

The Midwife.

REPORT ON THE WORK OF THE CENTRAL MIDWIVES BOARD.

The Report of the work of the Central Midwives Board for the year ended on March 31st, 1937, deals with specially important developments in the work of the Board. It states, indeed, that the year under review has been a period of far-reaching development in the midwifery profession in England and Wales, and will perhaps be regarded by future generations as approaching very near in importance, so far as members of the profession and those to whom they minister are concerned, the year 1902, during which the first Midwives Act for England and Wales was placed on the Statute Book and the foundations were laid for the establishment of a well-ordered, properly trained profession of midwives. The Board is proud to have had an opportunity of contributing to the development which has taken place and has welcomed with gratification the effecting of various improvements (noted in later sections of this report) which the performance of its duties has led it to consider desirable.

The first Midwives' Act was passed in 1902, and there has been a steady elimination of untrained midwives from the Roll. The trained women are now 63,543 in number and the untrained 1,503, the respective percentages being 97.7 and 2.3. The total number of midwives practising during 1936, according to the returns made by Local Supervising Authorities, is 16,648, of whom 16,334, or 98.1 per cent., are trained and 314, or 1.9 per cent., untrained.

EXAMINATIONS.

The number of candidates entering for examination during the year under review was 4,190 as against 4,155 in the previous year, an increase of 35.

Of 4,134 candidates who completed their examination 2,928 passed, the corresponding figures for the year ended March 31st, 1936, being 4,110 and 3,036.

Of the 2,928 successful candidates 2,465, or 84.2 per cent., were admitted to examination on the reduced period of midwifery training by virtue of having undergone general nursing training recognised by the Board.

The percentage of failures was 29.2 as against 26.1 in the previous year and 25.1 in 1935.

MIDWIFE-TEACHERS' EXAMINATION.

The sixth Midwife-Teachers' examination conducted under the authority of the Board was held during the year.

The Report states that 52 candidates entered for the written part of Part I of the examination, and of these two withdrew during the course of the examination and seven were rejected.

Of the 43 candidates who attended the oral examination 21 failed to satisfy the examiners and consequently were not permitted to proceed to Part II of the examination. The candidates successful at Part I of the examination, together with six candidates who were excused from sitting for that part since they had failed only in the teaching and demonstration part of the examination in the previous year's examination, presented themselves for Part II of the examination; 15 were successful, and of these two were existing teachers.

THE MAIN PROBLEMS BEFORE THE BOARD.

In the firm belief that the generally desired further improvement in the standard of skill and proficiency of

midwives cannot be effected until there is an adequate supply of teachers possessing not only skill in the practice of midwifery but also teaching ability of a high order, the Board has devoted special attention to the question of how best to secure, quickly, sufficient teachers of the type required. Almost without exception the midwives who are responsible at the present time for the instruction of pupil-midwives are most skilful midwives, but, unfortunately, the most skilled practitioner is not always the best teacher. Some of the existing teachers do not possess any real aptitude for teaching; others would become good teachers if they were given the opportunity of receiving proper training in the difficult art of teaching. The main problems before the Board have been (i) how to discover the midwives who possess a natural aptitude for teaching and (ii) how best to instruct such midwives in teaching methods.

The Board hopes that in course of time it will be assisted in the solution of the first problem as a result of the appointment, after the close of period to which this report relates, of an officer to be known as the Educational Supervisor.

If the necessary financial resources were available the most satisfactory solution of the second problem would be the establishment of a permanent national centre providing residential instruction for prospective midwifery teachers. It appears probable that a rapid and marked improvement in the training of pupil-midwives and in the general standard of midwifery practice would result from the establishment of such a centre. As a first step, the Board asked one of the approved training institutions, the City of London Maternity Hospital, if it would consider arranging, as an experiment, an intensive residential course extending over three months in preparation for the Board's Midwife-Teachers' Examination. The Hospital agreed to organise such a course in the autumn of 1937.

The Board was most gratified to receive the support in this experiment of the National Birthday Trust, who generously awarded four scholarships open to midwives attending the residential course.

PENAL CASES.

The Board state that the largest number of midwives who were dealt with under its penal powers was 128 in 1911. In that year the names of 74 midwives were ordered to be removed from the Roll; 36 midwives were censured or cautioned; in 10 cases sentence was postponed and in eight cases no action was taken. Since 1915 there has been a marked and almost uninterrupted decline in the number of midwives dealt with under the Board's penal powers, and the fact that last year (the year ended March 31st, 1937) only 18 of the 16,648 midwives who notified their intention to practise had to be dealt with in this way is a source of gratification to the Board and should be a source of pride to members of the midwifery profession and to those concerned with the supervision of midwives.

SUPERVISION OF MIDWIVES.

The Board welcomed the regulations, made by the Minister of Health under Section 9 (2) of the Midwives Act, 1936, prescribing the qualifications of persons appointed by Local Supervising Authorities to exercise supervision over practising midwives. The Board is of the opinion that these regulations, by requiring that persons appointed in future to act as supervisors of midwives must have had actual experience of midwifery practice, should in large measure remedy the major defects which, as the Board is

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)