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EDITORIAL.

THE REGISTRATION OF MIDWIVES.—II.

A FORTNIGHT ago we commenced to consider this question, with especial reference to the details of the Bill now before Parliament. We regret that the pressure upon our space for more contentious matter has interrupted our arrangements once, and we fear will again intervene before we can conclude them. For we live in "parlous times," so far as Nursing is concerned, and there are signs and portents on every hand that we are on the verge of events of the highest importance to the future work and welfare of Nurses. So while we have time to devote to this matter let us briefly discuss the clauses of the Midwives' Bill, and so far as we are able, point out its defects and the best means for their remedy. There is no need for hurry, however, seeing that the Bill cannot be proceeded with further until the House of Commons meets again next year. In the first place, it may be well that we should clearly define what, from widely-obtained information, we believe to be the professional feeling about this subject; next, what the laity appear to think about it; and then that we should attempt to deduce, from what public

opinion considers that legislation should do, some approximate idea of what form legislation will take. In other words, let us endeavour to understand what kind of Act is likely to be passed by Parliament, and finally contrast this with the Bill which the House has this session been unsuccessfully asked to accept. Let us, to clear the ground, recall what the history of the Midwife is, what position she has held hitherto, and what manner of women are now undertaking Obstetric work.

It must, then, be remembered that in ancient times women in child-birth were always assisted by their own sex. The process was a natural one, and, in the vast majority of cases, there was not the slightest necessity for interference. But in, say, five cases out of every hundred, there was either some obstruction in labour, or some dangerous condition subsequently supervened, and then ignorance or carelessness upon the part of the attendant meant disaster or death for the patient. And, therefore, so soon as Medicine emerged from the realms of mysticism and became a science, Medical men were obliged to study how the individual was born, just as they were obliged to learn how he lived and why he died. Naturally it followed from this that, in difficult Obstetric cases, the Doctor's skilled aid was more and more frequently summoned, and equally as a matter of course that, as civilisation and knowledge increased, it became more and more the custom for Midwifery to be undertaken by Medical men. The employment of Midwives, then, is merely the survival of a custom as old as the human race; but the lesson which history teaches with unmistakable emphasis is, that if Midwives are to continue in the land, far more if they are to increase and multiply, they must exhibit the skill and must possess the knowledge which made the public discard their predecessors' services for

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