

The Midwife.

DAINGEROUS TO MOTHER AND CHILD.

By MISS DORA E. CHAPMAN.

The paper which won the prize in our competition last week was unavoidably held over for want of space. We print below the question and Miss Chapman's paper.

"WHAT ARE THE DANGERS (a) TO THE MOTHER, (b) TO THE CHILD, IN A CASE WHERE THERE IS A PURULENT VAGINAL DISCHARGE AT THE COMMENCEMENT OF LABOUR?"

(a) *Dangers to the Mother.*—The genital passages during labour resemble an open wound, and where an abnormal secretion is present in the vagina, the mother runs a grave risk of "auto-infection," or infection from organisms in her own body. During childbirth the septic matter is liable to travel further than the vagina and vulva, finding its way through small lacerations of the cervix and perineum into the blood stream, at a later stage infecting the raw surface at the placental site.

During a vaginal examination, the examining finger may push the organisms further up the canal, so that they lie in closer proximity to the uterus, unless great care is taken to cleanse the vulva and vagina at the commencement of labour. A vaginal douche washes away the surface discharge, thus diminishing the risk of infection, providing it is administered with caution, but care must be taken to regulate the flow, lest too great a degree of force send the organisms upwards.

The tissues lose a certain amount of vitality during labour, through pressure on the soft parts, and even a small amount of hæmorrhage predisposes to sepsis.

Lacerations of the vulva, vaginal walls, cervix, and the open surface of the placental site readily absorb the poisonous products of the organisms, and a mild form of infection introduced through any of these channels may lead to severe complications during the puerperium, seriously endangering the mother's life.

Puerperal sepsis appears in various forms. Sapræmia, a condition of septic intoxication. This infection is produced, not only by the organisms themselves, but through poisonous toxins manufactured by them. If this condition is allowed to continue, it may lead to septi-

cæmia. This is caused by the entrance of virulent microbes into the blood current. It is one of the most serious forms of puerperal fever, and the inflammation may spread and produce general peritonitis.

Pyæmia is due to the entry of pus into the system, and abscesses appear on various parts of the body.

Phlegmasia alba dolens, or "white leg," results from blocking of the lymphatics and septic inflammation in the pelvis, and can produce pulmonary embolism, when a fragment of blood-clot is displaced and carried along the blood stream, frequently reaching the heart, where it causes suffocation.

These varied forms of infection are not produced from distinct sources, but may each and all derive their existence from the original organisms present in the vaginal canal at the commencement of labour.

(b) *Danger to the Child.*—Ophthalmia neonatorum, or inflammation of the eyes in newborn infants, is due to the entrance of septic matter into the eyes at birth. It is one of the most common causes of blindness, and the greatest misfortune which can happen to the child. There is often severe corneal ulceration, resulting in perforation and total blindness of the infected eye.

One eye may escape infection, and care must be taken not to swab it with any material which has been in contact with the infected eye; also the infant should be laid on the infected side, so that any discharge may drain away from it, leaving the sound eye free from the discharge.

The vaginal discharge collects on the eyelids and lashes during birth, and is carried into the eyes as soon as they are open. Prevention is better than cure, therefore the rules for cleansing the child's eyes immediately after the birth of the head should be carefully carried out.

If possible, before the eyes are open the lids should be cleansed with boracic lotion, using separate swabs for each eye. Sometimes the child rubs its eyes with its hands; therefore the hands should be cleansed at the same time.

When the child is washed, care must be taken to cleanse the head and face first in clean water, because the vaginal discharges infect the bath-water, and if the face is washed in this infected water, the infected matter can easily get into the eyes.

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