

The Midwife.

The Central Midwives' Board

PENAL BOARD.

A meeting of the Penal Board of the Central Midwives' Board was held at the Board Room, Caxton House, Westminster, on Thursday, June 24th, at 2 p.m., for the purpose of hearing the charges alleged against two midwives.

CASE I.

The first case taken was that of Eliza Thompson (No. 228 on the Roll), of Derby, charged with failing, in three specific instances, to notify the Local Supervising Authority that she had advised that medical aid should be summoned, and with habitually neglecting this duty after repeated warnings by the L.S.A.

The Board decided to censure her.

CASE II.

The other case was that of Mrs. Emma Pitman (No. 5717), of Bridgwater, who appeared in person, and was defended by her solicitor, Mr. Bishop. The Secretary also notified that a petition, signed by 3,147 inhabitants of Bridgwater, on behalf of Mrs. Pitman, had been received, stating that her suspension had caused inconvenience and alarm in the locality. We understand that a sum of £160 was also subscribed for her defence.

CHARGES.

The charges were (1) a false entry in Mrs. Pitman's Register of cases, that her last visit to a Mrs. Reed was paid on January 12th, and that the condition of the mother was then good, whereas she was in attendance on the mother till her death on January 14th.

(2) That in the case of a Mrs. Badger she neglected to explain that the case was one in which the attendance of a medical practitioner was required, and that a medical practitioner, having been summoned, she neglected to enter the fact in her Register of cases, and that she further neglected to notify the patient's death two days later.

(3) That she has failed to take the temperature of her patients, being unable to use a clinical thermometer; and

(4) That she does not keep a Register of cases as required by the rules.

Evidence was given by the Medical Officer of Health for the county and by the doctor who visited the case, who sent in a district nurse.

He stated that he was called by Mr. Badger to see his wife, who was lying in bed semi-conscious; there was abnormal tenderness, and the condition of the lochia, in the small room, spoke for itself. He formed the opinion that the case was one of septic poisoning. In reply to a question from Mr. Bishop, solicitor for the defence of Mrs. Pitman, he said that he did not, when he saw Mrs. Pitman at his surgery, or at any other time, suggest that the patient had had a paralytic stroke. Mrs. Pitman suggested it, but he did not concur. When he saw Mrs. Pitman she informed

him that the patient's temperature on the preceding Saturday was 86 degs.

Cross-examined further by Mrs. Pitman's solicitor, he said he had not informed her that the patient died of puerperal fever, and admitted that it would have been wiser to do so.

Miss Pilgrim, until recently Assistant Superintendent of Midwives in the county of Somerset, also gave evidence, and stated that on February 4th she paid a special visit of inspection to Mrs. Pitman, who had had 17 cases since January 1st, Miss Pilgrim learnt that all the cases were doing well, and the condition of those which had been concluded were entered in the Register as "good." She asked for details, and discovered that two out of the 17—Mrs. Reed and Mrs. Badger—were dead.

Mr. G. W. Duncan, Secretary, who then cross-questioned Mrs. Pitman, stated that the Bridgwater District Nursing Association had declined to assist the Board by allowing the District Nurse, who attended Mrs. Badger, to come up and give evidence.

He said that it was proved by the evidence that Mrs. Badger died on February 4th, and that the entry in the Register was February 7th. This proved the charge that Mrs. Pitman did not keep her Register correctly.

The fact that she had stated that a patient's temperature was 86 degs. was proof that in February she could not read a clinical thermometer correctly.

DEFENCE.

The answer to the charges was that Mrs. Pitman ceased to attend Mrs. Reed on January 12th, when her condition was "good," but that she had visited the house to wash and dress the baby, as the mother was weak. In the case of Mrs. Badger she saw her on the morning of February 1st. She was not clean, and had not proper linen. She was worried about the rent, the baker's bill, and the fire insurance, and was being dunned for these and other accounts. When Mrs. Pitman called on the doctor she found she had been supplanted by another nurse in her attendance on the mother, but she attended the baby until it was taken away on February 7th. In regard to Mrs. Badger's temperature on February 1st, she tried to take it, but Mrs. Badger could not keep still. She needed a fire. On the previous Saturday the temperature was 95 degs. She had known temperatures at 90 degs. When the district nurse was sent in she regarded the case as having come to an end.

THE BOARD'S DECISION.

The Board having deliberated, the Chairman informed Mrs. Pitman that she was a very dangerous midwife. If she had been competent probably neither of the women would have died. It was the view of some of the Board that she should be removed from the Roll, but on the whole they regarded her more as stupid than as wilfully negligent. They had, therefore, decided that she should

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