

## The Midwife Question.

### THE NATIONAL TRAINING-SCHOOL FOR MIDWIVES.

We are not surprised that the authorities of lying-in hospitals are not in sympathy with the suggestion to build a hospital which aims at the position of a National Training-School for Midwives. As Mr. H. A. Harben, Vice-Chairman of Queen Charlotte's Hospital, points out in a letter to the *Times*:—"There is no doubt that a midwife would perform her duties more efficiently if she possessed a knowledge of general nursing, but this knowledge can only be properly acquired in one of the larger general hospitals"; and with regard to the suggestion that educated gentlewomen should be encouraged to undertake the profession of a midwife, he says further: "Any woman of education and refinement who is willing to undertake the arduous duties of a private midwife's practice can readily acquire the requisite experience."

The well-intentioned ladies who are desirous of obtaining public support for their scheme to build a hospital with the object of providing an education which will turn out a hybrid who, whatever she may be, will certainly not be a trained nurse, would be well advised if, before proceeding further, they referred the matter to such a body as the Matrons' Council for advice on the professional and educational aspects of the question. A midwife, it must be remembered, is not of necessity a nurse at all, though there is a general consensus of opinion that she is a much more efficient person when she is. But, in this event, her training must be thorough, and any attempt to give her a smattering of nursing knowledge in a small hospital built for this purpose is to be deplored.

The Midwives' Board will shortly define what is required of women who act as midwives, and before long we hope a central authority will define what is required of the trained nurse. It is safe to assert that the standard of nursing education proposed by the promoters of the National Training-School for Midwives will not satisfy any Nursing Council which is called into existence, and from this point of view the scheme is doomed to failure.

As there are at present ample facilities for training both nurses and midwives, we should advise those ladies interested in providing midwives for the poor to turn their attention (1) to the best means of utilising these facilities, and (2) to securing proper conditions of work and adequate pay to district midwives.

Miss Alice Gregory asserts that the profession of midwifery has fallen into contempt, "especially amongst trained nurses." What does a trained nurse find when she considers the adoption of district midwifery as a means of livelihood? First, she

must pay the somewhat heavy fee for her training in midwifery. That many nurses do this proves to our mind sufficiently that they do not regard the knowledge they thus acquire contemptuously.

But the market price of a nurse's work is from £2 2s. to £3 3s. a week, besides board, lodging, and washing for the greater part of the year. As a district midwife she may think herself fortunate if she earns £70, on which she must keep herself entirely. For this she must condemn herself to a lonely life, and must be willing to work at all hours of the twenty-four, and to turn out in all weathers. Let the ladies who complain of the dearth of district midwives advertise posts of this kind, offering salaries of £150 per annum, and then report if the alleged dearth exists. Better still, let them arrange that midwifery shall be undertaken, when possible, from certain centres, so that organisation of the work is possible. Let them by all means endeavour to persuade the authorities of special hospitals to limit their training to certificated nurses of the educated classes. They will then, we are convinced, obtain through existing agencies as many educated midwives as there is employment for. The question is essentially one of organisation.

## Legal Matters.

### MARRIED BY DECLARATION.

A case illustrating the peculiarities of the Scottish marriage law came before Lord Stormonth-Darling in the Court of Session, Edinburgh, on Saturday. This was the action by Helen Steel Dykes, of Melrose Cottage, Coatbridge, against Joseph Muir Corbett, M.B., now or lately residing at Verona, Lethington Avenue, Langside, near Glasgow, for declarator of marriage.

Miss Dykes is thirty-nine years of age, and in 1895 was a nurse in the Western Infirmary, Glasgow. In the spring of 1896 she and Mr. Corbett became engaged to be married.

On May 21, 1896, she received a letter from Mr. Corbett from the house of his father, in which he enclosed a declaration of marriage. In the letter he said:—

"I wish you to have an absolute hold of me, and for that purpose I enclose a document which the darling is not to read just now. I consulted the necessary authorities on the subject and made sure the document will hold good."

Along with that letter she received a declaration dated May 22nd, 1896. She read and understood the meaning and effect of it. It was in the defendant's handwriting and bore his signature. She added her signature to the document. She saw the defendant at the infirmary the following morning and showed him the document bearing the two

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