

board with her patients when her services are required, but as they are mostly too poor to provide properly for themselves, she has usually to board herself. She has one room in a cottage, but, when she has been up all night, often finds it impossible to sleep, on account of the noise made by the landlady's children. This woman has worked in her remote district for years, leading a life of great loneliness and hardship, as an extract from her letter will testify:—"I was called to a patient in —, a distance of three sea miles, at 5 a.m. on the morning of Sunday week. I went immediately, and it was very cold at the time. I had to stay with Mrs. — until Tuesday, the sea was so high the curragh could not return. I went then on board the steamer that takes goods, etc., from —, but when we reached — not a boat could leave the shore. Poor me was obliged to go 30 miles to the mainland, and to endure the most horrible sea-sickness that can be conceived. We were attempting to cross every day without success, one time going back a three hours' sail, and, oh! the sea-sickness each time. At length I reached here last Monday, wearied and desperately put about. Happily, the patients did not suffer through my absence."

In spite of the remoteness from medical aid, this nurse has never lost a midwifery patient; but it is easy to imagine what extreme anxiety she must sometimes have undergone in a difficult confinement.

Although this case is doubtless an extreme one, all midwives take a grave responsibility, and as their patients are mostly of the very poorest class, and often unclean, both in their persons and houses, they have to contend with greater difficulties and dangers than usually falls to the lot of ordinary medical men.

A Manchester midwife once said to me that she thought the Inspector of Midwives ought to inspect the patients' houses, and insist on cleanliness of house and person before the midwife's services were required, instead of blaming the midwife when anything went wrong. The weight of responsibility connected with her work lay heavily upon this midwife, and, had she had other means of earning her living, she would have given up her practice and supported herself otherwise. She told me that occasionally she had absolutely declined to undertake cases on account of their dirtiness, and yet these women had sent for her at the last moment, when it was too late to get other help; and so she had felt compelled to look after them. Now, if the difficulties of a Manchester midwife are so great, on account of lack of cleanliness, there can be little doubt that the difficulties of midwives in other towns

will be greater, for the Manchester poor, or, indeed, the poor of Lancashire generally, are, on the whole, an industrious, clean, thrifty race, who scrub the fronts of their houses, and even the street pavement in front of their doors, and whose houseplace is a marvel of cleanliness and polished brass fire ornaments.

Unfortunately, many charitable societies seem entirely to forget that "the labourer is worthy of his hire," and pay their midwives, not according to the value of their services, but according to the lowest scale which extreme competition and necessity compels them to accept; and midwives working on their own account are in consequence compelled to accept such low fees that only by very hard work are they able to make a living, and are too often tempted through over-pressure and weariness to perform their duties in a less conscientious manner than they would otherwise do.

It is scarcely surprising, surely, that with such responsibilities, such hardships, and such pay, women of limited means are not keen to spend from £12 to £50, and to give from three to six months of their time, to qualify for posts which, when they are obtained, scarcely furnish a living wage or the most simple comforts and pleasures of life.

There appears to me to be one, and only one, rational and feasible solution to this knotty question, and that is, to provide midwives, or, better still, midwife doctors for the very poor, and to pay them partially or entirely from the local rates, or from the coffers of the State. Midwives should receive a minimum salary of £100 a year, and in the case of doctors acting as midwives the salary should be at least £200 a year.

MARY MONKHOUSE.

THE 1910 UNION OF MIDWIVES.

A Drawing Room Meeting of the 1910 Union of Midwives is to be held on Saturday, Feb. 19th, at 7, Delamere Terrace, Westbourne Square, W., at 3.30 p.m., when certified midwives will have the opportunity of hearing from its promoters what the Union hopes to achieve. The fact that its officers and executive committee are all certified midwives shows that organisation is being undertaken on the right lines, and should inspire confidence in its future. We are glad to know that "it affirms with all the resolution at its command, that a condition of the modification of the (Central Midwives') Board in the direction of direct representation by popular election is at once essential and inevitable." It further declares this feeling to be deep-seated and widespread, though no adequate and organic expression has been given to it hitherto. This journal has always pointed out the vital importance to midwives of representation on their governing body.

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