

The Midwife.

PROPOSALS FOR A STATE-AIDED MIDWIFERY SERVICE IN ENGLAND AND WALES.

The necessity for popularizing the office of midwife, if women in childbirth are to be efficiently cared for, has long since been apparent, and this has been accentuated in the present war: first, because of the shortage of medical practitioners, a shortage which must continue for years after the declaration of peace; secondly, because many attractive and lucrative occupations are open to women workers; and thirdly, because, after the war, a considerable increase of the birth rate is expected. The practice of midwifery as a means of livelihood in this country has never been popular even with those who have expended time and money in qualifying for admission to the Roll of the Central Midwives Board. Thus, in 1915-1916, there were 30,543 trained midwives on the Roll of whom only 6,754 were in practice, and 9,970 untrained midwives of whom 5,333 were in practice. It is a serious reflection for those who realize the need of skilled attention for women in childbirth, and have faith that the trained midwife is capable of rendering the service required, that though the Midwives Act has been in force for 15 years, only 6,754 trained midwives were in practice two years ago, and that number is diminishing. The presumption is that the conditions of work and remuneration obtainable are not such as to attract educated women in any numbers to adopt midwifery as a profession, and this presumption we believe to be correct.

Last week we commented upon an extremely interesting and able paper on the present and future position of the midwife, presented by Dr. E. W. Hope, M.O.H. for Liverpool, to the annual meeting of the Association for Promoting the Training and Supply of Midwives. That Association has now drafted Proposals for a State-Aided Midwifery Service in England and Wales, which has been generally approved by Queen Victoria's Jubilee Institute for Nurses, and the Incorporated Midwives Institute, as a basis for necessary legislation, and which commands interest and consideration.

This document states that "the reason that comparatively few trained midwives enter the practising side of the profession is now generally recognized to be the conditions under which a midwife works. Her life is an arduous and responsible one, yet she cannot, in present circumstances, earn a livelihood unless she undertakes so large a number of cases as to render it almost impossible for her to devote adequate attention to each case."

THE MIDWIFE'S INCOME.

Discussing the question of the midwife's income it is laid down that she should be able to secure an adequate income which should enable her to lay by for her old age and to take at least a short holiday each year. In present circumstances this is almost impossible. "Further, in assessing the income required, the expense of the training which a midwife should have received, and the great necessity for attracting and retaining a suitable type of educated women for this important form of public service should be borne in mind. . . . It is believed that an independent midwife, working in a town, cannot be considered to be earning a reasonable livelihood under normal peace conditions unless her income amounts to at least £150 per annum, or in rural or less populous areas, where living is usually less expensive, £120 per annum." We are entirely in agreement with this estimate.

Experience, we are told, has shown that the number of cases which a midwife can properly attend each year (including ante-natal care) cannot exceed 120 to 130 in a congested area and 90 to 120 in less populous areas. "It is clear, therefore, that the existing range of fees is wholly inadequate, and that for a midwife in regular work the fee per case must be 25s. Of this 25s. it is probable that 5s. might be regarded as the fee for ante-natal work. There will always be a proportion of cases where the midwife is engaged too late to do any ante-natal work, or where the birth is premature. Further, many untrained midwives are incapable of carrying out this kind of work. In such cases £1 might be regarded as the adequate fee."

PUBLIC AID NEEDED.

"The payment of a fee of 25s. is quite impossible for the great majority of those in need of midwifery aid. It is clear, therefore, that, in order that this remuneration shall be secured, it must be guaranteed from public funds, central or local, and must not be dependent on the possibility or otherwise of particular payments from the patient."

The Association is of opinion that an adequate midwifery service should be provided "for all persons who fall within the scope of the Insurance Act, or, who not being insured are below the income tax limit, or have an income of less than (say) £160 per annum," and that "the real steps needed to secure this service must be such as will provide a proper livelihood for the practising midwife. If such a livelihood could be earned, it is believed that a large proportion of the 23,000 trained midwives who are not practising would enter in and remain in practice."

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