

MIDWIVES REGISTRATION BILL.

SIR,—Several points raised with reference to the Midwives Bill call for notice.

1. *The Restriction of Practice to Registered Midwives only.*—A clause for this special purpose is not inserted in the Bill because it follows the lines laid down by the Select Committee on Midwives' Registration. It advised that a certain term should be protected and restricted. The point was raised at least a dozen times in the course of its various sittings, and is thus referred to in the summary at the end of the 1892 evidence: "It is admitted that unqualified women cannot be prevented by law from practising." The explanation repeatedly given, privately, was that Parliament would not sanction the formation of a monopoly in such a matter. In only protecting certain terms titles, the Bill follows the precedents set it in the Medical, the Dentists, the Veterinary Surgeons, and other similar Acts. Anyone desirous of testing the feeling of Parliament on the matter can easily get an amendment moved to that end. The method adopted in the present Bill has, however, already received the sanction of the House of Lords.

2. *The Statutory Limitation of the Sphere of Practice of Midwives.*—The insertion of a special clause making it obligatory on midwives registered under the Act to send for a medical practitioner in face of any unusual labour, or of any unsatisfactory condition of the mother or child, would not be objected to by my committee, provided it did not imperil the passage of the Bill, if proposed as an amendment. However, one of the main objects of the regulations of practice to be approved by the General Medical Council would be to this end.

3. *Certificates (a) of Death and (b) of Stillbirth given by Midwives.*—(a) The acceptance of certificates of death by registrars from unqualified persons could be put a stop to by the mere stroke of a pen if the Registrar-General could be persuaded to issue the necessary order. So long, however, as coroners (to whom such certificates would, after refusal, be referred) are permitted to issue their certificates without any medical evidence as to the cause of death, it is of little use for him to do so. There is, of course, a legal obligation on all persons present at a death to give notice to the registrar within five days, and to sign the register. (b) The Registration of Births and Deaths Act, 1874, permits burials of stillborn children to be carried out on the declaration of a midwife or other person present at the birth. A Select Committee has reported on this matter, and has advised legislation with a view to a better method of certification; doubtless this is under consideration by the Government, and meanwhile it would be impossible to obtain a reform of this magnitude on a side issue.

4. *As to the Suggested Infringement of the Medical Acts by the Registration of Midwives.*—(a) The Medical Act of 1886 is said to have so affected the standard of midwifery practice that the registration of midwives under Act of Parliament would, in effect, lower the standard intended to be set by the 1886 Act. This Act, however, only raises the standard of education amongst those who desire to go on the *Medical Register*, making the fact of being on that *Register* proof of education in all three branches of professional work. The 1858 Act permitted registration to a medical man who was only partly qualified, as in surgery. The public was thereby misled. (b) The *Medical Register* has been recently said to confer upon those registered the exclusive right to practise. This is untrue, and has been recently disproved before a Metropolitan stipendiary magistrate. (c) The Midwives Bill does not permit persons registered under it to use any of the titles protected under the Medical Acts, nor does it admit to the *Medical Register*. Therefore it does not infringe the Medical Acts.

In closing my letter, I have to apologise for an involuntary error made in my letter published in the BRITISH MEDICAL JOURNAL of March 12th. The reply therein given to Mr. Garrett Horder's first objection in his letter in the JOURNAL of March 5th has, of course, nothing to do with the objection, and its being given as such must be attributed to interruptions while writing.—I am, etc.,

ROWLAND HUMPHREYS,
Honorary Secretary Midwives Bill
Committee.

Buckingham Street, Strand, W.C.
March 22nd.

SIR,—With regard to this *soi-disant* Midwives Bill Committee, whose honorary secretary writes so often and with such an air of superior authority, may I ask by whom it was appointed, when, and for what purpose? Is it, or is it not, a self-constituted body, formed to promote the condoning of illegal action in the past on the part of certain private associations and institutions that have made a business of issuing diplomas to midwives for gain; to procure a State sanction for such illegal documents already in vogue; to legalise the issue of similar qualifications to practise in the future; to enlist, under the guise of a false philanthropy, the assistance of uninformed sentimentalists, who are for the "Committee's" ends misled by being systematically confronted with only one view of the situation and one way (the "Committee's") of solving a difficult problem, but whose excellent motives I do not for an instant impugn; and all this mainly and finally to secure and increase the pecuniary emoluments of what would thus be made a safe as well as a lucrative business? Is it for this holy end that they do not hesitate to take refuge in what the Honorary Secretary calls the "Parliamentary view of registration," quoting remarks of Sir W. Foster upon the Plumbers Registration Bill of 1897? He forgets altogether that, when the Plumbers Registration Bill was introduced—just as when the first Medical Act was brought in—there existed no plumbers in the one case, as there were no medical men in the other, who were already registered and practising under imprimatur of the State. The plumber's and the doctor's callings had previously been open without restriction to all the world. No apprenticeship or training was a legal prerequisite to practise in either case. The public was expected to make its choice under the motto "*Caveat emptor.*" But here and now the whole position is changed. Over 20,000 men and women are already qualified under State guarantee to practise midwifery and obstetrics. There is a State-created vested interest—created not for their benefit, but in protection of the health and lives of the citizens. It springs out of neither assumption, presumption, nor illegality. The profession is not now, as in 1858, or as the plumbers last year, "proposed to be registered." The State's authorised practitioners of midwifery have been registered these forty years. But this "Committee," with one of these registered for its hon. secretary, positively proposes, by one stroke of the parliamentary pen, to introduce within the ranks of our calling a flood of incompetent persons, dangerous in proportion to their ignorant self-confidence, and to issue them with a brand new mint stamp—Government counterfeits for circulation among our working mothers only. Surely we will not thus disgrace our civilisation. As Parliament has already registered for the community men and women to practise midwifery, as to whose fitness it has insisted on and taken full guarantees, I expect Sir W. Foster would tell us here: Parliament is bound to recognise the members of any trade or profession which it has already registered, and such registered members only, and to scout any suggestion to countenance with State recognition any ignorant upstarts undertaking such trade or profession, when the sole ground of the claim is their presumption to engage without proper training in work serious enough to require registration, and its sole result would be to establish and increase their powers for mischief—in this instance to create undue and avoidable risks and perils for the mothers and offspring of the poor. Bob Sawyer to-day is being shown no mercy. Why, then, Sairey Gamp?—I am, etc.,

Lillington Street, S.W., March 22nd.

THOS. M. WATT.

P.S.—It gives one some estimate of the Committee's sense of proportion, if one reflects that the Plumbers Registration Bill proposed to acknowledge only those who had been for five years in the trade, but for such a simple business as midwifery two years are to suffice.

FOREIGN PRACTITIONERS IN THE UNITED KINGDOM.

SIR,—All those who have at heart the maintenance of cordial relations between medical men of different countries owe a debt of gratitude to Mr. Victor Horsley for the leading part he has taken in inducing the General Medical Council to write its second letter to the Privy Council. More than once