

The Midwife.

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The Midwives' Act.

Now that the Midwives' Act has been on the Statute Book for five years, midwives are beginning to consider their position in relation to it, what it has done for them, and what its defects are. In the first place, it has set a limit to the practice of ignorant midwives. No one can henceforth use the title of midwife without undergoing systematic training, and passing the examination laid down by the Board. This will at once prevent the ignorant class of women who formerly took up midwifery from doing so in future.

Then the restriction of the title of midwife to those whose names are entered on the Roll of the Central Midwives' Board is an unquestionable gain, and, as time goes on, and those midwives who gained admission to the Roll by virtue of being in practice at the time that the Act was passed drop out, it will have a definite value. Already this restriction of the title is having one effect, which nurses will do well to note, namely, that women who no longer dare profess themselves midwives, either because their ignorance or malpraxis would bring them into collision with the Central Midwives' Board, hold themselves out as "only nurses," and for the present can work under this title with impunity. It remains for nurses to decide how long they will allow their profession to be used as the refuge of the incompetent, and when they will insist that a definite standard of knowledge, tested by examination, shall be required under State authority, of all those who assume the title of trained or registered nurse.

But although midwives have gained something by the passage of an Act which requires the attainment of a certain standard of knowledge, and has created a Body to maintain discipline in their ranks, and to protect the title of midwife, yet the Act was unquestionably framed primarily, not in their interests, but as an Act of Public Safety. The rate of infantile mortality and of maternal deaths from puerperal fever, an entirely preventable disease, were not creditable to a civilised country. The great disseminators of infection were ignorant and dirty midwives, and the need for supervising and controlling their practice

imperative. It was to effect this that legislation was undertaken, and from this aspect it was both useful and necessary.

But, from the point of view of the midwife, the Act has certainly defects, the most important being that while compelled by law to conform to it, and to obey the rules of the Central Midwives' Board, the midwives of England and Wales have no voice in the election of even one member of the Board, and, as a matter of fact, at the present time it has only one midwife member, the representative of Queen Victoria's Jubilee Institute.

The representation of any class governed upon its governing body is a cardinal principle of good government, and midwives have an undoubted right to ask that such representation shall be granted to them. But in order to make this demand effective, they need organisation. The views and aspirations of individuals may be just and admirable. They will never influence legislation until adopted by bodies of individuals, and voiced as their collective opinion. The first thing that midwives have to do, therefore, is to organise, to get into touch with one another, so that they can ascertain each other's views, and act in concert upon matters affecting their common interests. In this way, and this way only, have bodies of workers, whether professional or industrial, brought effective influence to bear on legislation, and it is only by having organisations at their back that when a Midwives' Amendment Act is introduced into the House of Commons, as seems probable in the near future, midwives will be able to make their collective voice heard.

Scholarships for Students of Midwifery.

In July, 1907, the London County Council will proceed to award not more than six scholarships to students in midwifery. Candidates must be ordinarily resident within the County of London, and must be between 24 and 40 years of age on 31st July, 1907. The value of each scholarship will be £25, and the course of training will extend over a period of six months. Forms of application may be obtained from the Executive Officer, Education Offices, Victoria Embankment, W.C., and must be returned to the same address not later

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