of venereal disease, and here, as nowhere else, are the sins of the fathers visited on the children, between whom and maybe blindness or death stands the care of the attendant nurse. In the matter of pauperism we are no sentimentalists, but the children of the poor are a national asset, and even the Local Government Board might be expected to be interested in seeing that such children do not, through neglect or incompetence, become a charge upon, instead of a support to, the State. We refer thus particularly to the Local Government Board because it appears from letters which have passed between the Workhouse Infirmary

Nursing Association and the Central Midwives' Board that the rule to which we take exception was inserted at the express instance of the Local Government Board. As a consequence of this interference it was decided at a meeting of the Central Midwives' Board held on December 17th to postpone for the present all applications from teachers in Poor Law institutions who sought recognition under Section C of the rules. Thus a new obstacle is raised to the improvement of the status of Poor Law nurses and fresh discouragement is given to those who have been so long and so earnestly struggling for reform in workhouse administration.

A good instance of the paramount importance to any class of workers of taking an intelligent interest, and participating in framing the laws which govern them, is to be found just now in the correspondence between the Master of the Rotunda Hospital, Dublin, and the Central Midwives' Board. The Midwives' Act does not apply to Ireland, but many midwives trained at the Rotunda and other Dublin hospitals subsequently work in England. The result of standing aside while the Midwives' Act was before the House, and failing to co-operate in the movement, is that Irish midwives now find their training does not qualify them for registration under the Act, and that if they wish to register in this country they must obtain further experience. Irish nurses are wiser. They have, just in time, formed their Irish Nurses' Association, and will by its means be able to voice their views on the Nurses' Registration Bill now before the House.

Practical Points.

Ice Poultrices. Ice poultices are often preferable to ice-bags for two reasons: because they can be made to fit to any surface of the body and a higher degree of cold can be produced. In cases of tonsillitis or other inflammation of the throat they are to be especially commended. The poultice is made of two-thirds ice, one-third linseed, and a fair amount of salt. The coverings are made by using oiled muslin and adhesive plaster. There are two envelopes, or bags, one smaller than the other, made of the oiled muslin and cut the desired shape, four pieces in all. The edges of two pieces are carefully bound together (excepting at one end) with adhesive about one inch wide. The smaller or inner bag is then filled with the poultice material and slipped inside the larger, after which the ends are fastened with adhesive plaster and the poultice is complete.

The Destruction of Tuberculous Sputa. Mr. J. Lionel Stratton writes in this week's *Lancet*:—"I notice in a paper by Dr. C. T. Williams that he advises as a convenient method of destroying the expectoration of tuberculous patients mixing it with sawdust and burning it. For some years I have advocated the following plan, which appears to me a more complete system. A small cardboard box is half-filled with sawdust which is damped with paraffin. Into

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)