

The Midwife.

THE CENTRAL MIDWIVES BOARD.

Report submitted to the Minister of Health by the Board on its work during the year ended March 31st, 1945.

This is a report of the work of women engaged in the most valuable national service, and its opening paragraph, let us hope, will never be necessary in any coming year.

This report, it is stated, relates to the year ended March 31st, 1945. It has been written at a time when it is possible to record that, although they are not to receive any official recognition, not even defence medals, the war service of the midwives has been of the highest value to the community and reflects proud honour on the midwives themselves. Almost unsung and unhonoured, they perform a public service of prime importance with a devotion which is an example to all.

ROLL OF MIDWIVES.

On March 31st, 1945, the Roll of Midwives contained the names of 70,595 women, being 1,736 more than at the end of 1944. According to the returns to the Board by local supervising authorities the number of midwives notifying their intention to practise during the calendar year 1944 was 16,374, being 303 more than in 1944. An analysis of midwives who notified intention to practise in 1944 provides useful information. About 32 per cent. of them are or have been married. Since relatively few married midwives work in institutions, the proportion of domiciliary midwives who are or have been married must be nearly 46 per cent. Just over 5 per cent. of the practising midwives were generally trained nurses at the time of their enrolment as midwives. The term "generally trained nurse," in this connection, includes all those allowed by the Board under rules now superseded to take a shortened period of training.

Approximately 69 per cent. of the pupil midwives who were State Registered Nurses began their first period of midwifery training within one year of passing the Final State Examination. Between 92 and 93 per cent. of the pupil midwives who took the second period of training did so within six months of passing the First Examination.

Midwife Teachers' Certificate Examination.

The number of candidates presenting themselves for this Certificate shows a slight decrease compared with last year. Approximately, 63 per cent. of approved training institutions have a person holding this qualification on the staff.

Approved courses in preparation for the examination were held in London, Birmingham, Liverpool, and Manchester.

Finance.

Comparing the Board's accounts for 1944 with those for 1943, the total income was higher by £237, and total expenditure was higher by £373. These increases were due mainly to examination receipts and expenditure and to increases in expenditure on printing.

The table showing the number of women whose names were enrolled in, added to, or removed from the Midwives' Roll for each year from 1926 to 1945 inclusive is a valuable record.

The work of the Midwives Board is exceedingly valuable, and every encouragement should be given to Registered Nurses to add this additional skill to their work as nurses. We are of opinion that the profession of nursing should be effectively represented on the Midwives Board—which at present it is not. No profession is of greater national value than nursing when midwifery is efficiently included in the curriculum.

TRIBUTE TO MIDWIVES.

Maternal Mortality Rate Reduced During War.

Alderman Charles Key, Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Health, addressing the London Summer School of the College of Midwives, said that 1,500 practising midwives were needed to bring the midwifery service up to full strength.

In a tribute to the magnificent way in which midwives, despite the shortages in their numbers, had grappled with wartime difficulties, Alderman Key pointed out that in 1944—the last full year of war—766,526 babies were born, nearly 120,600 more births than in 1938, the last year of peace. Yet there was no corresponding increase in the number of midwives. In fact, the figure for 1938 was 17,494 midwives, against approximately 16,000 in 1944; in other words, there was on the average one midwife for every 38 births in 1938 and one for every 48 births in 1944.

Yet despite the extra burdens thrown on midwives—they attend nearly 90 per cent. of births and are in sole charge of about 65 per cent.—the toll of childbirth had been reduced during the war.

The maternal mortality rate fell from 2.97 per thousand total births in 1938 to 1.95 in 1944, and the infant mortality rate from 53 per thousand live births to 46. While increased attention to ante-natal supervision and better social care of the expectant mother—the extra milk and vitamin supplements provided by the Government—had played a part in these improvements, no one would deny that they were in the main due to the skill and magnificent sense of responsibility of the midwives themselves.

Alderman Key stressed the value of midwifery training in a nurse's career and the importance that conditions in the midwifery services should be such as to attract recruits and retain them after training.

LAST WORDS, 1945!

With a clear conscience THE BRITISH JOURNAL OF NURSING makes its bow for 1945. Throughout this fateful year it has stood firmly for professional self-government for Registered Nurses in opposition to absorption by the Labour Office, and to de-grading of professional status and proficiency. But do not let its readers fail to realize that people are governed as they deserve, and if the rank and file of our profession fail to appreciate their duty, their apathy depreciates the status of the whole profession. Let each Registered Nurse unite in a self-governing organisation and play her part. The sick have need of you.

The first Nightingale-century is drawing to its close. How have we kept the faith? Let there be searching of hearts and no failure of courage and self-sacrifice in the coming year: "Zeal is like fire; it needs both feeding and watching" (*Proverb*).

THE MARRIAGE OF QUEEN ELIZABETH.

Concerning marriage, I have been long since persuaded that I was sent into this world by God to do those things chiefly which may tend to His glory. I have already joined myself in marriage to a husband, namely the Kingdom of England. And do not upbraid me with miserable lack of children, for everyone of you, and as many as are Englishmen, are children and kinsmen to me.

*Queen Elizabeth's answer to Parliament,
which had urged her to marry.*