

Great Britain shows that the death rate from childbirth has not appreciably diminished in England and Wales. In fact, in certain parts of England the death rate from puerperal septicæmia has actually increased in recent years. In the United States and Canada the mortality from this cause is probably less now than it was fifteen years ago, but it is still very high. Why is it that such a deplorable condition of things in connection with the practice of obstetrics continues to exist, notwithstanding the flood of light which has been thrown on the subject during the last fifty years? I will not now attempt to answer the question.

Under the circumstances, it behooves us, as a society which includes obstetrics as one of the subjects within its province, to assist others in carrying on a vigorous fight against this deadly but repressible foe—puerperal septicæmia. With this object in view it was decided by our council, on the advice of Dr. McMurtry, to have a discussion on one of the proposed preventive measures, viz., antiseptic vaginal douching, and I have been honored with the request to open the discussion.

Since the year 1848 antiseptic vaginal douches have been more or less in vogue. In the earlier years chloride of lime, chloride of soda, permanganate of potassium, sulphate of copper, etc., etc., were used by various obstetricians. So far as I know, such injections were first used in America by Fordyce Barker, in the Bellevue Hospital in New York, about forty years ago, and were continued by him as a matter of routine practice about twenty-six or twenty-seven years. In later years carbolic acid became the favorite. In 1876 Tarnier recommended bichloride of mercury, which to-day is probably the favorite antiseptic agent in obstetrical work. I will not mention any of the other numerous antiseptic remedies which have been used, nor will I attempt to discuss their comparative merits.

Vaginal antiseptic douching during the puerperium was most popular between 1875 and 1885. It appeared at one time that it would be universally adopted as a routine prophylactic measure. The method seems so charming in its simplicity, and appeared so perfectly innocuous, that it was considered by many somewhat of a crime to neglect it. In December of 1883, about two years after Fordyce Barker had given up the practice, Gallard Thomas became its most enthusiastic champion. His address on the subject of the prevention and treatment of puerperal fever, delivered before the New York Academy of Medicine, and the discussion which followed, including a paper by Barker, read at an adjourned meeting, were exceedingly able, and created a great deal of interest during the year 1884. The douching wave reached its greatest height about that time, but since then a reaction has set in, and at the present day opinions are divided as to the utility of the measure in normal cases.

I consider it quite unnecessary to enter minutely into pathological