

they are now; and that if they need not call in a doctor, to save their own reputations—as they are now obliged to do in dangerous cases—but could give death certificates without reference to a medical man, they would have every facility afforded them for concealing the fatal results of the ignorance and reckless carelessness which, unhappily, are too common now, and, upon which then, there would be no outside check at all. On the other hand, the Obstetric Nurse would be, from first to last, responsible to, and dependent upon the help of medical men; she would not be able to give certificates of death, and would, therefore, be compelled to seek for skilled assistance whenever necessary, and by her greater knowledge and experience would be better able to judge when such aid was needed, than the ignorant midwife could possibly be.

Proposed Registration and Inspection of Still-born Children.

BY ROBERT R. RENTOUL, M.D.

IT is full time the present very unsatisfactory state of affairs which permits the bodies of children, supposed to be still-born, to be interred—and without even a Medical Certificate of the cause of still-birth—were put a stop to. In Denmark, Holland, Switzerland, Sweden, Norway, Greece, Italy, Spain, France, Belgium, Germany, Austria, Hungary, Western Australia, Provinces of Ontario and Prince Edward Island, and in several States and Chief Cities of America, registration is provided for. Why should England and Russia be among the exceptions? The English law enacts that only those children “born alive” shall be registered, and the “Regulations” issued by the Registrar General to Registrars, enforce this. Our Births’ and Deaths’ Registration Acts have been undergoing a steady process of development. Before 1836, Registration of Births and Deaths was carried out by the clergy. Then in 1837, Civil Registration was introduced. But this made Registration voluntary, and did not work well. Consequently, the system was made compulsory in 1874. It is strange that none of these enactments make registration of still-born children compulsory. I take it that the Scottish Act of 1854 was drafted

with this intention, because Sections 26 and 27 refer to “every birth,” and “any child born.” Surely these terms include still-born children. Even Seton, in his “Practical Analysis” of the Scottish Acts, does not say that they exclude such being registered. Section 28 of the same Act gives the Registrar power to make parents bring the child to him, in cases of doubt, so that he may verify the birth, and sex—a most important provision.

The question has been asked—How many still-born children are interred in England each year? In 1890, I wrote to the Superintendents of about 100 Burial Board Cemeteries, and was surprised to find that at 71 such, no fewer than 6,321 had been interred. This statement having appeared in the Medical Journals, Dr. Cameron, M.P., called attention in the House to it. He then moved for a Parliamentary Return, showing the number of still-births interred. This return was issued in July, 1891, and for it we must thank Dr. Cameron and Mr. C. T. Ritchie, then President of the Local Government Board. The Return is incomplete, as it does not refer to Scotland or Ireland; nor does it take in the Parish and other Cemeteries—a number which might be put down at 8,000 at least. This Return shows that during 1890, no less than 17,335 children—supposed to be still-born—were interred at 1,133 Burial Board Cemeteries; and of this number 4,569 were interred without any Medical Certificate of the cause of still-birth. A painful feature in this Return is the large number interred in some of the large towns. It would have been an instructive point, if the age, sex, legitimacy, or illegitimacy, of these children could have been stated; but there is no way—owing to the present slovenly state of affairs—of finding this out. It is well-known that illegitimacy is the chief cause of still-birth. In the *British and Foreign Medical Review*, No. 7, it is stated that the proportion of still-births among legitimate births is 1 in 18 to 1 in 20—making the calculations from about 8,000,000 of births; while among the illegitimate and immature it is 1 in 8 to 1 in 10. Bertillon—Chief of Statistics of Paris—states that the chance of an *illegitimate* child being still-born, when compared with the legitimate, is as 193 to 100. In “Denmark, its Medical Organisation,” it is stated that of 100 legitimate births 2.6 per cent. are still-born; and of the illegitimate 4.1. Generally, in first labours, 1 in 11 are still-born; and in other labours 1 in 32. More male than female infants are still-born, in the proportion of 56 to 44.

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