

The Midwife.

LISTERISM AND MOTHERHOOD.

¶ We have already referred at length to Dr. Saleeby's brilliant book, "Modern Surgery and its Making," but the chapter on "Listerism and Motherhood" deserves further reference; indeed, one of the objects of the book, as stated by the author in the preface, is to demand the Rights of Mothers from his standpoint as a Eugenicist.

After pointing out that the scope of surgery, now steadily increasing, will still more rapidly diminish—since the disappearance of rickets, and of surgical tuberculosis, and the attainment of the bio-chemical control of cancer, to take no other instances, will progressively and rapidly diminish the importance of surgery as a servant of mankind, the author says:—"Here we celebrate a beneficent new art which will ere long, thank heaven, be a lost art. But the necessities of birth will remain, nor will they ever be circumvented until, perchance, science abolishes death."

¶ There are, Dr. Saleeby holds, "at least three special reasons why it is our duty to insist upon the importance of Listerism for motherhood; and a writer whose life is devoted first and foremost to the divine cause of Eugenics may well be excused if he insists upon those reasons before proceeding to review the history, state the lamentable present facts, and indicate the evident requirements of this great subject.

"The first reason is of course that truly stupendous and momentous fact, the fall in the birth rate, which is proceeding with even greater acceleration, and will long continue to proceed in all the civilized countries of the world. . . . The fall in the birth rate is an absolutely inevitable consequence of what has been called, not without some show of justice, the greatest discovery of the nineteenth century, namely the safe and efficient control of conception. . . .

"There are those in abundance who desire to 'moralize this spectacle'; and evidently the moralist, or the student of morality, has a notable object for contemplation in the fact that everywhere mankind desires the satisfaction of certain instincts out of proportion to the desire for their natural consequences. And when the censor turns student—a humbler and more arduous part, which he commonly thinks beneath him—he may profitably compare the relative advantages in moral principle, and in social result, of infanticide and the control of parenthood: of a mercilessly brutal struggle for existence and its preventive amelioration; in a word, of irresponsible and responsible, improvident, animal, and provident reproduction."

Some day, the author believes, the Eugenic ideal will be satisfied, and every child that comes into the world will be loved, desired and cherished in anticipation.

The second reason for the decline in the birth rate is "the alarming present tendency of the women most desirable for marriage and motherhood to decline these functions altogether, or if not both of them at any rate the second. The time is at hand when, if we do not actually require to tempt such women to undertake their great social function, we most certainly do require to remove such objections and risks as may be removed. . . . Listerism transforms the conditions of motherhood, and lowers the attendant risks to an extent which is beyond calculation."

The author then proceeds to show that "maternity makes special and increasingly onerous demands upon the women of the higher races. In general, the higher races have larger heads, not only in maturity but at birth; and this is one of the reasons why maternity is more exacting for the civilized woman than for her savage sister. Doubtless she has a wider pelvis, but even so there is a struggle, so to say, between the tendency for the size of the head to increase and the tendency for the capacity of the maternal pelvis to increase; and the head, with all that it may be capable of and all that depends upon it, is ever at the mercy of the calibre of the bony ring through which it makes its amazing entry into the world. Now the risk of infection and consequent inflammation, during or shortly after childbirth, is directly proportional, other things being equal, to the amount of local injury, including the devitalisation due to mere pressure, done by the child's head in its course; and this injury will evidently be greater in proportion to the size of the child's head. Thus the larger the head, the greater the need for Listerism; which is familiar doctrine in the ears of every doctor or midwife, or obstetric nurse, who all know well that the birth of a boy, his head being bigger, involves greater risk and needs more care, than the birth of a girl."

The author then shows that the use of strong antiseptics in normal maternity cases has passed, and "now is the age of aseptic midwifery. Normally the attendant has to deal with what, from the surgical point of view, is the exact parallel of an operation upon unbroken skin—say for the straightening of a rickety limb. Nature is the surgeon, and she makes her aseptic wound for her purpose, as the surgeon would make a wound with a knife for his, and in either case, if infection occurs, the operator put it there. There are imaginable and even possible exceptions, but they may be wholly ignored. If, then, the patient be uninfected

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