

## The Ending of Midwives.

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I HAVE been asked by the Editor to discuss in the columns of the *NURSING RECORD* the "Bill to Promote the Better Training of Midwives and to regulate their Practice," which has lately been published. I do so the more readily because I know that my own views concerning this subject, grounded on considerable practical experience, gained as Superintendent of a Maternity Home, co-incide on all material points with the Editor's own.

It is not too much to say that I read the proposed Bill with profound dismay. A former Bill for the REGISTRATION of midwives has been before the public for some time, and although, personally, I never felt able to support it—inasmuch as experience in general nursing was not made an essential feature, and I have never been able to believe in the wisdom of legislation for specialists—yet the movement was one with which I had much sympathy, as I thought it a bonafide endeavour to obtain legal status for midwives, and to secure to them personal rights and liberties, even if I believed the lines upon which the promoters of the Bill were working to be mistaken ones. But now the whole case has been given away, the Bill is no longer one to "promote the Compulsory Registration of Midwives," but to "Promote the Better Training of Midwives and to Regulate their Practice," and the legislation proposed is of the most restrictive and penal nature, so that it is impossible to believe that any women but those of the most elementary education, and special knowledge, will place themselves in the most humiliating position in which they will find themselves as licensed midwives under the new Act, should it ever become law.

So far, midwifery, as well as general nursing, is entirely uncontrolled by law, no minimum standard of efficiency is laid down, and anyone absolutely devoid of knowledge may place a brass plate on her door announcing herself as a midwife, and practice in this capacity. She does this, as does also the highly skilled midwife, entirely at her own risk, and should any death occur, or charges of inefficiency, or mal-praxis be made against her, rightly or wrongly, she is liable to be prosecuted as a common criminal because she has absolutely no legal status, but beyond this she is free to work where she pleases, and she is in no way under the control, or at the mercy, of the medical men in the district in which she is working, and with whom she is necessarily competing, so that she still had a certain amount of

personal liberty. At the same time there is no doubt that she needs to be regulated and controlled. It is with the suggestions for the manner in which the necessary control shall be enforced that I am entirely at variance.

It will be remembered that last year an influential deputation of representative women, and of medical men, waited on the Duke of Devonshire Lord-President of the Privy Council, to bring before him their views as to the necessity of legislation for midwives. The arguments in support of these views received scant consideration, and they were told very clearly that they must "come to a definite understanding with the medical profession as represented by the General Medical Council." Thus were the interests, the professional status, and the personal liberty of midwives ruthlessly handed over to the medical men with whom, in the exercise of their vocation, they come into direct competition economically and who therefore cannot be held to be an unbiassed authority. It is true that the Midwife's Board (not individual midwives) are allowed an appeal to the Privy Council should any disagreement arise between them and the General Medical Council respecting the carrying out of the provisions of the Act, but trained nurses have not yet forgotten—they are not likely to forget—that it was the present Privy Council, under the Presidency of His Grace of Devonshire, who last year repealed the generous Bye-Laws of the Royal British Nurses' Association, in which, in 1893, a Liberal Government granted to trained nurses the necessary powers of self government, and sanctioned in their place, Bye-Laws as unfair as they were restrictive, and, at the same time refused those who objected to these Bye Laws their right to state their objections by Counsel.

Such high handed autocracy must carry home to working men and women the conviction that their interests are unsafe in the hands of hereditary legislators, who are not in a position to understand them, and they will no doubt see to it that the legislation of the future is confided to representatives elected by themselves, and in whose care for their interests they have confidence. Meanwhile an appeal from the General Medical Council to the Privy Council can scarcely be considered a satisfactory arrangement for midwives.

I propose in this article to discuss, point by point, the new Midwives Bill. In the first place I desire to point out that the Delegates of the Midwives' Bill Committee have entirely failed to protect the interests of midwives on any one point. I cannot believe that this has been done willingly, but at least it has shown the inability of the Committee to do anything but submit to the decrees of the General

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