

Sir William Priestley, who had not concluded his remarks when the House adjourned, spoke in favour of the Bill.

We are not sorry that the Bill in its present form has not passed its second reading, but the fact of its being talked out is one more proof of the scant attention given by Parliament to questions affecting the interests of women.

In relation to the Registration of Midwives two letters have recently appeared in the *Times* both meriting attention, and both from opposite points of view having a strong case. The first from the Lady Balfour of Burleigh, the President of the Association for Promoting the Compulsory Registration of Midwives, urges upon the public the necessity of Midwifery Legislation as follows:—

“Three mistakes seems sometimes to be made regarding our Association. First, we are supposed to be antagonistic to the doctor (especially to the doctor in remote or country districts). No greater fallacy exists, far from ignoring the medical man, we wish to organize a state of matters in which the midwife will be more instead of less in touch with him. Secondly, it is sometimes said that we are the enemies of the “friendly neighbour.” On the contrary, we welcome her where no trained help is forthcoming, but we cannot admit that she has the right to practice habitually, and for gain, a calling of which there is no proof that she has learnt even the fundamental principles. Thirdly, some seem to think that our Association is working in the interests of midwives, and that we want to create a body of partially trained women whom we propose should occupy positions, and claim powers hitherto not possessed by them. This is far from being the case; what we do wish is to place within the reach of the poorer classes of midwives the opportunities of acquiring knowledge, and still more of having that knowledge, or the want of it, tested. We wish to put an end to the state of matters which allows (as at present) the word “midwife” to appear on the door-plate of any woman, who chooses to place it after her name, albeit she may not possess the veriest element of the trade she professes to practise. We seek to change our system, by which (alone of European nations) we leave the midwife uncontrolled, and to place her under some authority, the existence of which will tend to lessen the number of those sad cases—now unfortunately too frequent—in

which an ignorant woman mismanages, or fails to detect symptoms of danger in her patient, and then only calls in a doctor when human skill is of no further avail. We seek also to create in this authority a means by which those criminal practices, to which allusion is frequently made by those who disapprove of the work of our Association, may be more readily detected, and more easily punished, than is at present the case.”

This is the case for the Association for the Compulsory Registration of Midwives, and no one will say that it not a strong one. Against the Bill, Mr. George Brown, Direct Representative for England and Wales on the General Medical Council, writes also to the *Times*. “Although the Bill for the Compulsory Registration of Midwives is supported by some members of the Medical Profession, I have no hesitation in saying that the vast majority of the profession throughout the country are opposed to the measure. Having taken an active part in organizing opposition to the Bill, I shall feel obliged if you will permit me to state, through your columns, as I did before the Select Committee of the House of Commons, which was appointed to take evidence and report on the question, that our opposition is not inspired by selfish motives, but from a conviction that the Bill, if it becomes law, will perpetuate the evils Lady Balfour, and the Association she presides over, wish to remedy. The remedy I would suggest is, to make it illegal for persons to practise midwifery for gain unless they have received a complete medical education. Skilled aid in the lying-in room is as necessary to the well-being and safety of the wives of the working classes as it is in the case of the more opulent, and if we recognize our duty to humanity, we shall do all we can to place such aid within the reach of all classes.” This is the one aspect of the medical practitioner’s case against the Bill.

Lady Balfour, however, does not, to our mind, touch upon the crucial point, namely, what constitutes an efficient midwifery training? Mr. George Brown disposes of it by only allowing qualified practitioners to practise midwifery for gain, but there is no doubt that the midwife will always be in demand, and therefore it is necessary to define a standard of education for her. We have always held a special three months “training” to be a most inefficient standard, and for this reason we

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)