

Government of the evident intentions of the promoters of the Midwives Registration Bill to attempt to break up the British Empire, and to succeed—in covering themselves with ridicule. Because seriously this one little clause proves clearly that these ladies and gentlemen are either afraid of grappling with the whole question of the control of Midwives throughout the British Empire, or they have entirely overlooked the fact that if it is necessary to protect women against ignorant Midwifery in one province, it is equally important to safeguard them in all.

So we pass from the preamble to the second section, which defines a Midwife as a "woman of good character, and of fair elementary education, who is capable of managing a case of natural labour, and of undertaking the ordinary care of the mother and child after labour, and of recognising any conditions requiring the aid of a medical practitioner during the parturient and puerperal states." This is simple enough—almost too simple, we might fairly say. Because, as our readers will observe, the clause is so drawn, that however the status and knowledge of Midwives may advance in future, in the eye of the law they will still be defined as women of "good character and fair elementary education." It will interest our readers to know that the law considers a "fair elementary education" to be attained by "a child who can read without hesitation, or write correctly from dictation an ordinary sentence containing words of three or four syllables, and who is acquainted with the first four rules of arithmetic." Truly a high standard to which future Midwives must aspire. It has been often stated by some of the very promoters of the Midwives' Bill, that Registration would have the effect of placing all workers on one dead level. We can honestly congratulate these ladies and gentlemen upon their consistency. They certainly have carried out their ideal of Registration to the bitter end in this matter. For if the Midwives of the future are all to be possessed merely of this "fair elementary education," Registration will run them to a very low level indeed in the scale of skilled workers.

But in connection with the above definition—which distinctly implies that Midwives are only to undertake natural labours, but are to obtain Medical assistance when complications exist or arise—it is somewhat surprising to find it quietly stated in Section 5, that "a person shall not be entitled to recover any fee or charge in any court for the performance of any *Midwifery operation*, or for any Midwifery attendance or advice, unless she be registered under this Act." Because if words mean anything at all, these distinctly mean that Midwives are expected, or at least tacitly

authorised, to perform any kind of "Midwifery operation." It is unnecessary to remind our readers that these include some of the most dangerous and difficult proceedings known in surgery, while their after-treatment taxes the highest skill of the Physician. And yet it is actually proposed that this Bill should confer upon women of "good character and fair elementary education" the right to attempt to perform such operations. Because it must be remembered that this is a very definite recognition by implication of a distinct right to operate by registered Midwives. At present few women who had not some official position, or who were not possessed of unusual experience, would venture to perform any but the simplest operations, because should a fatal result ensue, and a coroner's inquest be held, they would certainly incur blame, if indeed they escaped a trial for manslaughter. This brings us to one of the great objections which we have always felt to the legal Registration of Midwives. It would give these workers the sanction of the common law to undertake the responsibilities and practise measures which at present they can only accept and perform at their own risk. And we have always seen that in this direction Registration might prove to be a remedy which was worse than the disease. At present if a patient seems ill the Midwife can always send for a Doctor, because she can explain that she is not permitted to adopt active measures on her own initiative, and in numberless instances the result is the preservation of life. But if the Midwife is by virtue of the law entirely independent, and in fact is recognised by the law as upon an equality with the Medical man, she probably will not, for fear of losing prestige and dignity, announce that a case is beyond her experience and powers, until she has made trial of some procedure, which if not successful will almost surely magnify any existing danger, while it will certainly cause delay, which in Midwifery practice so often spells disaster.

How the promoters of this extraordinary measure reconcile their definition of a Midwife in the first section with their evident expectation expressed in the fifth, that instead of seeking "the aid of a medical practitioner" these women will do, or attempt to do, the necessary operations themselves, entirely passes our comprehension. Nay, we would go so far as to assert that it has entirely passed the comprehension of those who drafted the Bill; because, as we shall show next week, they actually desire Parliament to give Midwives the right to perform the most critical operations by an Act which expressly provides for the Registration of women who have never had, and who never could have had, the slightest

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)