

PUERPERAL SEPTICÆMIA.

BY

L. COYNEUX PRÉVOST, M.D.,

Gynecologist to St. Luke's Hospital, Ottawa.

Among those whom I have the honor of addressing this evening, there are a few who, although comparatively young, have still like myself, lived long enough to have been the contemporaries of that dreadful disease which we used to call *puerperal fever*. The remembrance of this multiform plague which, at times, seemed to cling exclusively to the clothes of one *accoucheur* in particular, I am sure, is still fresh in their memory. All the parturients with whom he would come in contact would be stricken by the disease, and with such deadly results that he would be compelled to give up obstetrical practice until time would allow of his getting rid of the virulent atmosphere which appeared to surround him individually.

The oldest among us have witnessed these terrific cases which used to kill in a few days, as they have also known those epidemics of erysipelas, hospital gangrene, as well as those wounds flooded with pus which we used to call "*laudable*," so proud were we to establish a distinction between it and the fetid sania which in every case was rightly considered of such a bad omen. It was the pre-antiseptic epoch, and at that time the true character of puerperal fever was enshrouded in the same deep darkness as all the other infectious diseases.

At the time, already very remote, when I began my medical studies, we were far from possessing the richness of means that clinical investigations afford us to-day. Wunderlich had not yet armed us with the thermometer which enables us to follow and register with such a precision the oscillations of animal heat during illness. *Tactus cruditus* and other phenomena would, however, easily permit us to ascertain the existence of fever. The cause of this fever was carefully looked for in every case, and generally it was found to be due to inflammatory action going on in some parts of the organism. At one time the lung was inflamed, at another the pleura, the peritoneum, the cellular tissue, and so on; the elevation of temperature was the consequence of that inflammation and the fever was called *symptomatic*. But in other cases, no organs would show sign of suffering; nowhere would the most careful examination detect the least inflammatory process, a certain amount of mere functional disturbance only would