

# The Midwife.

## THE REGISTRATION OF LYING-IN HOMES AND ESTABLISHMENTS FOR MASSAGE OR SPECIAL TREATMENT.

On Thursday, October 7th, and Friday, October 8th, a Select Committee of the House of Lords on the London County Council (General Powers) (No. 1) Bill, took evidence in Committee Room No. 2, in support of the Bill, and received Petitions against it, supported by evidence. This Bill makes provision for the registration of lying-in homes and establishments for massage and special treatment, and under it, as introduced, it was intended to register nursing homes.

The Committee consisted of the Earl of Kintore (Chairman), the Earl of Ancaster, Lord Armstrong, Viscount Falmouth, and Earl Ferrars.

The London County Council was represented by the Hon. J. D. Fitzgerald, K.C., Mr. A. B. Clode, K.C., and the Hon. Evan Charteris; and the opposing Borough Councils by Mr. G. M. Freeman, K.C., and Mr. G. O. Bellewes.

We may here point out that Nursing Homes are no longer dealt with in the Bill, having, as Counsel remarked, been "knocked out"; the only way, therefore, in which they will be affected by it is that they will not be able to take in any maternity cases without first registering as Lying-in Homes.

The National Council of Trained Nurses of Great Britain and Ireland, which presented a Memorandum to the London County Council showing clearly the issues involved is to be congratulated on this decision. We understand that the deletion of the Nursing Homes from the Bill is due to the Earl of Donoughmore, Chairman of Committees, who was of opinion that the evils the Bill is designed to meet do not exist to any appreciable extent in Nursing Homes, and was unwilling that any slight should be cast on the honourable profession of nursing.

The point at issue, argued before the Select Committee, was a simple one, namely, whether the provision of the Act should be carried out by the Central authority—the London County Council, which has drafted the Bill—or through the twenty-eight Metropolitan Borough Councils, sixteen of which claim that they are the right authority to carry out the duties, as an extension of their powers in connection with disorderly houses. Both sides were agreed that legislation on the lines of the Bill is urgently necessary.

The case for the London County Council was opened by Mr. Fitzgerald, who explained that the Bill was an omnibus Bill, which had been blocked by opposition to Part VI, in the interests of the Cinematograph Film Traders' Association; but the Home Office attached very great importance

to Part V of the Bill being passed in the present Session, and therefore it was divided into two Bills—Part VI, celluloid, remaining in the House of Commons.

### LYING-IN HOMES.

The learned Counsel pointed out, in relation to Part IV, which deals with Lying-in Homes, that the great majority are managed by registered midwives, persons of respectability and skill; but there is a residue of these homes of a very different character, which are objectionable—partly from the people who carry them on, and partly from the way in which they are carried on. The whole arrangements of the house may be such as to unfit it for use as a lying-in home; and further, the objectionable homes are carried on by persons who are unfit for the position, because they are unskilled, or because they are of bad character, and sometimes a public nuisance. Unmarried girls, often those about to be confined with their first baby, and in answer to advertisements, come up to London to one of these homes to avoid publicity, and it is very desirable that a girl who has had one lapse from virtue should not get under the control of persons of bad character, who would rather direct her than otherwise towards a continued course of immorality.

Counsel instanced one case, in which it was found that the proprietor of one of these homes was the proprietor of several brothels in London, and inducements were offered to the girls admitted to the home to transfer themselves afterwards to the brothels. He also stated that there is ground for believing these homes are used for the purpose of abortion, and there are numerous cases where the horrible practice exists of taking the child away from the mother immediately after its birth for the purpose of getting it "adopted." The relatives are induced to pay money to someone who is, in all probability, a baby farmer, and the child is not seen to, and probably dies at an early age.

It was also pointed out that certain hospitals and institutions are exempted from inspection, also any lying-in home carried on by a duly qualified medical practitioner, certified annually by two duly qualified medical practitioners as a fit and proper person to carry on the home.

### ESTABLISHMENTS FOR MASSAGE OR SPECIAL TREATMENT.

When Counsel began to deal with Part V of the Bill, relating to Massage Establishments, the Chairman interposed, "I do not think, Mr. Fitzgerald, you need to take up much time proving the existence of such places. They are a scandal to-day, and a remedy is urgent. I think that is the opinion of us all."

Continuing, Mr. Fitzgerald said that it is common knowledge that places calling themselves massage

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