

The Midwife.

A CHAT WITH MISS ALICE H. HOLFORD.

Miss A. H. Holford, the well-known matron of St. Helen's Maternity Hospital, at Dunedin, New Zealand, is paying her first visit to the Old Country, and in making her acquaintance, it was interesting to hear how nursing and midwifery matters appealed to her here, and to gather interesting details concerning them in New Zealand.

Miss Holford is a well-known pioneer in her profession, which means that she is a thinker, a worker, and when needs be a fighter, for all that is of consequence to the sick whose conditions she is out to safeguard. In her own country, Miss Holford has legal status as a State registered nurse and midwife, honourable distinctions of which one is naturally proud, and of which she is deprived immediately she sets foot in the United Kingdom!

Miss Holford realises this anomaly with a keen sense of indignation, but in discussing it could not refrain from amusement. Indeed who could, when one considers the absurd inequality of the laws governing nursing and midwifery conditions in England and her overseas possessions?

In New Zealand the Act enforcing the registration of nurses has been in force since 1901. "We got it largely because you at home were fighting for it," said Miss Holford. That was a crumb of comfort anyway.

The Act now works very smoothly and with very great advantage to all concerned. The half-yearly State Examinations are held on the same days in eight central cities. Thus the national organization of professional nurses in New Zealand has been comparatively easy, built up as it is on the rock of legal status. Each member of the Trained Nurses' Association is inspired with a deep sense of personal responsibility for the wellbeing of the whole. Miss Holford finds conditions in England quite incomprehensible. That every matron is not standing firm for legal status, and leading on the whole profession towards such a happy consummation, naturally surprises her greatly. "The result is that anyone, coming from anywhere, trained or not, can set up as a nurse in England, and injure the profession as a whole. How unjust! Anyway one can nurse here if one feels inclined, but how about midwifery? It is when I consider the conditions set up by the

Midwives Act that I feel how topsy-turvy it all is.

"Take my own case. For twelve years I have had a wide practical experience of midwifery—for the last eight years as matron of St. Helen's Maternity Hospital, Dunedin, during which time close on 1,400 lying-in patients have passed through my hands, with only four deaths of mothers; one from eclampsia, two from toxæmia, and one from consumption. We are a midwifery training school, our standard being full six months for trained nurses, with a three years' certificate for general nursing, and a twelve months' term for maternity nurses only. I have trained and instructed a large number of efficient pupils, and yet because I am not certificated by the Central Midwives Board here, after a most insufficient three months' work, either in a hospital or district, I cannot act as a midwife in England without running the risk of being hauled up by the Board (whose standard I consider dangerously insufficient to protect the lives of mother and child), and fined; or of being run in to gaol for illegal practice. What a farce!"

"Yes," we assented, "but don't forget that once out of durance vile, criminal as you would be, according to our disorganized laws, you would be permitted to *nurse* the most serious and dangerous illness or the most intricate major operation known to Medicine! And remember" we added, "that in New Zealand women are citizens, who help to make the laws controlling their lives, whilst in Britain woman is, in fact, merely a domestic animal."

"Nurses and midwives in New Zealand," said Miss Holford, "are tremendously indignant about lack of legal standards in England, and in consequence lack of all possible reciprocity between those trained here and in the Dominion; and I *must* add my protest against such an unjust condition of affairs. Imagine if our first-rate medical men on their visits home were divested of all professional status at London Docks and degraded to the position of quacks! Impossible of course, but that is practically how the registered nurses and midwives are treated by the Home Government."

We agreed that the chaotic condition of nursing and midwifery in Britain, was mainly the result of depriving women of political rights as a sex.

We left it at that.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)