

the fate of the trio of doctors on the platform if they had suggested to a body of men that they should vote against their own interests, and hand themselves over, bound body and soul to be managed by a caucus of employers? Imagine anything so ridiculous; but should such an impudent suggestion have been made to men—they would, of course, have stormed the platform with might and main, and made a clean sweep of everything on it.

It is a pity that physical force is an argument women may not use. It is the only one a certain class of persons understands.

ONE OF THE RANK AND FILE.

A FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLE OF GOOD GOVERNMENT.

To the Editor of the "British Journal of Nursing."

DEAR MADAM,—May I ask for space to make a few comments on the article in your columns headed "Midwifery Matters."

The points you raise with regard to the editorship of various papers published for nurses seem to me a less important question than you consider it to be, recalling as I do the fact that, with the exception of *Nursing Notes*, no paper, lay, medical, or nursing, gave any help or encouragement to the passing of the Midwives Act—an Act which is not only acknowledged to be a piece of useful legislation but also likely to develop into greater powers of usefulness as public opinion advances.

It would undoubtedly have been an easier matter to make legislation approach more nearly to what was desired than what was simply obtainable if the Press had accorded its support to the promoters of the Bill; this being the case, it now seems a little unnecessary to comment on what you say you think has always been the weakness of the composition of the Central Midwives' Board, for this composition was settled at a date when the question was not, "What legislation is desirable," but "Is any legislation possible?"

You suggest an appeal to the "Electorate of Midwives on the Roll," now numbering 23,830, of whom a large proportion are untrained and, in many cases, illiterate; and you quite truly add that "the direct representative must be one of them (the midwives) and elected by them." If your suggestion is one made with a view to practical politics may I point out that if it were possible (by an alteration of the Act) that such an appeal could be made and, further, that if the majority of women practising as midwives responded, the logical result would be the return of an untrained, unlettered woman, who would, if she really represented the wishes of her supporters, vote in all probability for the repeal of the Act? Even most enthusiastic supporters of direct representation could scarcely regard such a result as progressive.

It is true that the Midwives' Institute represents a small number in comparison with the thousands on the Roll. I may, however, point out two facts; one, that its membership has always only been open to properly trained midwives, who are still in a minority on the Roll; and second, that if the list of Vice-Presidents and Council is studied it will be

noticed that past and present Matrons of lying-in hospitals and other training-schools are fully represented, thereby forming a body of midwife experts which surely has a right to call itself representative.

The Midwives' Institute has for over twenty-five years worked for legislation, and its Council invariably refused to support any Bill which did not accept the principle of representation on the Central Board through the Institute's nomination. This principle was so strongly opposed in the case of one of the Bills that after it had been with some difficulty retained a medical member hastened to telegraph his resignation on the Bill Committee on the ground that he strongly disapproved of any such representation. I quote this fact, as history is quickly forgotten, and critics are soon ready to say, "Why was such an imperfect arrangement accepted?" little dreaming how often a compromise is the only possible means of obtaining a modicum of justice. Whatever my individual opinions may have been as to this question I may state that experience has led me to think that certainly in early days an interested medical practitioner can very helpfully aid the cause of midwives; the working of a difficult Act at first requires for its success more knowledge of affairs and wider views, than a minute knowledge of detail. Your opinion that medical men would feel injured at their proposed representation by a midwife on the General Medical Council is, to quote your own words, a grotesque idea, for the larger knowledge of a medical practitioner includes the less, namely, that of a midwife; I therefore think such a comparison inapplicable. The British Nurses' Association and the Queen Victoria's Jubilee Institute have both freedom to nominate midwives on the Board, and in the latter case have done so.

In dealing with the whole question before us we shall be wise to hasten slowly. We are only feeling our way, and unduly hurried changes of any kind are much to be deprecated. We have not yet at command the full facts of actual conditions as they now exist, and, while we deprecate unworkable propositions, there is ample need for helpful criticisms on practical points.

I am, yours faithfully,

J. WILSON,

President Midwives' Institute;
Member of the Central Midwives' Board.

[In regard to Miss Wilson's remark as to the Press and the Midwives' Act we must state that this journal took a considerable part in regard to the Bill, that of opposition.

We desire now that the Act has become law that the best use possible should be made of it, but we were and still are of opinion that the midwifery in this country should be either in the hands of registered medical practitioners or of trained nurses who have added a midwifery qualification to their general knowledge. Eventually we believe the midwifery question will be solved in this way. There is no reason why the whole of the midwifery amongst the poor should not be organised through Queen Victoria's Jubilee Institute.

The Bill as drafted did not commend itself to us. The compromise described by Miss Wilson was a

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)