

THE FULLER EMPLOYMENT OF CERTIFIED MIDWIVES.

Sir Donald MacAlister, K.C.B., President of the General Medical Council, in the course of his Presidential Address to the General Council of Medical Education and Registration at their Winter Session, stated that "the absence on military duty of medical men in family practice, particularly in the country districts, will almost certainly lead to the fuller employment of certificated midwives. It is the more important that the training of these women should be adequate for the work they will be called upon to undertake. The Central Midwives Board for England has framed new rules providing for an extension of the course of instruction prescribed for its certificate. The rules have been transmitted by the Privy Council for the opinion of the English Branch Council, in accordance with the statute, and will be duly considered by it during the present session."

He further drew attention to the fact that there is, as yet, no corresponding statute in Scotland, and stated that strong representations had been made to the Government by leading members of the profession in favour of proceeding with the Scottish Bill in the current session of Parliament, on the ground that an emergency exists which ought to be provided for without delay. When, as President of the General Medical Council, he was consulted on the subject by the authorities, he reminded them of the declarations on the Scottish Bill communicated to the Lord President by the Council, and expressed the conviction that the claim for urgency was well founded.

This Journal, which has always stood for the adequate training of midwives for their responsible work, observes with satisfaction that the President of the General Medical Council is impressed with this necessity. But there is a necessary corollary that responsible work such as that of a midwife must be adequately paid. There is no inducement to skilled midwives to undertake district work for the fees they are able to command. The creation of a public service of midwives guaranteeing a living wage, and conferring an honourable status, is also a matter of urgency.

COVERING UNQUALIFIED PRACTICE.

A case of considerable importance was brought before the General Medical Council on November 3rd, affecting the relationship of doctor and maternity nurse, at the instance of the Central Midwives Board, as it was the first case of this nature which has been brought before the Council.

The medical man was charged with knowingly enabling a woman whose name had been removed by the Central Midwives' Board from the Roll of Midwives to practise as a midwife in contravention of the Midwives Act, 1902, as if she were duly certified under the Act. The Council found the charge proved, but postponed judgment till the next meeting, when the doctor will be required to produce evidence of his conduct in the interval.

PROBLEMS OF BREAST FEEDING.

A lecture on "Problems of Breast Feeding," one of a special course given under the auspices of the National Association for the Prevention of Infant Mortality, was delivered by Dr. Forsyth, Physician to the Evelina Hospital, at the Royal Society of Medicine, 1, Wimpole Street, on Tuesday, November 9th.

The lecturer began by saying that it had been proved up to the hilt that the percentage of mortality was far greater in the children fed by artificial means than in those breast fed. Not only so, but in the latter case the health of the children was decidedly better, and sickness and enteritis very seldom occurred. On an average the children no doubt thrived better.

The advantages from the mother's point of view were that it was certainly the cheapest, the easiest, and the simplest method. He thought it was not generally understood how much greater was the tie of affection between mother and child where breast feeding was practised.

The hindrances to this desirable practice were, he considered, often due to the mother's unwillingness to sacrifice her own pleasures for the child, and to a greater extent from the numbers and numbers of patent foods that were so widely advertised.

Artificial feeding was, he said, of comparatively recent date. Between forty and fifty years ago almost the only way of so feeding an infant was by a pap spoon or pap boat. Also a hundred years ago the milk supply was incomparably more unclean than it is at the present date, and practically the only alternative from the mother's breast was that of employing a wet nurse. There were serious abuses in connection with this practice. It being a well paid trade, young women would often become mothers of illegitimate children with the express purpose of earning their living as wet nurses. Their own offspring would be placed in the care of any person and generally died, while they themselves would be nursing the children of well-to-do mothers.

Dr. Forsyth described the physiology of milk secretion, and gave an outline of the structure of the breast.

With regard to test feeds, he did not think that much reliance could be placed on a single feed. He had himself taken observations for seven weeks of an infant's feeds, it being placed on the scales before and after every feed during that period. The results proved that the amounts varied enormously. Of two consecutive feeds, one was half an ounce, and the other three and a half ounces. The average quantity he estimated at one pint in twenty-four hours.

The care of the breasts and nipples during pregnancy and after, some causes of inability to suck on the part of the infant, some reasons for discontinuing breast feeding were among other points in the lecture.

At the present time the nutrition of the infant is a matter of paramount importance.

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