

accomplished for them, and the most signal lines of progress which have been pursued in the accomplishment of such advancement. If my conception of your wishes is correct, my task will not prove a difficult one, nor shall I be forced to weary you with prolix and uninteresting details.

Pardon a passing reference to the infancy of the science of obstetrics, which will serve merely to remind you of facts which you know as well as I do. Obstetrics as an art must always have existed, even among savage nations, and as civilization and refinement have increased, this art has become ever more and more perfect, keeping pace, as other arts have done, with the general advance in a people's knowledge. And thus it is that obstetrics, advancing from the ages of the past, from the period of the wonderful old man of Cos to that of Smellie and Levret, existed as a very perfect art indeed. But it was in no wise a science. He who was to elevate it to this high sphere was found in the person of the great Englishman, William Hunter, whose admirable work upon the gravid uterus did for this department of medicine what the eminent labors of Euclid did for mathematics and which exists to-day as a valuable part of the library of every intelligent practitioner of midwifery.

From that time to the present a steady advance has been made, and in our day we see the reproach which once upon a time, and that not so very long ago, attached to the "man midwife" entirely wiped away.

But all this has often been written of: let me leap over the wide chasm which divides two centuries from each other and speak of those improvements in this hundred-year-old science to which the past decade has given birth.

With how little pomp and parade are the greatest discoveries of science usually heralded! Who could have pictured to himself the wonderful results which were to follow the crude experiments of Count Rumford with steam; the watching of the swaying of a set of church lamps by Galileo; Newton's study under the apple-tree; or the flying of a Yankee printer's kite upon Boston Common? Yet the world has trembled and swayed under the result of these things, and mankind has felt their influence in every fibre and atom! In my judgment, one of the greatest achievements of modern pathology has been the discovery of the agency of certain lowly-organized monads, micrococci, and microzymes, classed under the head of bacteria, in the production of septicæmia, pyæmia, and the long list of diseases which are their outcome. These atomic bodies, floating in the atmosphere, clinging to sponges and towels, and adhering to instruments and fingers, enter the blood through the open mouths of abraded surfaces. The prevention of the evil consequences of such entrance by the plans of Lister has accomplished a great deal for general surgery. Applied to obstetrics and gynecological surgery,

the same methods are found to be fully as successful.

Progressive obstetricians are now pretty well agreed that the diseases which follow childbirth are due, for the most part, to the introduction of some contagium or poisonous element from without, through the open mouths of exposed bloodvessels laid bare by the parturient process, somewhere between the fundus uteri and the vulva. This theory once being accepted, it follows, as a natural deduction, that every means in the power of the obstetrician should be adopted for the prevention of the introduction of the morbid agents.

Even although the obstetricians of to-day are not prepared to make aseptic midwifery a rule wherever that art is practised, it is highly probable that in the very near future this position will be accepted. Even now this method, in modified form, is exerting a beneficial influence and steadily working its way to adoption, in spite of the fact that it entails a good deal of trouble on the practitioner. That it can do no harm is quite evident. Does any man, can any conscientious obstetrician, maintain that strict cleanliness and the most scrupulous avoidance, so far as it lies in his power, of all things which can possibly admit of the entrance of the agents which in all probability produce puerperal septicæmia, will do any harm in the lying-in chamber? Supposing that only one life is saved out of a hundred deliveries, will any one assert that the saving of this one life would not repay him for the trouble which his preventive precautions have cost him? If the whole theory of the bacterial origin of puerperal fever is false, then in a quarter of century from now all precautionary measures will disappear and the old *régime* will triumph. But if, perchance, this theory is valid and true, then no human power will prevent the realization of the prophecy that aseptic midwifery will be a rule as strict, as inviolable, and as obligatory as the aseptic surgery of amputations and of laparotomy is to-day. Look at the surgery of London, of Paris, of Vienna and of New York of twenty years ago, with its unclean hands, its fatally dirty instruments, its death-laden sponges, and its foul air, with its terrible mortality, and then look at the surgery of those same cities to-day; and he will be a bold man who dares gainsay the statement that in another quarter of a century no one will venture to rise in a scientific body and declare that any efforts at perfect cleanliness in the lying-in room are superfluous or absurd.

To free the parturient act from the dangers of septic poisoning, to prevent that scourge, the so-called puerperal fever, suppurative arthritis, pyæmia, embolism, and septic inflammation of the lung, liver, and other organs, would be to save millions of lives in every generation, and to raise the science of obstetrics to an enviable height.