

Midwifery than to the greater care which is now inculcated in the use of antiseptic precautions in the lying-in room or ward. But this argument appears to us to have been altogether overstrained, because, in the first place, the most ardent disciple of LISTER now admits that the great secret underlying the use of germicides is the absolute cleanliness which is thus effected, and that infinitely better results are obtained by securing *asepsis*—or to put it briefly, absence of dirt—than by securing *antisepsis*—that is to say, the destruction of bacteria, born and bred in nests of putrefaction due to filth; from which it may not unfairly be contended that it is due to the increase of knowledge and skill and the consequent prevention of evil results, that the present vastly diminished mortality of child-birth is due, rather than to the use of antiseptics. And, in the next place, it is an undeniable fact that many of the most successful operators and obstetricians of the present day, are the strongest advocates of the free employment of soap and water, and the strongest opponents of the indiscriminate use of the poisonous bactericides which are so much the fashion in certain schools of Midwifery.

It being admitted, therefore, that the increasing safety of lying-in women is chiefly due to the increasing knowledge and care of their attendants, it would seem to follow that the evils wrought by ignorant Midwives are diminishing, from which it might be fairly argued that the number of such workers, or at any rate the opportunities of malpractice which they individually, and as a class, possess, must be also lessening. As a matter of fact, and figures, we have good grounds for believing that this is indeed the truth, because we have received reports from many different districts, both in our large towns and in country parishes, that the Midwives who formerly practised there are rapidly disappearing; their places being filled, as we have said, by skilled workers. Let us, therefore, endeavour to understand whence has arisen the present agitation for an Act of Parliament for the purpose of bringing about the legal registration of Midwives. The explan-

ation is very simple. Some four years ago, the Royal British Nurses' Association was publicly requested at a Mansion House meeting to add to its scheme for registering Nurses, another for the enrolment of Midwives on a similar list. With avowed reluctance, the Association consented to consider the matter, and the good result was achieved that a small body, termed the Midwives' Institute, which had been formed some years previously for this very work, but which had been dormant, was suddenly galvanised into life. It became duly incorporated as a limited liability company, with the object of obtaining an Act for the registration of Midwives, and the Association "thankfully declined to take any further action" on the subject. The Midwives' Institute caused a Bill to be drafted, and it was introduced into the House of Commons. But its provisions were so farcical that even its own friends described it as "bad," and it was withdrawn. It was re-modelled and again introduced the following Session, but ignominiously collapsed again; and by this time the opposition of the medical profession had become so pronounced that it was clear that it had no further chance of success. Consequently, other means were taken, and last year a Select Committee of the House of Commons was appointed to consider the matter, the Dissolution of Parliament, shortly afterwards, causing—if we may so express it—the premature birth of a immature Report. The Committee, however, met again this Session, and have now presented the public with the final result of their labours, in the shape of certain statements deduced from the evidence which they have heard, and of certain recommendations which are the outcome of their united wisdom, and which are briefly summarised as follows:—That a system of examination and registration of Midwives be established, and that, for the purpose of admission and examination of women desiring to act as Midwives, the General Medical Council shall be invited to frame rules regulating (1) the admission to the *Midwives' Register*, either by (a) practice or (b) examination; (2) the conditions of admission to such

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)