

The Training and Supply of Midwives.

The fourth Annual Meeting of the Association for Promoting the Training and Supply of Midwives was held at the offices of the Association, Dacre House, Dean Farrar Street, Westminster, on Thursday, March 5th. The Treasurer, Mr. Arthur L. Leon, J.P., was in the chair.

After some formal business had been transacted, the adoption of the Annual Report was, in the absence of the Chairman of the Executive Committee, Mrs. Wallace Bruce, admirably moved by the Vice-Chairman, Miss Lucy Robinson, a certified midwife, who pointed out that we were within two years and three weeks of the 1st of April, 1910, after which, by the law of the land, no woman who is not a certified midwife will be able to attend women in childbirth habitually and for gain, except under the direction of a medical practitioner. There had, she said, been suggestions in the press and elsewhere that the time limit should be extended, but that would be a most dangerous and undesirable thing. It must be remembered that all women of good character who had been in *bonâ-fide* practice for a year at the time the Act was passed, were admitted to the Roll, and those who were still working as uncertified midwives were for the most part women who were guilty of bad practice, and the extension of the time limit would perpetuate the evil. It should be clearly understood that the 1910 time limit did not affect the *bonâ-fide* midwives, nor the neighbour who gave casual help in an emergency.

In regard to training the applications during the year have been 460. The report states that "The applications are most carefully sifted, for the importance of choosing women really suited for the serious responsibilities of the work is great, and it is often a matter of difficulty for women to take up a profession where the livelihood to be gained is so precarious.

"We are often asked to supply a midwife, with a nurse's training in addition, at a salary which beyond the bare cost of board and lodging would hardly amount to the wages of a kitchenmaid. These posts we cannot undertake to fill."

Miss Robinson said that the salaries offered in many instances meant that the midwives had to work for bare board and lodging. She really could not see why the hard working midwife should be expected to do charity work throughout the country, or to live at a standard in which it was impossible for her to set the example which she should do if her work was to produce the best result.

In connection with the extension of the time limit now placed by the Act upon the practice of midwifery by uncertified midwives, Miss Rosalind Paget enquired whether the Association had taken any strong line. The Chairman replied that the Executive were strongly of opinion that extension was undesirable; for that reason they were making a special appeal for at least £5,000 in order that they might train more midwives because, if a

strong effort were not made, there would be a great outcry in 1910, and public opinion, ignorant public opinion, no doubt, would have its say.

In reference to a statement that the Society was obliged to refuse eligible candidates owing to lack of funds to train them, Lady Rayleigh, Chairman of the Essex County Nursing Association, said that her Association supplied midwives to parishes, but it did not get enough applications at the Leytonstone Training Home. She asked if the Association would pass on candidates whose applications it could not entertain. In reply to an enquiry by the Chairman, she said that her Association was established to train midwives and nurses for the poor, but this did not work altogether satisfactorily, and finally it started a system of employing some of its staff as nurses among the lower middle classes. This branch of the work was a little more than self-supporting, and enabled the Committee to go on with the other branch.

It would appear from this that the Committee of the Essex County Nursing Association utilise the earnings of working women to help to support their "philanthropic" work amongst the poor. It is a form of cheap philanthropy which appears neither equitable nor dignified on the part of the well-to-do.

It was extraordinary how the virtues and efficiency of the untrained midwife were applauded by some of the ladies present, and how the Chairman's statement that he considered £70 to £90 per annum a fair salary for a midwife, was disapproved. Mrs. Ebdon said why the midwife should have a higher wage than the ordinary district nurse she could not understand. The Hon. Mrs. Egerton regarded this "high salary" as "prohibitive." It would frighten people off if the Association were supposed to approve of this rate of pay, and she must protest against it. Mrs. S. Bruce quoted the case of a midwife in Gloucestershire who had had a salary of £56 for the last twelve years and was perfectly satisfied. The Chairman said that he put forward the suggestion as to a fair salary for a midwife as his own, not as authoritative on the part of the Association. He regretted if the ladies present had a lower idea of what women's wages should be than he had. In his view women were underpaid for their work.

Miss Paget pointed out that £70 might be good pay in one district and starvation pay in another. It seemed better to mention a certain salary and all found. This was the plan adopted by the Queen Victoria's Jubilee Institute.

It was pitiable to hear ladies of rank and affluence objecting to the very modest pay for midwives proposed by the Chairman, it not only aroused one's indignation but, frankly, made one blush for one's sex. One could wish that these ladies might go round for a month with a district midwife. They would have neither the skill nor the knowledge to do any actual work, but even as useless onlookers they would probably get a different conception of the monetary value of her services.

M. B.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)