

THE LONDON COUNTY COUNCIL (GENERAL POWERS) BILL.

THE REGISTRATION OF LYING-IN HOMES.

By the courtesy of the Clerk to the London County Council, at the request of whose department we deferred dealing at length with the proceedings before the Local Legislation Committee of the House of Commons until we had the Council's official report before us, we are able to publish the following information in reference to the evidence given before the above committee in reference to its General Powers Bill so far as it affects Lying-in Homes in London. The Chairman on Wednesday, July 8th, Thursday, July 9th, and Tuesday, July 14th, was Mr. Middlebrook; Counsel for the Promoters of the Bill, the Hon. J. D. Fitzgerald, K.C., Mr. Clode, K.C., and the Hon. Evan Charteris, and Petitions against the Bill were read from the Corporation of London, the Borough Councils of Camberwell, Greenwich, Hammersmith, Kensington, Lambeth, Lewisham, and Wandsworth, and the Mayor, Aldermen and Councillors of the City of Westminster, all of whom were supported by Counsel.

Mr. Clode, K.C., in introducing the subject, described the Bill as "an omnibus Bill, comprising a good many parts dealing with various topics." He began with Part II, which refers to High-pressure Gas Meters, passing on to Part III, dealing with Music and Dancing Licences, and then to Part IV, "Lying-in Homes," with which this JOURNAL is concerned.

LYING-IN HOMES.

Mr. Clode stated that the objects of this part of the Bill were that lying-in homes should be registered, that they should be inspected, and regulated by bye-law. The working of the Midwives Act, 1902, was given by law to the London County Council, and in the course of the investigations and inspections they had to make under that Act they became aware that everything was not as it should be in regard to lying-in homes. In support of this, Counsel made the following points:—They are ordinary dwelling houses, in most cases with no particular provisions, which are resorted to by people for the purposes of confinement, and when the Council made investigations they were rather appalled to find that there was no qualification of skill or training, or character required for anyone who might be the proprietor of a lying-in home. There was no standard as to what was requisite either for the premises as a whole, or the room in which the confinement might take place, and there certainly was brought to the Council's knowledge a great body of evidence that showed to the social and philanthropic worker that there were certain grave abuses connected with some of these establishments. In one case there was a proprietor of no less than four or five of these homes who was keeping a brothel, and the homes were used in connection with it and the poor

people who came there for their lying-in were subsequently offered such temptations and inducements as would induce them to go and earn their livelihood at the other establishment kept by the proprietor. In some homes the hygienic conditions were most unsatisfactory, the rooms were ordinary, the furniture dirty, clothes were littered about, all sorts of offensive things were left in the room at the time of the confinement, and no steps whatever were taken to see that the patient had the accommodation which was absolutely necessary for her welfare. Tuberculous patients were mixed with untainted ones, healthy children lodged with unhealthy ones, and no steps whatever appeared to have been taken by the proprietors to see that the ordinary conditions of health which ought to obtain even with a slight ailment were extended to these women when they came to these homes for confinement. The registration of lying-in homes had already been recommended by a Departmental Committee appointed by the Lord President in 1909, and in consequence of that recommendation the late Lord Wolverhampton introduced a Bill to enable officers of local supervising authorities to enter premises which they had reason to believe were lying-in homes conducted for profit. Unfortunately that and a second bill were withdrawn. In May, 1913, a petition most extensively signed by workers amongst the poor was brought to the notice of the Council, and a deputation urged upon it that powers should be sought over certain persons who purported to be certified midwives, and were receiving expectant mothers for confinement, and who would afterwards retain them for immoral purposes, and that powers for regulation of lying-in homes should be given to the Council. The doubtful and difficult position of the unmarried mother under the National Insurance Act was urged as an additional reason.

Referring to the opposition of "a more or less friendly kind from the Borough Councils," Counsel said that the County Council was the supervising authority under the Midwives Act and the Infant Life Protection Act, and it would be a pity that the authority on a subject so germane as the Registration of Lying-in Homes should be taken from them and given to other alien bodies. Another objection was that if the work were given to the Borough Councils there would be twenty-five tribunals for registration and inspection, and twenty-eight different sets of officials. The Council had a staff competent to deal with this business, familiar with the working of the Midwives Act and the Infant Life Protection Act. The provisions of the Bill would also apply to the City of London.

THE CHAIRMAN OF THE MIDWIVES ACT COMMITTEE.

The first witness sworn was Mr. L. Courtauld, Chairman of the Midwives Act Committee under the London County Council, who stated that the object of the legislation contained in the Bill was to extend powers under the Midwives Act. At

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