

The Midwife.

AN HISTORICAL OUTLINE.

FROM SUSPICION TO CO-OPERATION.

Great pressure on our space has prevented us so far from alluding to the extremely interesting and extremely valuable address on "The Early History of the Central Midwives Board, and the Organisation of Midwifery in England and Wales," given by Sir George Fordham, who was for nine years a member of that Board, to the Cambridge-shire Nursing Association at their annual meeting held in the County Hall, Cambridge.

Sir George said in part:—

A Departmental Committee, before which I gave evidence, sat in 1909, and, in its report, made a number of minor suggestions, mainly arising through the experience gained in the working of the Act. An amending Act was not, however, passed until nine years later, in 1918.

I am not dealing to-day, however, with modern developments so much as with the early history and work of the Central Midwives Board for England and Wales, on which body I represented the County Councils' Association for about nine years—from the end of the year 1904 to the spring of 1914—and of which I was Honorary Treasurer.

Of the twenty years' work of the Board it may be said that its duty during the first half of that period was largely constructive. In the past ten or twelve years the constructive work has practically disappeared, leaving the Board free for the discharge of its important administrative and routine duties, very sufficient in magnitude and burden to occupy its attention.

The Board was first set up to consist of nine members only—four being medical practitioners appointed by various medical institutions; two (of whom one was to be a woman) appointed by the Privy Council, and the other three appointed respectively by the County Councils' Association, the Queen Victoria Jubilee Institute for Nurses, and the Royal British Nurses' Association. It has since been enlarged (from April 1st, 1921) to 14 members, but during my long term of office in the early stage of its existence I, as representative of the County Councils' Association, found myself on the Board as the only layman and the only representative of local government administration in England and Wales, and thus in a position both interesting and onerous. It was necessary to hold very frequent meetings, both of the Board and of committees, and this will be understood when I proceed, as I now propose to do shortly, to enumerate the various phases of the constructive and administrative responsibilities imposed on the Board by its statutory constitution.

THE MIDWIVES ROLL.

The first great work was the setting up of the Roll of Certified Midwives. The foundation of the Roll—now rapidly and happily disappearing—

was the large body of women who were able to satisfy the Board that at the passing of the Act they had been for at least one year in *bona fide* practice as midwives, and that they bore good characters. Certain certificates from institutions also justified inclusion in the Roll. Claims had to be made within two years from the coming into operation of the Act (April 1st, 1903). The Roll, as thus constituted, was closed in 1905, and, as reported to the Board on May 19th of that year, the Roll then contained 22,300 names, of which 12,521 were those of *bona fide* midwives; 7,458 were admitted on the certificate of the Obstetrical Society of London, and the remaining 2,321 had obtained diplomas from a number of other institutions, nineteen in all, which had been admitted to this privilege.

TRAINING AND EXAMINATION.

Concurrently with the setting up of the Roll itself, a matter of immense labour and routine for the officers of the Board, but which did not involve the Board itself in much which required their formal decisions, the question of the training of the new midwives and their examination was one involving, in all its early stages, much constructive labour and professional knowledge.

The Board, by its rules, laid down the method and time of teaching, and by resolutions accepted, or refused, the applications of training homes and hospitals, as recognised schools, and individuals as qualified teachers, and for the purpose of certificates of teaching, without which admission to the Board's examinations were refused.

A large panel of examiners was set up, from which the special examiners for each examination were selected—the papers set being subject to general co-ordination, so as to maintain, as far as possible, a settled standard of knowledge in the women admitted to the Roll.

The first examination was held on June 27th, 1905, and the second on October 24th of the same year, and it was at that time appointed that four examinations should be held annually, in January, April, July and October, a practice which still continues.

In the first set of rules the minimum period for training was three months only, and, no doubt, the papers and standard of examination were framed on this very limited basis; but I had no special acquaintance at any time with either training or examination—and, indeed, never during my membership of the Board did I actually even attend in the Examination Hall to watch the proceedings.

As regards the medical and sanitary side of the large questions and the many minute issues involved, although I assisted at their discussion, and possibly usefully in some respects, particularly as regards drafting, I cannot pretend to deal here to-day with the history of the development of this code. It is familiar to most of my audience.

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