

answered in the negative. We find in the last list of its members that after eight years' existence it only has about one hundred and fifty members, while of these only about sixty are Certificated Midwives, and even amongst these few we observe the names of several who are Matrons or Nurses in General Hospitals, and of others who are not engaged in Midwifery work. Surely the inference is that the great majority of Certificated Midwives, who naturally are anxious to be protected against unfair competition, are not in accord with the views of the Midwives' Institute upon the salient point of compulsory Registration.

But, again, has the eight years' honest, and, we believe, hard work brought the Midwives' Institute strong support from Obstetricians of eminence? In other words, does its scheme of compulsory Registration commend itself to men to whom the public and the profession look for guidance on such matters? Once more, we fear that a negative reply is necessary. We would recall the speeches of Doctors Matthews Duncan and Priestley at the Mansion House meeting last July, when they publicly called upon the British Nurses' Association to undertake the Registration of Midwives. In no uncertain language Dr. Priestley especially laid stress upon the impossibility of preventing any woman, in her hour of greatest need, receiving assistance from any other woman unless she were a Certificated Midwife. We have recently, in these columns, at considerable length, proved how futile would be the attempt to carry out such an enactment.

But, once again, has the Midwives' Institute, in all these years, succeeded in touching the fringe of popular opinion upon this subject? Surely not. The Bill, drawn so carefully eight years ago, has never yet been considered in the House of Commons. And we believe that, unless something more is done to stir the public mind upon the matter than has in all these years been achieved, no Bill will become law within another eight years. We have no hesitation in saying that the chances are ten thousand to one that a Bill for the Compulsory Registration of Midwives, if introduced next session, will not reach its second reading. We have proved again and again, in these columns, that Parliament has, for the last forty years, steadfastly refused to make quackery a penal offence. It has said in effect—not once, but many times—"We will not interfere with the liberty of the subject. We will put a hall-mark on silver, but people may make and buy electro-plate; we will prevent butterine being vended as butter, but anyone who wishes for the adulterated article shall be able to procure it under a distinct name; we will give the public a Register of Medical men, but if people choose to be treated

in illness by quacks, they shall be free to do so." Now we ask gravely, what shadow of evidence can the Midwives' Institute obtain that the House of Commons will suddenly go back upon all its previous decisions—in fact, alter, reverse, and absolutely depart from precedent upon precedent, which are as the very breath of Parliamentary life?

Some months ago, after some similar considerations which we urged in these columns, we received a strange epistle from an illiterate individual, who, struggling for sarcastic—though very ill-spelt—words, did us the honour to compliment us on our knowledge of the opinion which might be expressed by members of the Legislature. We are not afraid of any such retort uncourteous now, but we desire to ask those whom we are chiefly addressing to obtain copies of the Acts to which we have referred; or, better still, to spend an hour in the library of the British Museum in reading the debates in Hansard which took place upon the Medical Acts of 1858, 1860, 1873, 1876 and 1886, and the Sale of Food and Drugs Act of 1875 and 1879. If they are not convinced by these, nor by the weighty speech of Dr. Priestley, to which we have above referred, nothing will effectually do so, except, perhaps, the bitter disappointment of finding their Bill emasculated or, more probably, quietly shelved by Parliament.

We urge all these arguments afresh because we are in most complete sympathy with Mrs. Nichol and her co-workers. We are every whit as well aware as they are of the crying evils which are now existent, but we are desirous that a remedy should be found and applied without further delay. We look at the matter, however, with impartial eyes, because so long as a real remedy is found we do not care one jot whence it comes nor what it is. We say that the lost lives and healths and the sufferings of thousands of women demand Midwifery reform as soon and as absolute as possible. We appeal to all who are working for this end to join hands, and gain the strength of unity for their work—not to fritter away valuable power and effort striving in diverse directions.

The Midwives' Institute, after eight years, has not been successful alone. We most earnestly and sincerely wish that it had been. The British Nurses' Association has in eighteen months achieved an amount of success which even its bitterest enemy tacitly admits, and which to most people is a presage of still greater advances. We were informed some months ago that a large number of Midwives from all parts of the country had become Members, and were supporting the demand made for their separate Registration.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)