

The Midwives' Bill.

THE Midwives' Bill is down for consideration on the Report stage on June 27th. The resolution providing for the expenses incurred by the General Medical Council was, however, down for April 26th. It was not reached until after midnight, and was promptly blocked by the words "I object," and the same thing happened on the following Monday, and will, so the *British Medical Journal* believes, whenever the question is brought forward, until the decision of the Government is known as to the progress of the measure. Meanwhile, there has grown up, in the course of the consideration of the amended Bill by departments of the Government, an unfavourable feeling to the form of the proposed legislation. It is the duty of departments such as the Home Office, to see, before a Bill passes, that it can be made to work easily and effectively, and in the present case the difficulties of administration are patent. The feeling is growing that, in its present form, the Bill will prove satisfactory neither to the central nor to the local authorities, and it is probable that considerable modifications may be adopted before any legislation is carried.

The *Medical Times* makes some excellent observations on the present position of the Bill. It says:—

"In consequence of the financial arrangements which are necessitated by the working expenses of the proposed Midwives' Act, an unexpected delay has occurred in the progress of the measure and the report stage of the present Bill has been deferred until June 27th. By this delay the medical profession may be enabled to take immediate action for the defeat of the measure as it stands. Whether such action be taken or not, there is now a reasonable probability that the Bill will not be able to pass through its remaining stages in the House of Commons in time to be passed by the Lords this session. On the other hand, however, the promoters of the measure have this year experienced such good fortune that too much hope cannot be based on the possible delay and final defeat of the measure. The profession is awakening to a keener appreciation of the grave defects in the present draft of the Bill, and even its warmest supporters admit that its provisions are capable of considerable improvement. We have never hesitated to oppose legislation for midwives in any form as a *separate class*, and have no admiration for the weak-kneed individuals who were formerly strong opponents, but have been so alarmed by the manufactured public interest in the measure as to admit that legislation for these women may be advisable, and even, in the

case of some, to go so far as to suggest legislation themselves, thus giving up the whole principle upon which opposition should be based. Just at present there is a little conflict upon the small question of whether these women should be termed midwives, or midwifery nurses—an argument which is childish and fatuous because it misses the whole point of the question involved. As our readers are aware, years before the opinion was held by any considerable section of the profession, we argued in these columns that nursing legislation was necessary, as a protection to the medical profession as well as to the public against the ignorant and incompetent women who now without let or hindrance undertake the most responsible duties of the calling. But, as we have shown times without number, it would merely accentuate the existent dangers to make these inefficient workers independent of all professional control by affording them the prestige of State sanction and qualification. We have always suggested that, if legislation took place at all, it should be based on the broadest lines and with due safeguards for every interest concerned. Specifically we have suggested that all classes of nurses should be registered upon one general and comprehensive scheme, placing thereby all medical, surgical, and obstetric nurses on one common register, each one to work, however, under the control and superintendence of medical practitioners. Moreover, we have shown that, at the present time, the best trained nurses are asking for this measure as a matter of justice to themselves, and of protection to their calling; and we have proved that, if adopted, it would solve the whole midwives' agitation at once, and would practically obliterate those women as independent practitioners."

On Monday last a question was again put in the House on the subject of the Midwives' Bill, and Mr. Balfour promptly replied that he "knew nothing of such things." How should he, indeed? Midwifery is not a matter which comes before the notice of the bachelor layman. The House roared with laughter, and Mr. Balfour blushed prettily, the only thing he could do. All the same, the episode points the moral that a feminine element in the House would be of value to the nation when legislation for women is under discussion. Another point to which we must draw attention is that these three months midwives are described in the daily press as nurses, a procedure which is likely to do the latter much harm. The women for whom legislation is now demanded, belong no more to the ranks of trained nurses than to the medical profession. This is a point which the public should distinctly realize.

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