

The Midwife.

THE RIGHTS OF THE UNBORN CHILD.

The duty of giving skilled nursing care to mothers of illegitimate children in their confinements is, we should imagine, a self-evident proposition, did we not know that committees of voluntary nursing associations frequently refuse to allow the nurses under their control to attend these cases.

It is difficult to understand the attitude of mind of these "unco guid and rigidly righteous" ladies who, from the comfortable security of well-ordered homes, condemn a woman in her hour of anguish to neglect, and possibly to death, as the result of that neglect.

They talk of "not condoning sin." Very well. The sin has occurred. Whose sin? That of the two primarily concerned. But the local community cannot wash its hands of responsibility for contributory causes, as, for instance, housing conditions, which are frequently a scandal to any civilised community, and a direct incentive to immorality. What have the "unco guid" done to remedy these? Let them ask their own consciences.

Many years ago Charles Kingsley, spokesman for the people and passionate lover of justice, put into the mouth of a poacher's widow the words:—

Our daughters with base-born babies
Have wandered away in their shame,
If your misses had slept, Squire, where they did,
Your misses might do the same.

What are the alternatives for the woman approaching her confinement if the local nursing association, which probably also includes local midwifery in its scope, refuses its help? She may stay at home and get what untrained nursing she can, running the risk of septic poisoning in consequence; or go to the poor law infirmary. "Quite right, too," say the ladies of the committee of the local nursing association. But a nurse knows better; knows how easy it is, having taken one step down, to take another, unless a helping hand is held out; knows how, if she goes to the infirmary, a girl with her first baby comes under the very influences from which it is expedient to keep her. In the workhouse maternity ward she will find women who are ready to help her to lead a life of sin when she is convalescent, and to become one of that sad company of "ins and outs" who are the despair of the Eugenist and the perennial problem of the social worker.

And what of the unborn child? The community and the State have their duty towards this most defenceless and unprotected unit. The lot of the illegitimate child is never an easy one, but its difficulties are immeasurably accentuated if throughout life it has to meet the taunt of having been born in a workhouse. Only the most forceful characters will overcome such a handicap.

It will be an ill day when the nursing and midwifery professions require a certificate of

moral rectitude as a qualification for the help to which sickness, pain and necessity should be the only passport.

RESIGNED RATHER THAN BE A PARTY TO IT.

It was reported at a meeting of the Billericay (Essex) Board of Guardians last week that the local nursing associations' committees had resigned in consequence of the Local Government Board's decision that nurses should attend all cases of confinement when required (presumably if they are to be qualified for a Local Government Board subsidy). The committees decided that they could not attend single women or widows, and resigned rather than be a party to it.

The Rev. P. Loseby, rector of North Benfleet, characterised the attitude of the ladies on these committees as scandalous. If it was on moral grounds it was a gravely mistaken view, and if it was some "sentimental balderdash" the Board should express a strong opinion.

We wonder whether these ladies would "be a party to it," if the case concerned was a girl of their own class. Would they deprive her of nursing care because her baby was not born in wedlock? And if not why should there be one law for the middle class sinner who can afford to pay several guineas a week for her nurse, and another for her erring sister who is dependent on "charity"? The tender mercies of the righteous as well as of the wicked are often cruel where the poor are concerned and it is well that the Local Government Board, as representing the State, should step in and see justice done.

THE MISSION OF HOPE.

A Society which is doing good work for the unmarried mother and her child is the Mission of Hope, the headquarters of which are at 30, Denman Street, London Bridge, S.E. 1. That there is need for such help as it offers will be realised from its report. In the first nine months of last year three thousand girls and young women, unmarried mothers, or expectant mothers, appealed for aid in their grave trouble to this one society alone and that on its present income the Mission can only deal with 500 maternity cases yearly, these being girls who have previously borne good characters. And supposing a girl is seen safely through her trouble, what is the prospect for her subsequently? One writes: "I have worn my feet off walking about trying to find a home for baby," yet, "unless such a home be found, what is the unhappy mother to do?" asks a supporter of the Homes connected with the Mission of Hope. "A situation is impossible; the workhouse, 'the street,' or 'the river' is the only and terrible way." It is up to a Christian nation to find a different solution, not only for the mother, but for dear innocent little children.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)