

The Midwife.

THE MIDWIVES BILL.

We briefly announced last week the result of the Debate on the Committee stage of the Midwives Bill in the House of Commons, when Mr. Hayes Fisher stated that "it is the intention of the Privy Council which governs this matter to give direct representation to midwives on the Board."

THE DIRECT REPRESENTATION OF MIDWIVES.

It is very essential that a definite statement should be made on behalf of the President of the Local Government Board as to the meaning of the term "direct representation" which the House of Commons decided on Monday, October 21st, should be granted on their governing body to certified midwives. Speaking in the representative Chamber, during the Committee stage, on the clause of the Bill which he presented, the Right Honble. Gentleman said:—"It is the intention of the Privy Council which governs this matter to give direct representation to midwives on the Central Midwives Board. There are already, I believe, two women on this Board, and it is intended to increase the number and to have direct representation of midwives upon it." The question was then put, and the clause under consideration agreed to.

The House of Commons therefore unquestionably granted to midwives the right to send representatives elected by themselves to their governing body—the Central Midwives Board.

At a later stage in the debate a new clause was proposed by Mr. Watt as an amendment to Section 3 of the principal Act as follows:—

"The following sub-section shall be added after sub-section (3) of section 3 of the principal Act:—

"(4) Three persons, who shall be certified midwives, to be elected for a term of three years by the certified midwives practising in England."

In moving the second reading of this clause, Mr. Watt said:—

"It provides that three certified midwives should be elected on the Central Midwives Board. When the 1902 Act was passed, the Board had power to deprive midwives of their livelihood, and I believe this Board still has the same power. It is the opinion of my honourable and gallant friend (Major Chapple), who placed this new clause on the paper, that the midwives themselves should be represented on the Central Midwives Board."

The President of the Local Government Board said, in reply: "I am informed by the Privy Council that this proposal would necessitate setting up very cumbersome and expensive machinery

and I think it would be better to deal with this question of representation of midwives through the first Clause, which provides machinery by which that can be effected. I am told that this proposal would result in a very haphazard and unsatisfactory representation of the midwives, and I see no reason for setting up machinery of this kind which is not in the Scottish and the Irish Acts. I think we should be satisfied with the provision in Clause 1, which enables us to provide for the representatives of the midwives on the Board."

But the question remains whether, the House of Commons having granted direct representation to midwives, it is not the duty of the President of the Local Government Board, who has charge of the Bill, to provide the machinery to give effect to that mandate. Nobody is in a better position to understand what is meant by the term "direct representation" than the House of Commons. There is further the precedent of the medical profession, which has secured the highly prized right of electing five direct representatives on the General Medical Council.

It cannot with any logic or justice be argued that midwives nominated to seats by their governing body—the method provided for in the first Clause of the Bill—are the direct representatives of the class governed. It would be equally just to say that workpeople nominated by their employers to sit on a board to discuss their mutual relations are the direct representatives of the employees.

The effect of Clause I of the Bill is to place the future revision of the Constitution of the Central Midwives Board in the hands of the Board itself:—(1) "The Central Midwives Board may at any time represent to the Privy Council that it is expedient to modify the constitution of the Board either by (a) increasing or diminishing the number of persons appointed by any body or person, or (b) abolishing the power of appointment by any body or person, or (c) conferring on any body or person a power of appointment of one or more persons, or (d) altering the term of office or qualifications of any members.

(2) The Privy Council before considering such representation shall cause it to be laid before both Houses of Parliament."

Unless either House of Parliament presents an Address to His Majesty within forty days declaring that such representation, or any part thereof, ought not to be given effect to, the Privy Council may report to His Majesty that it is expedient to give effect to the representation, when this may be done by Order in Council. It will be realised, therefore, that the controlling voice as to its constitution is practically given to the Central Midwives Board.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)