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Editorial.

THE HEALTH VISITORS' BILL.

The Bill to enable Local Authorities under the Notification of Births Act, 1907, to appoint Health Visitors, presented in the House of Commons by the President of the Local Government Board, provides that

(1) "The local authority for the purposes of the Notification of Births Act, 1907, of any area outside London in which the Act is for the time being in force may appoint suitable women, to be known as health visitors, for the purpose of giving to persons advice as to the proper nurture, care, and management of children under five years of age, including the promotion of cleanliness.

(2) "The qualifications to be possessed by persons appointed to be health visitors under this section shall be such as the local authority may, after consultation with their medical officer of health, require."

The Bill is strongly opposed by the Women's Local Government Society, which at two recent Conferences held at Caxton Hall has passed resolutions expressing its opinion, "that any woman appointed in the future to carry out the work popularly known as 'health visiting,' should be qualified and appointed as sanitary inspector, and should hold additional qualifications for the special work of health visiting."

The Society further, at the last Conference on the subject, held on Monday, at which fifteen important organisations, including the National Union of Women Workers and the Women's Industrial Council were represented, agreed, on the motion of Mrs. Maitland, seconded by Dr. S. C. Lawrence, M. O. H., Edmonton, that the Health Visitors' Bill is calculated

to lower the high standard of work maintained by women officially employed by sanitary authorities, by encouraging the appointment of women without adequate qualifications, without the necessary powers, with too narrow range of work, and with practically no status, and that if the Bill as now before Parliament should come on for second reading, it should be actively opposed.

It will be seen from the text of the Health Visitors' Bill, that no definite qualifications are to be required of health visitors. We therefore support the action of the Women's Local Government Society in its opposition to the Bill as at present before Parliament. The qualifications required of these officials should be definitely stated, or there can be no guarantee that their knowledge is adequate.

It is stated by the Women Sanitary Inspectors' Association, that "the result of the Health Visitors' (London) Order has been the almost total cessation of the appointment of women as Sanitary Inspectors, and a diminution of their numbers in some Boroughs (e.g. Finsbury) by the substitution of Health Visitors at a lower salary, and without sanitary training."

Women who appear specially suitable to discharge the duties of Health Visitors are three years' certificated trained nurses, who further hold certificates as Sanitary Inspectors. If the office of Health Visitor is to be effective and respected, those holding it must be efficient. If women "without adequate qualifications" are appointed, the status and prestige of these new officials must inevitably suffer, and mothers of families may be forgiven if they receive advice as to the "proper nurture, care, and management of children," given by spinsters with uncertain training, with some reserve, if not derision.

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