

The Midwife.

THE MIDWIVES BILL.

A BILL TO AMEND THE MIDWIVES ACT, 1902.

On Tuesday, October 15th, the day on which the House of Commons resumed after the Adjournment, the second reading of the Midwives Bill was moved by Mr. Hayes Fisher, President of the Local Government Board, in the words, "I beg to move, 'That the Bill be now read a second time.'"

Mr. Hayes Fisher said that he could perform this duty in a very few sentences. He explained that the Bill was introduced in the House of Lords, on behalf of the Privy Council, early in the Session, and passed that House with only one important Amendment. When it came to the House of Commons a lynx-eyed member detected in some of the Clauses an infringement of the privileges of the House of Commons. These Clauses were held to contain a public charge. That being so, the Bill should have been introduced into the House of Commons instead of the House of Lords; therefore it had to be laid by. He consequently introduced it precisely in the same form in which it passed the House of Lords.

THE ACT OF 1902.

He then explained that the basis of all legislation in relation to midwives was the Act of 1902, which set up a Central Midwives Board and required that after a certain time women should not act as midwives unless they were duly certified by that Board. The Act applied to England and Wales only. After some years' experience of its operation, a Departmental Committee made valuable recommendations as to amendments which might fittingly be brought into the Act by subsequent legislation. When Scotland and Ireland obtained the benefits of a Midwives Act, the principal recommendations of the Departmental Committee were incorporated in those Acts.

THE CINDERELLA OF MIDWIFERY LEGISLATION.

So it came about that England and Wales became, as it were, the Cinderella of midwifery legislation. The whole object of the present Bill was to assimilate the law relating to the midwives of England and Wales to that which obtains in Scotland and Ireland.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE CLAUSES.

Mr. Hayes Fisher went on to explain the importance of the Clauses of the present Bill.

Clause 1, he said, provides machinery by which the constitution of the Central Midwives Board can be altered, with proper safeguards, by an Order in Council. *Clause 2* endeavours to make an equitable apportionment of any deficit; the

present system appeared to penalize the more active authorities as against the negligent ones. *Clause 6* amplifies the provisions relating to suspension; in this Clause, Sub-section (2) introduces, for the first time, the principle of compensation.

Clause 7 allows the Central Midwives Board, if they think fit, to pay the expenses of any midwife who may be required to appear before them to defend herself; whilst *Clause 8* empowers the Central Midwives Board, in removing from the Roll the name of any midwife, also to prohibit her from attending maternity cases in any other capacity.

Clause 10 introduces provision for the reciprocal recognition of certificates granted by the Central Midwives Board in this country, and of midwives certified by similar bodies in other parts of His Majesty's Dominions where the training is equivalent. *Clause 11* empowers Local Supervising Authorities to contribute to the training of midwives in conformity with the resolution passed by the County Councils Association. *Clause 12* repeals Section 9 of the principal Act (Delegation of Powers by County Councils to District Councils).

Mr. Hayes Fisher pointed out that this proposal gave rise to a division of opinion in another place, and said he thought it probable that, in the Committee stage, some objection might be taken, he should be only too glad to listen to all those capable of advising him as to the best form this proposal ought to take.

Clause 14 provides a simple machinery for the payment of medical assistance summoned by midwives in cases of emergency, and makes it obligatory to summon a doctor in typical cases of emergency.

EFFECT OF THE BILL.

In conclusion, Mr. Hayes Fisher said: "It only remains to be said that the Bill embodies the principal recommendations of the Departmental Committee, and that it brings the whole of our legislation connected with midwives in England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland all on the same footing. We are all most anxious to do everything we can to promote maternity, and anything that relates to child welfare. If we can pass such a Bill as this, which improves the status of midwives and removes some of the difficulties under which they suffer, I feel that we shall have done something to diminish the suffering of motherhood, and we shall have done something to attract more women, and possibly a better class of women, to that ancient and honourable profession. By this Bill we shall take an important step forward in one branch of the public health which endeavours to see that everything is done for the strengthening of the health and the general im-

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