

**THE MIDWIVES' REGISTRATION BILL
AMENDED, AND THE STATE REGISTRA-
TION OF MIDWIVES.**

BY ROBERT REID RENTOUL, M.D., M.R.C.S.

SHOULD Midwives be registered by Act of Parliament, and *how* should they be educated, examined, registered, and supervised? Those who talked out the first Bill in the Commons opposed it because they objected to the manner in which Registration, &c., was to be effected. The British Medical Association at its last Annual Meeting, and speaking in the name of thirteen thousand five hundred doctors, held similar views, and then proceeded to pass a resolution condemning this Bill, coupling this with a request that the entire subject should be referred to a Select Committee, with power to collect and take evidence. The promoters of this Bill are using arguments which do not bear investigation. They say their intention is to protect "poor lying-in women." In order to do so they propose placing some thirteen thousand old women on the Official Register *without any examination whatever* to test their knowledge! They will allow these thirteen thousand to keep about thirteen thousand more *unqualified* assistants! They will permit unqualified Midwives to continue practising for purposes of gain, and when the services of a qualified person can be secured! They will permit a Midwife to continue practising when she is removed from the Register; and, lastly, in their first Bill, they proposed to fully train a Pupil Midwife *in three months!* although the ordinary sick Nurse receives three years. How can the above conditions protect women? Such a Bill would only legalise the present illegalities. Similar evils would be brought within the Law if an Act were passed giving unqualified "medical" persons, quacks, and prescribing chemists the power to practise. Again, they say there are no Doctors in country districts. I doubt this. But do Midwives propose to practise in country districts? They say, Doctors' fees are too high. Do they propose charging lower fees than now taken? They say that deaths in child-birth are too numerous. Can they show that their system will lower this death-rate; or that the Continental system of employing Midwives gives better results than we obtain? There may be some few Midwives who wish for a Government system of Registration; some women's rights advocates; some Doctors who engage a cheap Midwife instead of a qualified assistant; and some Poor Law Unions which

supply cheap labour and send unskilled assistance in a Midwife to whom they pay from three to four shillings per case. All these are very interested parties. Again, they argue that Midwives are employed in foreign countries. But they are employed because at one time Doctors were scarce. Moreover, they are now frequently educated and supported by the State. They take the place of our Poor Law Medical Officer, in so far as midwifery is concerned. Surely our Poor Law is, in so far as the relief of sickness is concerned, far in advance of the continental plan. They also argue that the Medical and Dental Acts bear a close analogy to this Act. The two are in no way parallel, as the first two qualify a Doctor or Dentist to practise their profession *in its entirety*, whereas the Midwives' Bill proposes to give her only a mere part of a work. I fancy the promoters of the Bill notice this defect, for they have taken excellent care not to introduce a clause making it penal for a Midwife if she exceeds her duties.

Some very serious objections may be raised against the Amended Bill. By clause 2, an effort is made to exclude men. This is most unfair, especially as women have been asking for "equal rights." It is also contrary to the spirit of present day legislation, and to the Medical Act of 1876, which lays it down that qualifications shall be given "*without distinction of sex.*" There is also an unpleasant sting in it, and which hints that men should not be accoucheurs. If women can practise Midwifery, and claim fees in court, by studying for three or six months, I fail to see why men should be compelled to undergo a prolonged and expensive education during five years in order to secure just the same privileges as Midwives. I feel certain if the case were reversed, women would be the first to appeal against such one-sided legislation—and rightly too. By the same clause, the General Medical Council is appointed to draw up regulations providing for the efficient education and examination of Pupil Midwives; no provision, however, is made for the payment of this Council. It is known that the Medical Council cannot afford even to administer the Medical Acts with satisfaction. Clause 4 gives the Privy Council the power to appoint Inspectors of Examinations. If some members of this Council are chosen, how can these act with efficiency unless funds are provided? I go so far as to say, that if the Medical Council use the income derived from the fees paid by Doctors for the registration of their degrees for administering a Midwives' Act, they will be exceeding their duties, and prove untrue to the profession. Let the Government make an annual grant to the Council. It is much more of a national than professional Institution. This is not a question

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)