

### The Midwives' Question.

THE Medical Profession has the power to elect three direct representatives on to the General Medical Council, which governs that profession, a small number but better than nothing.

A conference of medical men interested in medical politics was lately held at Newcastle, when the direct representatives gave an account of their stewardship.

In the discussion which supervened on the addresses, the midwives' question was, of course, to the fore, and, according to the *British Medical Journal*, Dr. Clark Newton moved the following resolution:—"That this meeting strongly urges the local organisations of the profession and the representatives on the General Medical Council to oppose strenuously the certification, by registered practitioners, of unqualified persons as competent to undertake *any* department of medical practice. That this meeting further regards such certification as contrary to the principles of the Medical Acts, and any measure to legalise the same as a repeal of those Acts."

He said that the word *any* was in italics to indicate that the Midwives' Bill and the licensing of opticians was included. He considered that the Midwives' Bill was one of the most retrograde medical movements that had taken place during the last forty years. The Duke of Devonshire had received a deputation favourable to the registration of midwives, and he was told that the idea had received the sanction of the General Medical Council and the College of Physicians. The Bill would create an inferior order of practitioners. It must be opposed strenuously, because it was incompatible with the dignity of the profession. The creation of the so-called educated midwife was one of the silliest mistakes that could possibly be made. The Bill provided no penalty for a midwife practising without being registered. Women were more easily tempted by money and other things than men, and when once a woman had departed from the correct path she sank through depths unknown to men.

Mr. Victor Horsley said it was untrue to say that Mr. Balfour's Bill created a new order of practitioners; it only put people who were already practising midwifery on a list, so that if they did what they ought not to do they should be punished. As to their recognition by the State, it was only recognition for the sake of penal disability. The House of Commons when it had constructed an Act to restrict a certain interest

to a certain class, had never interfered with persons carrying on their work. They must all start together; the improper people would die out, and a proper class would gradually be constituted. The British Medical Association had dealt with the matter of the midwife, and had introduced the first Midwives' Bill.

Dr. Cox said they objected to any Bill, and they objected to every Bill. He pointed out that in the *British Medical Journal* of June 15th of this year Mr. Horsley said that he would prefer no legislation. Mr. Horsley had adopted a policy of despair rather than have a bad Bill passed, and had advocated what he considered to be the best out of some bad Bills. He (Dr. Cox) contended that the Bill created a new order of practitioners.

Mr. George Brown said that the public called for a Bill supposed to increase the safety of parturient women. His experience was that fatalities were due to bad nursing. A better class of nurses was wanted. It was said that the Bill would not create a new order of medical practitioners, but the trained midwifery nurses he had seen were a very good guide in the matter, for these nurses called themselves as good as doctors, and this Bill would only consolidate them in their position. They had certificates now, and directly they were put on a *Register* they would be made into practitioners. They must go to members of Parliament and explain the evil of the Bill, and how it would be a public injury to vote for this Bill.

The resolution was carried with one dissentient.

We consider that the position taken up by those of the medical profession who are opposed to the creation of an "inferior order of practitioners" is quite unassailable. There is no room in this country, in relation to the care of the sick, for persons other than the qualified practitioner and the certificated nurse. It is urged, in support of the registration of midwives, that in other countries they are recognized by the State. But, in England, nursing progress and organization is in advance of that in other European countries, and the semi-educated specialist is not needed, as the medical practitioner and the trained nurse cover the whole ground.

In regard to Mr. Victor Horsley's statement that the recognition of midwives by the State is "only recognition for the sake of penal disability," this is precisely what we have always contended. The legislation proposed is not for the benefit and advantage of well-qualified midwives, but merely a "penal" act.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)