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Editorial.

THE NATURE OF PUERPERAL FEVER.

There is no more interesting or important disease to the general practitioner than puerperal fever, and until the day comes, which come it has not yet, when we shall have a clear and full understanding of its cause or causes, speculation and investigation regarding it will not cease.

We take it that our readers have each a theory or theories as to the nature of this ubiquitous scourge, and that they will be interested and informed by a short abstract of a paper on recent bacteriological investigation concerning the nature of the disease, read by Wm. T. Lusk, M.D., of New York, before the section on Gynæcology of the College of Physicians of Philadelphia.

Not many years ago it was discovered that the vaginal canal abounded in micro-organisms. Without stopping to consider the nature of these organisms, as to whether they were pathogenic or non-pathogenic, the members of the medical profession vaulted over one another to devise some means of getting rid of these pestiferous germs.

Dr. Lusk believes with the recent investigators, that the natural micro-organisms in the vaginal canal intensify the acid reaction of the vaginal secretions and render the latter especially unfavorable to the multiplication

of the streptococcus, which is the germ that produces puerperal septicæmia. The normal vaginal secretions furnish a soil hostile to all forms of cell growth, and render the latter non-virulent.

The cervical canal of a pregnant woman, he asserts, is protected from the invasion of micro-organisms by the mucous plug. He quotes Walthard's observations, as showing a line of defence between the attacking germs below and the clear portion of the mucous plug above; thus in natural labor the protection of the uterine cavity is complete. Contagious material has to be carried to it from without, but cannot gain entrance on account of the mucous plug. The entire parturient act, furthermore, serves to guard the woman against infection. With the rupture of the membranes a downward current is produced by the escape of amniotic fluid. The descent of the child cleanses the vaginal canal and the associated leucocytosis and increase of vaginal secretion are inimical to the action of the septic germs. Finally, the toilet of the vagina is completed by the passage of the placenta.

The fact that Nature provides this precious means of self-defence, clearly shows that the disturbing methods of disinfection employed before and after labor, under the plea of prophylaxis, are not commendable. The anti-septic douche dissolves the mucus, sets free the imprisoned germs, weakens the resistance of tissue and contributes to the extension of the source of infection.

Dr. Lusk quotes the statistics of several of the maternity hospitals, showing a complete change of front in the management of puerperal cases in many of them within the last year or so. He says that a careful examination of hospital statistics, on the whole, shows that with the abolition of the routine practice of douching, the morbidity is diminished and the mortality statistics are slightly more favorable. He thinks it is probably wisest