

## OUR PRIZE COMPETITION.

### WHAT ARE THE FOUR PRINCIPAL CAUSES OF MATERNAL MORTALITY, IN ORDER OF IMPORTANCE, AND HOW CAN THEY BE PREVENTED?

We have pleasure in awarding the prize this week to Miss Theodora Harris, Town Hall Chambers, Hastings, to whom we have awarded it because she places sepsis first in order of importance, which, in our opinion, is its right position, in spite of the fact that Number 4 is rather vague.

#### PRIZE PAPER.

It is a disquieting fact that maternal mortality, which had decreased since the passing of the Midwives Act, has during the last two years shown a distinct rise.

The four chief causes may be quoted as follows:—

1. Sepsis.
2. Albuminuria.
3. Hæmorrhage.
4. Other accidents of pregnancy and labour.

1. The first is by far the largest cause of the mortality and is also the most preventible. It can, however, only be prevented by efforts both on the part of the State and of the individual attendant on the lying-in woman. The State might do much in this work of prevention by stricter legislation *re* attendance at childbirth, especially in regard to "handy women" and "covering" by (some) doctors. There are many cases now attended by an unqualified woman, who calls herself a "maternity nurse," and the medical practitioner "looks in" next day to see all is well. This "handy woman" is not under the supervision of the Inspector of Midwives, no rules are binding on her, and at present apparently nothing can be done to stop this practice.

Maternity nurses also, even when the doctor is actually present at delivery, should be required to have a standard of training and efficiency, and be liable, in the same way as a midwife, to removal from practice in consequence of carelessness or inefficiency. Further, every maternal death and every case of puerperal sepsis might, as suggested by the New Zealand special committee on maternal mortality, be the subject of investigation by the local authority, the result being submitted to the Ministry of Health. Education of public opinion to know the dangers of sepsis and the safeguards against it would also assist. Early booking and thorough and early examination of the patient would likewise be of value, as thus difficult cases could be sent into institu-

tions, instead of emergencies having to be struggled with in dirty and over-crowded surroundings; minor causes of sepsis, such as carious teeth, impetigo, &c., could be dealt with and cured; and venereal cases (a certain proportion of cases of puerperal fever being stated to be caused by the gonococcus) could be treated beforehand, and infection more adequately guarded against.

2. The great preventive in the case of albuminuria is early booking, and regular examination by the doctor or midwife of the urine, as well as a watch being kept on the patient for puffiness. If discovered early enough, suitable treatment and diet may carry an expectant mother safely to term; and if that is impossible, labour may be induced by the doctor to save the patient's life.

3. Hæmorrhage, though sometimes inevitable, could be largely minimised by ante-natal examination and care, thus discovering early placenta prævia and also conditions conducive to post-partum hæmorrhage; while skilled assistance at birth would reduce the number of cases of this, and treat it efficiently when it occurred. The habit of hurrying the delivery of a placenta is responsible for a certain amount of hæmorrhage; there would be distinctly less if the delivery of the placenta were left to take a natural course . . . provided the latter is not over long, the uterus hard, and no loss occurring.

4. As regards other accidents of pregnancy and labour, the great preventive in such cases is early examination and supervision of the patient by a medical practitioner or a competent midwife, and skilled and efficient help at birth.

In all these causes of maternal mortality the general well-being of the expectant mother, her freedom from worry, mental strain, and too strenuous work, the possibility of her obtaining adequate nourishment and comfort, and trained help and advice, will materially aid in the prevention of what is surely the most tragic mortality possible.

#### HONOURABLE MENTION.

The following competitors receive honourable mention:—Miss M. E. Thorpe, Miss Henrietta Ballard, Miss P. Thomson, Miss M. James.

#### QUESTION FOR NEXT WEEK.

Describe the preparation of a patient for receiving an anæsthetic. What precautions would you take before and after?

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