

of this journal—that professional matters should be settled by professional people, and that the members of any calling should be under the actual control of those to whom technically they are supposed to be subordinate. To hand over Midwives to the supervision of the County Councils is an idea which might commend itself to the brains which evolved “H.M.S. Pinafore,” and is quite as amusing as any of those promulgated in that classical skit on the manners and customs of our country. But when the County Councils—composed of the most estimable gentlemen, of whom in their private capacities we speak with the greatest respect—are actually expected by this Bill to decide as to whether any given case attended—or not attended to—by a Midwife has been one of “natural labour” or not, the ridiculous deepens into the wildly farcical. We have commented upon sufficient points in the measure in our previous notices of the subject to make it unnecessary for us to do more than express our decided conviction that it is one of the most absolutely mischievous Bills ever drafted, and that touch it where one may, it is almost impossible to prevent calm consideration drifting at once into ridicule.

As we have again and again said in these columns, however, it is a thousand pities. There are beyond doubt many women at work amongst the poor who undertake the grave responsibility and work of Midwifery without possessing the smallest qualifications in knowledge or capacity for the calling. They do so without let or hindrance, and to the clearly great danger of lying-in women and infants. The problem, naturally, is how to end or amend this state of affairs, disgraceful as we do not hesitate to say that it is to any civilised people. It appears to us that the solution is very simple, even if the process occupied a long time in completion; and against the latter objection, moreover, it might well be urged that the disease has been in active existence for hundreds of years, and that no remedy, however potent, could be expected to work an acute cure in so chronic a condition. We believe that the promoters of the Midwives' Bill have started entirely at the wrong end. They have desired to place a roof upon an edifice which has not only no foundations, but is entirely and altogether in the air. Nay, more; they have chosen material for their roof at entire variance with, and in complete disproportion to, the very shadowy house which they had evolved from their inner consciousness. To shackle and tie down by law the members of a calling which is in an inchoate state would be absurd enough, as effectually preventing a future development and progress. But to give the entire authority over a body of un-

educated, unskilled, and yet nominally professional women into the hands of unprofessional men, naturally as ignorant of the calling as those whose ignorance is the great plea for legislation in the matter, is to our minds the sublimity of silliness.

It will surely not be seriously stated that even medical men are acquainted with the facts of the case. One gentleman, who loses no opportunity of informing the world that he has worked at this question for thirty years, recently brought before a London medical Society his reasons for desiring the Midwives' Bill to pass. His reasons were based upon certain figures, and these figures—being critically examined, probably for the first time, by gentlemen able to understand and appreciate them—were conclusively proved to be based upon—well, to put it very mildly indeed—a rubbish heap.

We have taken a different course, and have carefully digested all the information which we could obtain upon the subject. Our first conclusion, that some remedy was essential, we have repeatedly stated. The next result at which we have arrived is, that there is not sufficient irrefutable evidence and undeniable data, at present available, upon which any remedy likely to be at all effective could be based. Incidentally, we may say that we have also arrived at precisely the same conclusion with regard to Nurses. And this has led us to admire still more the proceeding adopted by the British Nurses' Association in refraining from any attempt even to obtain a Royal Charter, and so trammel its power of future action, until it had first discovered by actual experience the corresponding information about the training and education of Nurses.

Our advice, then, to the promoters of the Midwives' Bill is very simple. As soon as the measure is rejected by the House of Commons, let them persuade some professional people to form a Registration Board for Midwives, and register these workers and get them gradually under control on the lines the British Nurses' Association has so excellently pointed out. It is, we know, a matter of regret to many that that Association so hastily declined the request made to it to undertake the work on the ground that Parliamentary powers were to be sought for on behalf of Midwives, which took the subject entirely beyond the common sense scheme it proposed to carry out for Nurses.

[Owing to an unusual press of “Correspondence” we have been compelled to hold over our “Echoes” columns this week.—ED.]

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