

allow midwives to attend single women in their confinements. The child would be handicapped all through life, and it should at least enter the world under good conditions. Charitable ladies hardly realised the effect of this rule.

#### THE PREVENTION OF INFANTILE BLINDNESS.

An admirable paper on "The Prevention of Infantile Blindness" was read by Dr. Nimmo Walker (Liverpool). He said there were two principal methods of prevention—(1) prophylactic, and (2) curative treatment. Under the first heading he discussed Credé's method, and asked whether it was desirable for a midwife to assume that the eyes of every infant are infected, and to treat them with strong chemicals, or to adopt the aseptic method. In his view the latter course was the right one. In the first place no antiseptic was known which would infallibly prevent infection; and secondly, antiseptics in unskilled hands might injure the infant's eyes. He described two cases brought to the St. Paul's Eye Hospital, Liverpool, of severe inflammation in the eyes of two infants, at an interval of three months. There was no trace of infection as the cause, and both cases were proved to have occurred in the practice of the same midwife, whose habit it was to drop a solution of corrosive sublimate into the eyes. Other objections were that the instillation might cause infection, and that to teach a midwife to interfere with the eyes in health was to teach her to treat them in disease. Better results were obtained from the aseptic method than from Credé's method. In every town there should be a hospital with an ophthalmic department, to which midwives should be able to send suspected cases on the first day. The mothers should also be admitted, because bottle-fed babies were handicapped. He described the success of this method in connection with the St. Paul's Eye Hospital, Liverpool, so that infantile blindness had been considerably reduced.

Lady St. Davids (Hon. Secretary of the South Wales Nursing Association) said that her interest in the question had first been aroused by visiting a blind asylum.

Miss Blomfield (Matron of Queen Charlotte's Hospital) said that in her experience cases of ophthalmia were by no means invariably due to the carelessness of the midwife. She thought that the midwife should have the power to treat infected eyes with a chemical agent. It was of the utmost importance that treatment should begin immediately, and why should not a well-trained midwife have that power?

Mrs. Lawson (National Association of Midwives) supported Dr. Walker's view. She advised those who advocated routine treatment of eyes by a chemical agent to drop a solution of 1 in 6,000 perchloride of mercury into their own eyes. She thought they would have an uncomfortable night.

Dr. Bygott, Miss Elsie Hall, and other, having taken part in the discussion, Dr. Walker replied to the questions raised.

#### THE REPORT OF THE DEPARTMENTAL COMMITTEE.

Mr. F. E. Fremantle, F.R.C.S., then reviewed the report of the Departmental Committee appointed to consider the working of the Midwives' Act. Two of the principal points which the Com-

mittee had to consider were "supply" and "training." With regard to the size of the Board he was bound to say there was somewhat extravagant representation of medical men. The Committee recommended that the representative of the Midwives' Institute should be a midwife, and that the representation of the R.B.N.A. should be discontinued, as the midwives among its members were a negligible quantity.

Miss Alice Gregory (member of the Midwives' Committee of the L.C.C.), thought that the recommendations of the Committee were positive and negative. In the *positive conclusions* the interests of the doctors, ratepayers, and Central Midwives' Board were considered, those of the midwives glanced at, while the mother seemed to have been overlooked. The *negative conclusions* stated that there was no need for an increase of midwives, as there was no shortage, but this was only because dirty old women were working under the authority of the Midwives' Board, and the public acquiesced, as these women were inexpensive.

Another negative recommendation was that the standard of examination should not be raised. Was there any reason why the Midwives' Board should be coerced to keep it at its present irreducible medium, behind other European countries.

Miss Gregory was opposed to the payment of medical men by Boards of Guardians, and the consequent pauperisation of self-respecting patients.

Dr. Bygott strongly opposed the payment of medical practitioners called in to the assistance of midwives by the Poor Law Authority. He said the way many Guardians treated the sick was disgraceful, and any who had worked amongst the poor knew how they loathed parish relief.

Dr. Fremantle, defending the recommendation of the Committee, said that the Guardians were a popularly-elected authority. We might return to government by a benevolent despotism, but at present our form of government was democratic.

Mrs. Bedford Fenwick repudiated the idea that any form of government was democratic under which women had no votes.

#### DIRECT REPRESENTATION ON THE CENTRAL MIDWIVES' BOARD.

Mrs. Margaret Lawson, President of the National Association of Midwives, presented an excellent paper on the above subject. She commented on the fact that midwives had no strong association at the time the Midwives' Act was under consideration, and so they had no voice in framing the regulations by which they were governed. She showed that midwives are required to report a case of sepsis under penalty, but that a medical man is paid for so doing; that there is no direct representative of the midwives on the Central Midwives' Board; and she further described the composition of the Local Supervising Authority under which she works—with some of the members of which she is in financial competition. She claimed that there should be at least one working midwife on the Central Midwives' Board and the L.S.A. The interests of the mothers were as safe in the hands of the midwives as of any other section of the community, and they demanded a share in shaping their own destiny.

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