

## The Midwife.

### The Midwife of To-Day.

#### THE EARLY NOTIFICATION OF BIRTHS BILL.

We hope all midwives followed the discussion in the House of Commons on the Early Notification of Births Bill, as amended by the Standing Committee, prior to its being read for the third time in the House of Commons. A stronger evidence of the need for some powerful organisation through which their views can be expressed could hardly be afforded them.

The Bill as drawn affected both medical practitioners and midwives, inasmuch as the "person in attendance" at the time of birth, usually, of course, a doctor or a midwife, was required, failing notification by the father, to give notice, *under penalty*, of the birth, without remuneration.

The Annual Representative Meeting of the British Medical Association forthwith passed the following resolution: "That this Representative Meeting of the British Medical Association, while cordially welcoming any legislation which shall provide for an early and accurate notification of births, is of the opinion that no public work can justly be demanded under penalty from the medical profession, unless the principle that service so rendered by the profession to the State should be remunerated, is fully recognised and provided for."

Midwives took no concerted action with regard to the Bill, or their own position in relation to it.

When the Bill as amended came before the House for consideration, Mr. Bertram, member for Hitchin, moved to relieve from the obligation to notify, with special reference to midwives, "any person in attendance on the mother at the time of, or within six hours after the birth."

Mr. Bertram pointed out that it would be a great hardship to add to the duties of midwives, who were already poorly remunerated, the notification required by the Bill without fee or reward. The father was the only person who should make the notification.

The speaker hardly strengthened his case by pleading that midwives were often illiterate, and the inclusion of the provision would either cause the measure to become inoperative, or would have the effect of driving large numbers of women out of their present em-

ployment. Obviously a woman, who is too illiterate to fill in the required information on a post card, is not safe to be entrusted with the responsible duties of a midwife. We are glad that the President of the Local Government Board, Mr. John Burns, dissented from Mr. Bertram's estimate of the midwife. He said a picture had been painted by Mr. Bertram in which the midwife of to-day had been portrayed as illiterate as Mrs. Gamp of fifty or sixty years ago. He (Mr. Burns) knew the midwife class as well as Mr. Bertram. They were not illiterate to-day, and there was no case to support the amendment.

The amendment was rejected without a division.

The case for the medical profession was presented by Lord Robert Cecil, who moved an amendment to free the medical profession from obligations under the Bill. The case they made was that it would impose a new professional duty on them without pay. As the imposition of a fee would imperil the Bill he asked the House to accept the amendment.

Mr. Burns, on behalf of the Government, reluctantly accepted the amendment. Through their representatives in the House, the medical profession had, he said, asked to be dissociated from co-operation with other people in this measure. He believed the best doctors would deplore it, and that the doctors were greater than their trade union, and better in this case than the narrow view their profession imposed upon them. He trusted that when this Bill had been in operation a year they would be in a kindlier and better mood, worthier of the great profession to which they belonged, and that they would ask to come in under some amending Bill to co-operate with the midwife, the nurse, and the parents in bringing about a reduction of infantile mortality.

Dr. Cooper pointed out that the great objection of the medical profession was not to the shilling fee, but to the offensive penalty.

On a division, Lord Robert Cecil's amendment was rejected, but it is a significant fact that while the case for the midwives was rejected without a division, the medical profession was able to bring sufficient pressure to bear to induce the Government to accept the amendment put forward on its behalf, and to ensure an animated debate on the question.

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