

# THE CANADA LANCET.

A MONTHLY JOURNAL OF

MEDICAL AND SURGICAL SCIENCE,  
CRITICISM AND NEWS.

VOL. XXII.] TORONTO, JUNE, 1890. [No. 10.

## Original Communications.

### THE PREVENTION OF PUERPERAL FEVER.\*

BY WM. BRITTON, M.D., TORONTO.

A few weeks ago I attended Mrs. S. in labor. She passed through its various stages in a perfectly normal manner, and gave birth to a well-developed and apparently healthy child.

Being an extraordinarily robust woman, and feeling none of the weakness that usually exists after so short an interval, on the fourth day she requested permission to get up, which, of course, was ungallantly refused.

I have reason to believe, that on the following morning she took the reins in her hand and tried the experiment with the result of a violent chill, followed rapidly by a temperature of 106. The ordinary remedies were used, and whether *post* or *propter hoc* I do not know, at any rate the alarming symptoms disappeared inside of forty-eight hours.

I had always been taught both by precept and experience that if this was puerperal fever, its rapid decline must be looked upon as most extraordinary. Bearing in mind the distinction drawn by Heath, between sapræmia, a comparatively harmless and evanescent septic intoxication without the entrance of bacteria, and septic infection proper, depending on the presence of these organisms, I concluded that this case, so violent at the outset, and yet so amenable to treatment, should be placed in the former class. Backed up as my convictions were by the weight of authorities, I do not know that I would have hesitated immediately after the patient's recovery to attend another case of labor; but fortunately for the rate of mortality amongst lying-in women, in a day or two fresh develop-

ments appeared. I was hastily summoned to reduce what appeared to the parents as a dislocation of the infant's shoulder. Instead of such an injury I found a rapidly forming abscess in the acromio-clavicular articulation. This was soon followed by another in the wrist and one in each temporo-maxillary joint. As a profound jaundice set in subsequently, one may safely infer that there were similar lesions in the liver.

The connection between mother and child had not ceased in this case with the snipping of the umbilical cord, for the diseased condition of the former, which must have been true septic poisoning, had evidently infected the infant, and, as if to prove the interchangeable character of the different types of puerperal fever, although the mother's case was one of fever pure and simple, the child evidently was in a pyæmic condition.

These occurrences more than ever impressed my mind with the necessity for early diagnosis in such cases, and the vital importance of the attendant taking every precaution lest he become emphatically the messenger of death.

Although known by many other names, this disease has through the whole history of medicine attracted the notice of authors; and no work on the subject either ancient or modern has failed to refer to its obstinate nature; but, strange to say, the most of them pay more attention to epidemic influence than to auto-infection.

Woman, even in the most favorable surrounding circumstances, while in child-bed has within herself the factors that may conspire to produce any or all of the septic manifestations; and for this reason science, with its discoveries has, up to the present, been time and again outwitted in its effort to overcome this inherent tendency that has existed in all past generations.

Indeed I do not know that Mother Eve had not a dose of it; at any rate pre-disposition existed. It is quite probable that at some time in her married life she was a primipara, therefore the more liable to lacerations, and her spouse not having had access to either Tyler Smith or Playfair could not have been a much better obstetrician than ourselves; therefore it is safe to conclude that in spite of all his skill the first infant in its exit from an embryo state left behind it abrasions of the os. At the very least we may infer, if she was constructed like her daughters,

\*Read before the Toronto Medical Society, May 20, 1890.