

than Saturday, 20th April, 1907. Further information may also be obtained on application to this address.

The Battle of the Midwife.

Miss F. Elizabeth Crowell, writing in *Charities and the Commons* on "The Midwives of New York," gives an interesting résumé of the old world custom of employing midwives, and shows how this employment slipped from the hands of women as opportunities for education were opened to men which were closed to them. Of the employment of midwives she writes:

History and tradition are at one as to its antiquity. In fact, the history of midwifery is the history of the human race. From the earliest ages mothers of all races, Jewish, Egyptian, Greek, Roman, down to the modern European, have called upon the midwife for assistance in childbirth. During thousands of years the care of parturient women was practically entirely in the hands of these midwives. If an unusual or dangerous complication arose, a physician was called upon to assist in the delivery, but the process of labour was considered a natural, normal occurrence, requiring ordinarily no interference or aid outside of that to be obtained from women experienced in this form of service.

At the end of the fifteenth century the impetus which the invention of printing had given to all branches of human knowledge was felt in the science of medicine; its branches began to pulse with new life and vigour, and midwifery, which had heretofore been regarded as an art, now began to develop as a science. Here was the physician's opportunity. His development kept pace with the increasing intelligence of the community, while the midwife, when she did not actually retrograde, at least stood still. Universities that were open to physicians were closed to her, opportunities for advancement, for improvement, were denied her; the profession of midwife ceased to be regarded as a profession. The result was inevitable—a gradual lowering of the standards that had hitherto prevailed among women who devoted themselves to this calling. During the seventeenth century we find the man-midwife, as he was then contemptuously styled, claiming and obtaining his share of obstetrical work. In France fashion set the stamp of her approval upon him, and a few decades later the general introduction of the use of forceps in obstetrical practice entrenched him upon an impregnable point of vantage. But a custom which had been sanctioned by the usage of thousands of years, and which was in complete accord with the deepest, most sensitive prejudices of womankind, was not to be lightly set aside. The battle was on. For three hundred years it has waged. Through it all the women of the masses, in their hour of travail, have demanded aid from their sister women, and received it; and this demand, rooted in popular prejudice, nourished by the economic conditions under which these masses struggle for a bare existence, has kept alive the calling of midwife until to-day.

The Central Midwives' Board.

A Meeting of the Central Midwives' Board was held on Thursday, March 21st, at Caxton House, Westminster. Dr. Champneys presided.

The election of Dr. Stanley B. Atkinson, Barrister-at-Law, as the representative of the Midwives' Institute, for the ensuing year, from March 31st, was notified by the Secretary. Dr. Dakin's resignation of his seat, thus entailed, was received with regret.

REPORT OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE.

The application of Dr. George Martin Fox, D.P.H., as a teacher was approved, and the following midwives were approved for the purpose of signing Forms III. and IV.: Angela Rosamund Griffiths, No. 22,671, and Rose Maria Charlotte Ross, No. 23,895.

TRAINING IN POOR LAW INFIRMARIES.

Mr. Parker Young asked the Chairman a question of which he had given notice as to the present position of the Board in reference to training in Poor Law Institutions. The Chairman then made a statement on the course of negotiations between the Privy Council and the Board on the subject. It appears that the Local Government Board desire that the Central Midwives' Board shall consent to approve every Poor Law institution, the arrangements of which are certified by the L.G.B. to be satisfactory. The L.G.B. also object to the Note binding them to carry out the rules of the C.M.B. in institutions under their authority, and the Lord President concurs with the L.G.B. on both the above points.

The Board have resolved that they are unable to delegate the duties imposed upon them by the Act "to secure the better training of midwives," and regret that they are unable to give the Lord President their assurance of approval of "every Poor Law Institution, the arrangements of which are certified by the Local Government Board to be satisfactory."

At the present time, therefore, the position is an *impasse*.

The right to examine and certificate all midwives belongs only to the Central Midwives' Board, but, under the Act, it is also authorised to regulate the course of training, and the view of the Board is, apparently, that in the case of Local Government Board candidates it will not have complete control of the details of their education and practical training, a part of its work which the Board regards as most important. Again, under a Privy Council amendment to the Rules framed by the Central Midwives' Board, now accepted by it, the chief medical officer of a Poor Law institution is permitted to sign the certificate of instruction without requiring the approval of the Board. Yet the efficiency of the instruction given to pupil midwives must depend to a great extent upon the capacity of the teachers, and it by no means follows that because a man is a competent doctor and a good administrator that he is able to impart what he knows to others. The gift of teaching is quite apart from these things, and by no means so common as is often supposed.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)