

The Midwife.

The Midwives' Act Committee.

We turn with pleasure from the evidence of Miss Broadwood before the Departmental Committee to inquire into the working of the Midwives Act, on which we commented last week, to that of Sir William Sinclair, with its well-considered plea for the better education of midwives, more thorough teaching, longer training, better pay, and their honourable recognition as public officials. Sir William Sinclair is the nominee of the Lord President of the Council on the Central Midwives' Board, and Professor of Obstetrics and Gynaecology at Victoria University, Manchester. He therefore speaks with authority on midwifery matters.

HIGHEST CLASS OF MIDWIVES REQUIRED FOR RURAL DISTRICTS.

In the first place, he is of opinion that "the highest class of midwife is required in the rural districts, because she is more thrown on her own resources in cases of emergency." Questioned by the Chairman as to whether emergencies were common in rural districts, he replied that they were in proportion to the number of cases. Pressed as to whether in ordinary circumstances emergencies in rural districts ought not to be infrequent, he replied that they were not very frequent anywhere; they were a small percentage.

TRAINING AS NURSE ESSENTIAL.

The witness further considered it essential for a rural midwife to be qualified as a nurse, and that midwives should be subsidised by the local authority in the same way as the medical officer of health. Asked if this would not be a form of municipal Socialism, he replied that it was only in analogy with what had been done in the medical profession.

Sir William Sinclair is in favour of entrusting the duty of selecting and training midwives to the County Councils, in order to prevent demoralising competition. Asked to explain the latter term, he said that a phase of demoralising competition was the temptation to the crime of procuring abortion in order to supplement resources. He added that County Councils would want to know something of the women's previous history and the reasons why they wanted to be trained as midwives; if it was just the last resort because of the fear of poverty, or whether they had any wish or special fitness to do that kind of work.

Sir William Sinclair considers that in Lancashire and the North there are too many midwives to make a living. For this reason he would like the midwife's appointment made official, like that of the medical officer of health, and have her paid partly or wholly by the County Councils. He would, in fact, assimilate the arrangements in this country to those in Germany, where midwives are trained by the State and are official persons. He said also that at the hospital for maternity cases in Paris the arrangements seemed to him simply perfect.

In the small towns, and where a midwife could show that her practice did not bring her more than a certain amount annually, she must be subsidised if she was to live in a respectable way. It was an advantage to the community, and possibly a gain in money, to save lying-in women from injuries. For every woman who dies in childbed, six or eight, or even more, are made invalids, become a burden to their families, so that they drift into the workhouse, or the husbands run away. A large proportion of the expenditure of public money would be saved by taking better care of these women. Sir William Sinclair pointed out that in Germany the training period is from six to nine months; in Russia it is even better. Women who had only a minimum of three months' training without any test of education to start with were not in the same position as those who have to pass a test of general education and had subsequently six or nine months training in midwifery. The former women are not educated, and cannot generalise; they cannot read text books, and only think about details.

Questioned as to whether he thought that women permitted to pass a less stringent examination than that of the Central Midwives' Board would be safe to let loose on the public, the witness expressed the opinion that if the examination were lowered we might as well go back to the old barbarous days. We were still the most backward people in Europe in that respect, and that would be going back to our old position.

In regard to teaching, the witness thought the C. M. B. should be required to cease recognising private teachers or coaches. The sooner a beginning was made with German and French methods of working together in considerable numbers, the same as with medical students, the more efficient the training would be and the better for everybody concerned. Cross-examined by Dr. Downes as to his statement that the highest class of midwives is required for rural districts, he said that he meant the nurse who had been trained for the usual time in a general hospital, and who had got a certificate as a trained nurse and also passed the examination of a midwife. Questioned as to the additional expense involved in training, Sir William Sinclair said that there were a sufficient number of women now, or a very large number of women, who were trained nurses who were trained for midwifery work in addition. Emergencies did not often occur, but in a rural district every emergency of that kind was a matter of life and death. The well trained woman would not allow the more serious cases of miscarriage and obstruction, and difficulties of that kind, to occur without sending for assistance at once; whereas the untrained midwife sends as late as possible, if at all.

Sir William Sinclair said that in other countries the need for raising the midwife into a different position altogether from any other profession, had been recognised for 150 years and carried out. He would have the supply limited by authority, and

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