

there was no improvement. Few people had any idea what women had to suffer at these times. Miss Johnston gave instances of neglect within her own knowledge, and said that in England the work of midwives was supervised. Why could not the Local Government Board in Ireland appoint inspectors to see that the midwives under their control were doing their work correctly?

She referred to the salaries paid to midwives under the L.G.B.—£20, £25, and £30 a year, which was really sweated labour. If an official could be paid £700 per annum and expenses for inspecting infirmaries, why should not midwives be paid a living wage? She herself, in doing midwifery work, had walked fifteen miles a day, and there certainly was a temptation for midwives who had such long distances to cover to neglect their work, and some were doing so. Inspectors were needed, both to see that the midwives were not overworked, and also that those who were part lazy, part drunken, did not neglect the patients.

Miss Johnston considered that if midwives were such a national asset that the State should take over their provision and their supervision. She would like the Irish Nurses Association to send a deputation to the Local Government Board to enumerate the defects of the present system.

Midwives under the Local Government Board were allowed to take paying patients to eke out their living, and the danger was that when a patient took a free ticket entitling her to assistance to a midwife that she should refuse to take it, saying that the patient was able to pay. She challenged the Local Government Board to examine the warden's paper and the books of some midwives and to make the two agree.

DISCUSSION.

The chairman hoped that the deputation to the Local Government Board would be arranged, and that Miss Johnston would introduce it.

Miss C. C. du Sautoy said that for six years she had acted as Inspector of Midwives in a large county, chiefly agricultural, in which there were 300 midwives, both trained and bona-fide. In England the word midwife was patented and could only be used by women on the Midwives Roll. In Ireland midwives were in the same position as trained nurses in the United Kingdom, *i.e.*, without status.

Miss du Sautoy said that she had often appeared before the Central Midwives Board in connection with cases. Many of the bona fide midwives could not read, write or take temperatures. When she asked one midwife to demonstrate her method of temperature-taking to her, she did so with the thermometer in the case. In another instance, when a woman was appearing before the Central Midwives Board, her solicitor coached her as to the correct method in the train on the way up. Solicitors also read up the Act on their way up to town to defend their clients, and Miss du Sautoy was of opinion that midwives on their defence

would often be much better defended if a midwife who understood the subject took charge of the case.

Miss du Sautoy considered that practising midwives should have seats on the Central Midwives Board, women who would understand the difficulties of midwives. She thought that midwives should be governed by their own profession, and not by one in many ways antagonistic.

Referring to the vexed question of village nurses, she inquired what these workers could be called. They were midwives with a slight knowledge of general nursing. Thoroughly trained nurses would not come forward to do the work.

Another point in connection with the Midwives Act was that though the limit on the side of youth was defined—*i.e.*, a midwife must be over twenty-one—there was no limit set to the age at which a woman might practise. Old ladies of seventy and seventy-five practised, and in one instance within the speaker's knowledge a woman of ninety. In reply to an observation that she was rather shaky, she remarked, "It's the inspector I be feared of, I bain't feared of the babies."

Miss du Sautoy also questioned the legality of the form applying for maternity benefit being filled in by lay people. In one instance she knew of the mother of the patient signed the paper, and the probability was the husband drank the money.

Miss Ramsden said it should not be legal except for a doctor or qualified midwife, but it rested with the Friendly Societies if they chose to accept other signatures. The Irish Nurses Association had communicated with Irish members of Parliament, and with Mr. Masterman, asking that this might be rectified. At present the Act was open to the construction that anyone might sign.

Mrs. Bedford Fenwick said that the reason thoroughly trained nurses would not come forward to act as nurses in rural districts was because the salary was so inadequate. She had known village nurses paid fifteen to eighteen shillings a week, to find everything—excepting a bicycle. It was preposterous to imagine that work would be sought by highly skilled nurses at this miserable wage.

A strong stand should be made against this system of underpayment. Some discussion took place on this point, Miss du Sautoy pointing out that in some counties village nurses received 22s. a week in their third year. Mrs. Fenwick contended that the practice of employing midwives as village nurses was only adopted because it was cheap. Even if a village nurse eventually earned 22s. a week, a woman with a knowledge of two professions—nursing and midwifery—could not be expected to work for that amount. It could only be considered sweated labour.

The Hon. Albinia Brodrick thought that the midwifery practised in the country districts in Ireland was thoroughly unsatisfactory. It was impossible to get a good class of women to take up the position of dispensary midwife at the ridiculous salaries paid, and some unions would not employ dispensary midwives. Miss Breay having replied, the Conference was adjourned.

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