

threaten with imprisonment any uncertificated woman who dares to help a fellow-creature in childbirth. We have proved that if such a measure were enacted, unless penalties for non-compliance with the law were enforced, the law would fall into disuse, and in fact Registration would cease to be compulsory in any sense. We cannot see how the Midwives' Institute can expect to succeed if they cannot explain away this dilemma. On the other hand, the British Nurses' Association suggests a system which has been most valuable to the public in the case of the Medical and other professions. Because we must correct an impression held by one of our correspondents, who evidently thinks that every Doctor must be Registered—in other words, that compulsory Registration of Medical men is enforced by the law of the land. As a matter of fact, most of them are Registered, but in every individual case it is a voluntary act, for Doctors are not, as Sir Crichton Browne would say, "brought in by policemen to have their names inserted." Certain privileges, rights and emoluments depend upon Registration. For example, freedom from serving upon juries, payment as skilled witnesses in a court of law, and power to recover fees by legal process are all granted only to those who are duly Registered. Were it not for these and other similar advantages, probably few, if any, Medical men would go to the expense and trouble of Registering the degrees or diplomas they have already gained, and upon which, be it remembered, they are fully entitled to practise their profession. But so entirely optional is it that, although Registration is ordained by no less than seven separate Acts of Parliament, many Medical men now at work have never enrolled their names, and no power on earth save their own free will and inclination can compel them to do so.

Perhaps others beside our correspondent did not know this; perhaps even the Secretary of the Midwives' Institute was not aware of this important fact. So we put these questions. If Parliament has never attempted to make Medical Registration compulsory, is it probable that it will take this extreme step in the case of a smaller and less important body of workers? If optional Registration has worked so well in the case of Doctors, why should it not yield satisfactory results when Midwives are concerned?

But we have been asked a very pertinent and important question, which really touches the keynote of the whole controversy, and to which, therefore, we would devote very careful consideration. "If Registration is not made a compulsory matter, how are poor and ignorant women to be protected from untrained Midwives?" We immediately and frankly admit the force of

the argument, but we commence by saying that two wrongs do not make one right, putting to one side altogether the improbability of a compulsory system ever being adopted in this country, for we distinctly hold that it would be most wrong to make it a criminal offence for one woman—however unskilled or ignorant she might be—to give such assistance as lay in her power to another in child-birth, when, perhaps, no other help of any description was available.

But, leaving this point, we would argue thus. The object of Midwifery reform, it appears to us, is to prevent, as far as possible, the dangers to which lying-in women are exposed at the hands of ignorant and unskilled Midwives, not to put it out of the power of kindly, though untrained, women to aid helpless neighbours in their hour of need. If this proposition be granted—and we presume it will be universally agreed to—then we contend that it can best be secured by a measure, the two-fold effects of which will converge and conduce to this one end. And this measure would be optional Registration of well-trained and Certificated Midwives, which, on the one hand, we maintain would gradually elevate the standard of skill and efficiency amongst the whole body of workers in this department, and, on the other hand, would steadily and surely force unskilled attendants out of the field.

As regards the first point, the experience of a similar provision in other professions is conclusive proof that the effect of competition is inevitably to raise, rather than to lower, the average of excellence. And it goes without saying that the lower the level from which the commencement is made, the greater possibility is there of substantial elevation being gained. No one will deny that at present the average standard of knowledge amongst English Midwives is appallingly abysmal. Consequently, the prospect that a general improvement would mean a remarkable advance is correspondingly hopeful. And no reasonable doubt can be entertained that the first result of raising the status of Midwives will be to attract a better class of women to undertake the work, while the desire to attain to the standard necessary for Registration must necessarily tend to enhance the quality and extent of their knowledge and skill.

As regards the second effect of Registration above mentioned, it may be argued thus. The British public, however poor, much prefers anything—or anybody—with a title. And as the knowledge spreads, as it undoubtedly soon would do, that Registered Midwives were professionally certificated as skilful, and that those who did not possess that title were presumably of inferior experience and ability, it would become more

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