

to place nurses on something of a pinnacle; and it is the bitterness of disappointment at their inability to maintain their ideals regarding the profession that has called forth the sweeping condemnations to which nurses have been subjected.

Is this not sufficient to incite those in authority in hospitals to rouse themselves to the fact that the demands of the public for well-mannered, true, helpful nurses is, in a measure, a step towards what those in the profession really wish themselves, namely, the recognition of their positions as honoured members of a profession that has gained the confidence and esteem of the public?

If the matter were considered fairly by both sides, something might quite easily be accomplished which would prevent these accusations having to be made in the future; and a good deal of soreness in the hearts of some hard-working, conscientious women would in consequence be avoided.

The Midwives Bill.

The second reading of the Midwives Bill was moved in the House of Lords on Friday last by the Duke of Northumberland, who said that there was a general consensus of opinion in favour of something being done to remove the evils of the present state of things. There were in this country some 10,000 to 15,000 women practising as midwives, and they were stated to attend annually some 450,000 cases to which no doctor was called. There was absolutely no guarantee that these women were qualified to perform the duties which they undertook. The reports of coroners' courts furnished very instructive evidence as to the necessity for a Bill of this kind, and no less than 200 out of the 250 coroners had expressed approval of such a measure. There was no doubt that the question was full of difficulties in matters of detail. This he frankly admitted while asking the House to assent to the principle of the Bill, which was to require the certification of a proper degree of knowledge and of good character on the part of midwives. The position of those at present working who were really fit for their duties, and whose characters were above reproach, was specially safeguarded in the Bill.

It was pointed out by Lord Welby that the Bill gave considerable powers to an independent Board. This Board would meet the expenses incurred out of the fees paid by candidates for certificates, but the balance of expenditure was to be charged on the rates. He hoped the point would have the attention of the noble duke before the Committee stage. It was not usual to allow one body to spend money and then hand the bill to another body without any check or control.

The Lord Chancellor said that, while he did not take the responsibility of moving the rejection of the

Bill because certain cases contemplated by it might require regulation, yet there were much more serious objections to it than the noble lords seemed to think. Those who had drawn up the Bill appeared to have in mind large centres of population possessed of ample means for the purpose of obtaining medical assistance, and had not considered that in certain cases it might not be possible to get trained nurses. If the Bill in its present form passed into law, he was informed it would inflict an inconceivable amount of suffering on the very poor. He read passages from the letter of a lady who had herself obtained a certificate and assisted in the nursing of the poor, and who protested against the Bill in its present form. He was assured by magistrates in Lancashire, Worcestershire, Warwickshire, Sussex and Surrey that in small villages the persons who performed what was necessary without skilled assistance also performed the functions of maid-of-all-work in the house during the few days in which the woman was unable to work for herself. He was told that if the Bill passed into law in its present form it would inflict an inconceivable amount of suffering on the very poor. He was also informed by a clergyman, in a very good position to judge, that there was very serious objection to the Bill on the part of the working population.

The Bishop of Winchester said the history of the subject showed how the pendulum had swung from one extreme to the other. Not many hundred years ago no medical man was allowed to be present at a birth; now some who opposed the Bill held that a midwife was an absolute anachronism. The promoters of the Bill held neither of these views. They recognised that, in all ordinary circumstances, a fully qualified medical man should be present; but, at the same time, they appreciated the natural—might they not say wholesome?—influence which led so large a proportion of the working-class mothers of the country, rightly or wrongly, to prefer the aid of those of their own sex who were fairly well qualified to aid them in their time of need. While all doctors were not unanimous as to the way in which present wrongs should be set right, they all agreed as to the existence of very grave evils which proceeded from the lack of training on the part of women who undertook midwifery.

Earl Russell was of opinion that a great deal depended on the way in which the details of the Bill were made to work, and the manner in which the Midwives' Board carried out its duties. He was glad to see that at least two members of this Board must be women, for he regarded it of great importance that women should be adequately represented on a Board of this kind.

Lord Thring took exception to various details of the Bill. Lord Balfour said it was seven years since he had moved the second reading of a similar Bill. Its purpose was to ensure that women who

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)