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EDITORIAL.

THE NURSE-MIDWIFE.

The Bill to amend the Midwives Acts, 1902 to 1926, now before the House of Commons, raises issues of serious and far-reaching importance for Registered Nurses which it is to the highest degree essential that they should appreciate.

The Main Purpose of the Bill.

As we have already informed our readers, the main purpose of the Bill is to improve the standard of domiciliary midwifery in England and Wales by establishing an adequate service of salaried midwives, and it places on each local supervising authority an obligation to secure an adequate service within its area, and provides for an Exchequer grant towards the cost of the new Service.

Clause 6 (1) of the Bill provides that "if, on and after the date on which this section is applied to the area of any authority or to any county district contained therein, any person, being a woman neither certified under the principal Act nor registered under the Nurses' Registration Act, 1919, or a male person, receives any remuneration for attending in that area or district as a nurse on a woman in childbirth or at any time during the ten days immediately after childbirth, that person shall be liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding ten pounds."

So far so good, under this Clause the interests of women in childbirth, of Registered Nurses, and of the taxpayers are justly considered. Women in childbirth because they are assured of skilled attendance, Registered Nurses because their services will not be dispensed with for the sake of cheapness for those of unskilled and possibly dangerous substitutes, and the taxpayer who will perforce contribute to the General Exchequer contribution to be paid out of moneys provided by Parliament, in the event of material additional expenditure being imposed on any class of local authorities by reason of the institution of a new Service.

It is in the highest degree important that this new Service to be established under the authority of, and subsidised by, Parliament should be established on a just and sound basis, and it is necessary to watch the progress of the Bill as it passes through the various stages.

A Divergence of Opinion.

The point upon which it has been evident during the Committee stage that there is a divergence of opinion is that the local supervising authorities shall be authorised to enter into arrangements with welfare

councils or voluntary organisations to carry out the work made obligatory upon them by the Bill. Some members of the Committee approve of this method while others consider that their work in this connection "is almost done, and what has to take their place is a well-equipped, well-organised and well-endowed public institution."

This point is of considerable importance, as Sir Francis Fremantle pointed out to the Committee the Queen's Institute of District Nursing is "the main centralisation of these voluntary organisations," and the Council of the British College of Nurses has addressed a letter to the Minister of Health urging that if this work is carried out through the County Nursing Associations under the Queen's Institute, it should be identified with midwives not with nurses, and the midwives recognised as working under County *Midwives* Associations.

This would be quite in accordance with the purposes for which the Institute was founded by Queen Victoria, out of the surplus of the Women's Jubilee Offering, for the Committee nominated by Her Majesty in 1887, to advise her upon the best means of giving effect to her desire, suggested that the Queen's Nurses should be "women of some education and refinement; and that they should have a special training in district nursing and in the work of maternity hospitals, so that they may be qualified to attend poor women after childbirth."

At that time, and indeed for many years after, neither midwives nor nurses were registered by the State. The Midwives Act for England and Wales was passed in 1902, but when midwives were organised by the Queen's Institute for work throughout the country it was under the title of County Nursing Associations. Medical opposition to the Midwives Act had not then died down, and we have high authority for stating that it was felt there would have been strong opposition to the organisation of County Midwives Associations.

Now, however, that argument has no substance, and both nurses and midwives in England and Wales have honourable legal status, nurses under the Nurses' Registration Act, 1919, and midwives under the Midwives Act, 1902, and we submit that the title of Nursing Associations should no longer cover certified midwives who have only an elementary knowledge of nursing.

Either the County Nursing Associations should comprise only women who hold the double qualification of State Registered Nurse and State Certified Midwife, or, in order to be eligible for State subsidies, they should be described as County Midwives Associations.

The sick poor in rural districts need nurses who are as skilled as those who work in urban districts; indeed, it

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