

The Midwife.

MIDWIVES AND MATERNITY HOMES BILL.

The Midwives and Maternity Homes Bill, which proposes (1) to amend the Midwives Act of 1902 and 1918; and (2) to provide for the registration of Maternity Homes, was considered on Tuesday, April 20th, and Thursday, April 22nd, by Standing Committee A of the House of Commons, under the Chairmanship of Major Sir Richard Barnett.

PART I.

Amendment of the Midwives Acts, 1902 and 1918.

CLAUSE 1.

SIR KINGSLEY WOOD (Woolwich, U.), Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Health, proposed an Amendment to Clause I, Subsection (2), concerning which he said: "This is really a drafting Amendment, but it is to make it perfectly clear, following the practice of the Midwives Acts for some time now—and I hope it will always continue—that there should be no possibility of admitting any man to the Midwives' Roll, and I do not want it to appear, even by implication, that there is any such suggestion. If the words I am proposing in this, and one of two following Amendments consequential upon it, are carried, it will read as follows:—

"If any person being either a male person, or a woman, not certified under this Act attends a woman in childbirth otherwise than under the direction and personal supervision of a duly qualified medical practitioner, that person shall, unless he or she satisfies the court that the attention was given in a case of sudden or urgent necessity, be liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding ten pounds."

SIR KINGSLEY WOOD pointed out that this would also obviate the necessity of Clause 4 in the Bill, which is:—

"The Midwives Acts, 1902 and 1918, and this Act, shall apply to a midwife who is a male as they apply to a midwife who is a female, and accordingly words in the Midwives Acts, 1902 and 1918, importing the female gender shall, so far as necessary to give effect to the foregoing provision, include males."

DR. VERNON DAVIES (Lancaster, Royton, U.), enquired how medical students would be dealt with who, as a part of their training, had to undertake a certain number of midwifery cases on their own, and SIR KINGSLEY WOOD undertook to give further consideration to the question of medical students if necessary.

MAJOR HILLS (Yorks, West Riding, Ripon, U.), moved an amendment, substituting for the words, "personal supervision of a duly qualified medical practitioner," the words, "in the presence of a Registered Medical Practitioner."

LIEUT.-COLONEL FREMANTLE (St. Albans, U.), said the Act had worked very well, but even in his profession there were a few black sheep, who worked with "handy women." He urged that the Ministry of Health should consult the General Medical Council. (This SIR KINGSLEY WOOD undertook to do.) COLONEL FREMANTLE wished the conduct of a medical man in deliberately abstaining from being present at a case of childbirth, when a handy woman was working under his direction to be considered "infamous conduct" by the General Medical Council.

MR. RHYS DAVIES (Lancaster, West Houghton, La.), supporting the amendment before the Committee, said he would like to know how many of these unqualified men there were? "I quite agree," he said, "that it is a very

indelicate matter for a man to act in this capacity. If it be intended to rule them out, I would like to know if there are sufficient women to do the work. I should not like to do anything to reduce the number of those doing this kind of work, whether they are men or women."

SIR KINGSLEY WOOD said the Government supported the Bill because it was making for the time (which you could not bring about immediately), when every woman in confinement would be looked after by a qualified person. With regard to the Amendment, the first Clause was a great step forward. The phrase in the Bill, "personal supervision," meant that a medical man actually took charge, but if they said "in the presence of a doctor," as had been suggested, he would have to stay throughout the confinement, otherwise he would not be safe. This he regarded as impracticable.

MAJOR HILLS did not press his amendment, and on SIR KINGSLEY WOOD expressing the hope that the Committee would accept the Amendment as it appeared on the Paper, this was agreed to, and after two consequential Amendments had been made, the Clause as amended was ordered to stand part of the Bill.

CLAUSE 2.

On Clause 2, SIR KINGSLEY WOOD moved to leave out Subsection (1) and to insert instead thereof a new Subsection:—

"Where a midwife has been suspended from practice in order to prevent the spread of infection she shall, if she was not herself in default, be entitled to recover from the local supervising authority such amount by way of compensation for loss of practice as is reasonable in the circumstances of the case."

The amendment, he said, was necessary in order to meet the case of a few local authorities which had refused to give compensation.

Clause 2 contains two other subsections: Subsection (2), which limits the time in which a doctor called in to assist a midwife in case of emergency must submit his claim for the payment of a fee within two months from the date on which he was called in; and subsection (3), which empowers Local Supervising Authorities, subject to the sanction of the Minister of Health, to make arrangements with any pregnant woman in their area for the payment, whether by instalments or not, of such sum as may be agreed upon to cover any liability which the Authority may incur in respect of fees payable to medical practitioners who may be called in by midwives.

The Amendment to subsection (1) was agreed to, and the Clause, as amended, was ordered to stand part of the Bill.

CLAUSE 3.

On Clause 3, which provides for the retention of names on the Roll of Midwives and the payment of an annual fee not exceeding 2s. 6d., SIR KINGSLEY WOOD said he thought it would be for the convenience of the Committee if he now explained the new Clause which he wanted to move to insert instead of Clause 3, later on. This new Clause was as follows:—

"(1) The Central Midwives Board may, if they think fit, cause the roll of midwives to be divided into two parts, of which one shall contain the names of all those practising midwives whose names have been supplied to the Board by local supervising authorities in the month of January in each year, in accordance with the provisions of section eight of The Midwives Act, 1902, and shall be published annually, and the other shall contain the names of all other persons who are entitled to be on the roll,

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