

THE MORAL CHARACTER OF MIDWIVES.

When the Midwives Bill was before Parliament, and since the Act has been in force, there have been people who justified their support of the registration of midwives, while opposing that of trained nurses, by making the pronouncement "You cannot register character," and then proceeding to argue that in the case of the midwife "it makes no difference," while in the case of the trained nurse it is all-important.

IT MAKES NO DIFFERENCE.

The former view was put on record by Lord Knutsford (then the Hon. Sydney Holland) in his evidence before the Select Committee of the House of Commons on Nurses' Registration in 1904.

To quote from the minutes of evidence:—

The Hon. Sydney Holland: It is said "doctors are registered, midwives are registered; why should you not register nurses?" Do you want argument on that point, or is it too patent?

Chairman: I should not like to stop you.

The Hon. Sydney Holland: I say the analogy is completely different. The midwife goes in for a special kind of work. If she is so minded when she has finished she may go and drink herself stupid if she likes. In her case, so long as she can do her job accurately and well it makes no difference.

This view midwives have always regarded not only as insulting to themselves, but highly dangerous to the women who confide themselves to their care, for there is no security that the midwife who "drinks herself stupid" at one moment will be able to "do her job accurately" at another, and further they are aware of the far-reaching influence for good or evil of the midwife, and of the importance of high moral character on her part.

Many women in the past dated their contraction of the drink habit to their first confinement and the advice of an ignorant midwife. Many others owe the best influences in their lives to the midwives who have attended them.

TRUSTWORTHY, SOBER, AND OF GOOD MORAL CHARACTER.

The Central Midwives Board has always realized the importance of character in a midwife, and before a woman is admitted to the Roll it requires a certificate, signed by some one personally acquainted with her, for a period of years, that she is "trustworthy, sober, and of good moral character."

THE PRIVATE CONDUCT OF A MIDWIFE.

Recently, as reported in these columns, a midwife whose name was removed from the Roll by the Central Midwives Board on the ground of moral delinquency, appealed to the High Court, and while she won her case so far as the restoration of her name to the Roll was concerned, because, in connection with the

hearing of the case the Central Midwives Board did not comply with its own rules, and, in the words of the Lord Chief Justice, "the omission was fatal to the case," yet the argument of the plaintiff's counsel that "the term misconduct under the Midwives Act did not affect the present charge," and "the Board was not intended to inquire into the private conduct of a midwife" was not accepted by the Court.

THE OPINION OF LEARNED JUDGES.

In summing up the Lord Chief Justice held that "the term misconduct in Section 3 of the Act was not limited to the discharge of the duties of a midwife," and Mr. Justice Avory observed that "the result would be mischievous if lying-in women were attended by women of immoral life."

THE POSITION OF THE CENTRAL MIDWIVES BOARD.

As we last week reported, the position taken up by the Central Midwives Board is that conduct which before enrolment would render it impossible to certify that a candidate was of "good moral character" renders her, after enrolment, liable to be removed from the Roll for "misconduct."

THE "LANCET" ON THE SITUATION.

The *Lancet* in a leading article on "Midwives and Moral Character" says that "The declaration thus made is eminently satisfactory. To have found that the Board had been compelled by legal decision to abandon all consideration of the moral character of a midwife, after once admitting her to practice among the women who might seek her aid, would have been more than disconcerting. It would have been disastrous. . . . The practice of a midwife, implying attendance upon women, and to treating them in, and in connection with, pregnancy and childbirth, brings her in contact with females of the humbler classes of society, with married women of the strictest respectability, and with those in very different circumstances. It is difficult to imagine any person whose opportunity for mischief among her sex would be greater if she herself were to be of loose morals and at the same time endowed with the training and skill which the Midwives Act, 1902, was passed to promote."

After arguing that it would be altogether illogical and absurd to require evidence of good moral character as a condition of admission to the Midwives Roll, if the power to remove from the Roll on account of proved immorality were withheld, our contemporary continues: "It is not, however, only the desirability of a right to remove undesirable persons from the official roll which we are now discussing. We are rather insisting upon the performance of the duty to remove such persons, both for the sake of the pregnant women who may come under the midwives' care, and for the credit of the women who have made midwifery their profession."

The *Lancet* evidently does not agree with Lord Knutsford's view of the personality of a midwife "It makes no difference."

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