

details. Probably all here will admit that puerperal septicaemia is due to the work of living organisms, which are largely, if not altogether, introduced from without. Bacteriologists have taught us much on the subject, but have not yet proved definitely what form, or forms, of bacteria cause the poisoning. Certain kinds of cocci, especially the streptococci, have a certain connection with the sepsis, but exactly what it is we know not now. The bacteria are so much under the influence of surrounding structures, and are subjects to so many modifications, that the study of their life history has been found very intricate and difficult. It seems in some cases that a certain number of bacteria already lodged in the parturient woman are comparatively innocuous until other members of their species are imported from foreign sources, when suddenly all commence to work together with deadly effect; or sometimes they are kept harmless by the surrounding secretions, as, for instance, in the vagina, until they are pushed into other fields, such as the cervical tears, or the uterine cavity, when they immediately wage war. From a clinical standpoint the important thing to recognize is that septic matter—something that cripples or kills our patients—when introduced from without by dirty finger tips, dirty instruments, and from dirty surroundings of all sorts, creates all the mischief.

In order to assist in avoiding the evils, our council directs me to ask the question, Should antiseptic vaginal douching be made a routine practice in the puerperium? In my opinion, no. While I hold a decided opinion, and am quite willing to express it, I have a great respect for many eminent obstetricians who say yes, and am always glad to hear their arguments and, I hope, weigh them carefully. I happen to be one of those who were not captured by the fascinations of vaginal douching as pictured by so many in years past. If I were at all inclined to feel proud of this, my pride ought to be lowered by a consideration of the fact that a large proportion of those who at that time held views similar to mine were too lazy, or too careless, or too indifferent to give the matter much thought or study. I have no feeling but that of contempt for this class of obstetricians, who are mainly responsible, in my opinion, for the high mortality rates which still prevail in midwifery. I have sometimes been misunderstood and misquoted; and, although I am not likely to be misunderstood by the members of this association, I desire to add that no man has a greater desire than I to see a rigid adherence to the modern rules of asepsis and antisepsis on the part of all who practise our obstetric art.

I have studied the subject pretty carefully for the last eighteen years. I was much impressed with many of the favorable reports showing the good effects of vaginal douching. About sixteen years ago, and for a number of years thereafter, I watched the work of a friend in Toronto