

fence and wonder if they could not be improved, even with the methods we have now at work. For the last twenty years we have first been opposing a great theory; then we have been accepting facts on which it was based; then we have been rushing into violent and illogical enthusiasm about it, only at the end of all to throw doubt and dispute on the whole field. I confess I always doubt surgical theories, just as I doubt all theories of art. No school of art which started on a theory has ever made a lasting impression. Our surgical theories never lead to anything; not even the great antiseptic theory has led to any tangible result beyond what every housewife knew before its day—namely, that dead, moist organic matter will decompose if some agent or other gets to it. We know now the exact nature of this agent, but this is a new fact, not a new theory. The theorists forget that living tissue will not decompose under the access of the same influences—influences, indeed, which surround us at every moment of life, and pass by harmlessly. Now the theorists take a lingering farewell of their lost darling by saying, "Well, at any rate, it taught us cleanliness." As a matter of fact, the very reverse of this is true, for it was the arguments of those who opposed the antiseptic theory which demonstrated the successful cleanliness. The last phase of this discussion—I sincerely hope the very last—is the antiseptic accoucheur who pleasingly fancies that both his theory and his practice are new, whereas in matter of fact Semelweiss literally died for them nearly thirty years ago. No more instructive reading can be indulged in than a brief monograph which has recently been issued concerning the history of this truly great man—a man so great, that I think he deserves to have erected to his memory a statue in every civilized country. Semelweiss had no theory; he simply stated the fact that puerperal women in Vienna were poisoned by dirt. "Wash your hands," he cried, "and the women will not die," and his colleagues ruined him for his frankness. But he persuaded the world he was right. Simpson took up the fight with his accustomed vigour, and carried it through; and now, forsooth, we hear of the antiseptic theory as applied to midwifery as being a new thing.

What is wanted for the improvement of our surgical results is not any more theories, but better work and better systems of working, preceded by better systems of training. We forget that an art like surgery cannot be acquired by passing examinations. It is true that examinations admit to our academy schools in art, but they are merely for the purpose of selecting candidates upon whom it is likely that benefit will arise from the teaching which there can be obtained. Surgical art is not conferred upon the successful candidates by the College of Surgeons' parchment for the Membership, still less by that for the Fellowship. Like all arts, surgery requires some indescribable gift, easily recognized and appreciated when seen,