

The Midwife.

A BILL INTITULED AN ACT TO RESTRICT THE SALE, DISPLAY, AND ADVERTISEMENT OF CONTRACEPTIVES.

The Bill introduced by Lord Dawson of Penn into the House of Lords to restrict the sale, display, and advertisement of contraceptives, which passed its Second Reading on February 13th, by 46 votes to six, deals with a question of the gravest social importance, and Lord Dawson has performed a public duty in lifting the veil which has obscured the widespread evil in our midst, which is corroding the health and morals of the nation—the shameless trade in contraceptives, which, for gain, flaunts them before the young, and inexperienced, appealing to the strongest impulse in those entering upon manhood and womanhood; a trade which if not recognised for the evil thing it is, and dealt with accordingly, must lead to racial suicide, physical and moral.

The Bill had the support of the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Bishop of London and the Bishop of St. Albans, who though disassociating themselves from some of the views expressed by Lord Dawson in supporting the measure, when notifying their intention to vote for the Second Reading, all gave overwhelming proof of the urgency for the passing of such an Act.

The question is one upon which it behoves nurses and midwives to think intelligently, and to be able to give clear reasons for their considered opinions, when these are invited, as assuredly they will be, in the course of their work.

Let us first point out what Lord Dawson made clear in his opening remarks in moving the Second Reading of the Bill, when he said: "Opinions on birth control and contraceptives cannot be intelligently considered one without the other . . . I would like at once to identify myself with the view that the way of keeping the sale and use of contraceptives on sound lines is to remove that veil of doubt as to the honesty of contraception. It is the fact that there is a doubt as to its cleanness and its honesty which prevents honest traders from taking contraceptives into their trades, and thereby the profits remain too large and the sale of contraceptives gets into the hands of less scrupulous traders. If this slur were removed this would be altered and the movement would get into more normal channels."

Lord Dawson's Bill is a very moderate measure proposing to make illegal the sale of any contraceptive "in any street or public place, or by means of an automatic machine so placed that it can be used by persons in any street or public place."

To make it illegal to display any contraceptive in or outside any shop or any picture or written description of any contraceptive so as to be visible to persons outside the shop. That, Lord Dawson explained, is what determines it. No limitation is placed upon what the owner of the shop wishes to put inside the shop nor is there any restriction on the sale of contraceptives to any person at any age.

Some will think that this does not go far enough, and that it should be illegal to purchase contraceptives except on the prescription of a medical practitioner, as are certain drugs at the present time.

The Bill would also make it illegal "to send or deliver or cause to be sent or delivered to any unmarried person who has not attained the age of eighteen years (for the purpose of any trade or business) any circular, advertisement or other document containing information of any kind whatsoever relating to any contraceptive"—a provision

which Lord Dawson considers requires a drafting amendment.

He would also amend Section 1 (1) (b) which as at present drafted makes it illegal "to go to the premises of any person and there sell, or offer for sale, any contraceptive, unless the sale or offer is made in pursuance of a previous request of that person, or the premises are used by a dealer in contraceptives, who buys to sell again."

In explaining this paragraph Lord Dawson said "it is obvious that you must except from its operation, nurses, midwives, and doctors." We must make the strongest objection to any such exception in regard to nurses and midwives, and we are sure that both registered nurses and certified midwives would be practically unanimous in endorsing this objection.

With birth control—a totally different matter from birth prevention—the Bill makes no attempt to deal nor does it intrude upon the sacred intimacies of married persons, and the regulation of their families as conscience and circumstances direct. Such regulation surely is dictated by a higher sense of duty and responsibility than thoughtless and indiscriminate breeding.

What the Bill does attempt to do, and this surely must commend it to every right thinking person, is to protect children and young persons "from having contraceptives pushed at them either by means of automatic machines in the public streets or by lurid displays in shops."

As evidence of the increasing sale in contraceptives Lord Dawson stated that one firm at the present time turns out 8½ millions per year. Also that home production is reinforced by large importations from abroad.

The Bishop of London, speaking with eloquence and intense earnestness, invited their Lordships to take this matter very seriously, and announcing that he was going enthusiastically to support the Bill, spoke with an intimate knowledge of the evils of the indiscriminate advertisement of the use of contraceptives. These evils had been brought to his attention as Chairman of the London Public Morality Council. His last illustration was one which had reached him that morning. "A man stood outside St. James's Park Station speaking to a crowd and said: 'This book is very interesting; why have the unwanted child, a burden round your neck? I should not advocate interfering with the course of nature, but the unwanted child need not arise. Read this book and you will be able to behave with confidence when you take your lady friend out for an evening.'" He appealed to the House for the sake of the young people to pass the Bill.

Viscount Fitzalan of Derwentwater stressed the fact that boys and girls of whatever age can obtain contraceptives at any hour of the day or night by simply putting a coin into the slot of an automatic machine, and submitted that this was something which must tend to deprave the youth of this country.

The Archbishop of Canterbury said that their Lordships would notice that Lord Dawson's whole point was that, "although, as he believes, on medical and other grounds, it might be permissible for persons in the married state to limit or even avoid parenthood, that can be no excuse for encouraging the wide use of these contraceptives in order to enable unmarried persons to enjoy sexual intercourse without fear of awkward consequences, and to use these things so as to enable them to regard the indulgence in sexual intercourse apart from marriage as a mere matter of pleasure." The Archbishop emphasised that Lord Dawson "would not have taken the responsibility of bringing in this Bill unless he had two convictions—

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)