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**For the Good of Humanity ... Ignaz Philipp Semmelweis**

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The "Gabriel Group"

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Members of the Shreveport, Louisiana Catholic Physicians' Guild are assisting a most worthy project in their community. Dr. Alice Holoubek has sent us an account of the activities of the "Gabriel Group" that helps expectant mothers. Lectures are given, followed by discussion periods. The interest of Dr. Holoubek in this work is very evident, and we are quite certain that the cooperation of her fellow-Guild members is a reflection of her own efforts. But let us give you the story in her own words.

It is difficult for married couples of today to live up to their Christian ideals at best. In a predominantly non-Catholic community such as ours, the materialism of the environment certainly increases the difficulty. The attitude of the neighbors - the change of attitude toward the birth of each additional child - presents formidable problems. In an effort to aid in the combat in an active way, groups of expectant mothers have been gathering to discuss and, we hope, to grow spiritually in their attitude toward their families. In addition, more formal talks are given to them on the normal functions and development of mother and child during this period of pregnancy.

There are many errors to be overcome in the purely natural field. Our young mothers receive most of their knowledge of pregnancy, and childbirth from novels, movies, experiences of friends, and from their mothers. The first two sources usually present the difficult and heart-rendering aspects, as each of us well remembers. As to real life experiences, these are often related inaccurately; the most unusual and bizarre events are the better remembered, and very often the informer really has very little true knowledge to impart. So on a purely natural level, instruction of normal physiology should tend to allay fear and ignorance, which are physical as well as psychical detriments to natural childbirth.

However, always of much greater importance, is instruction and emphasis on the spiritual glory of bringing a child into the world, a child whose soul will live and love and serve God for all eternity, a child whom God has co-created with the human parents, a child who carries in his body the potentiality of the future. A true understanding of this tremendous reality should make the most worldly individual regard parenthood reverently.

The families of our parish are of a fairly consistent economic level and have no need of the Public Health type of pre-natal instruction and care. However, in parishes where there are some who do not enjoy economic ease, this discussion can be adjusted to cover this aspect and be very adequately supervised and conducted by Catholic nurses engaged in Public Health activities.

Practically, the groups have been meeting about once a month for four meetings. At the first gathering, our Pastor introduces the series and emphasizes the spirituality of motherhood. Following his departure, as a doctor and a mother, I give a brief, simple explanation of the physiology of menstruation. The second lecture, given by a prominent obstetrician, describes conception, heredity, fetal development, RH factor, and cesarean sections. At the third meeting, our Pastor is again with us, presenting the teachings of the Church as to the dignity of life and the Catholic teaching on birth control, abortions, and surgical operations of the generative organs. Also, another Catholic doctor describes the physiology of pregnancy and labor. The last meeting is a panel discussion by well-known and loved Catholic mothers of the community who discuss ways they have found effective in making Catholic teachings and especially the Liturgy, a part of their family life.

It is suggested that Guilds assisting with Cuna activities in their communities might well include this "Gabriel Group" project in their program.

For the Good of Humanity...

IGNAZ PHILIPP SEMMELWEIS

THIRD IN our series of Catholic men of science, a word portrait of Ignaz Philipp Semmelweis adds an account of a dedicated doctor whose life became a gallant and bitter fight to rescue mothers and their newborn babies from ever-waiting death. Born July 1, 1818, the fourth son of a German merchant, he became a medical student at Vienna in 1837. After he had taken a philosophical course at Pesth, he continued his medical studies there, obtaining his degree in medicine at Vienna in April, 1844, as obstetrician in August of that year, and as surgeon in November of 1845. In February 1846 he was made assistant at the first obstetrical clinic of Vienna.

Early in his career Semmelweis, a brilliant young interne at the famed Vienna hospital made the shocking discovery that thousands of women were dying at childbirth because of the unhygienic methods of the physicians who attended them. He asserted that this condition among lying-in women was caused by infection from the examining physicians, who had previously made pathological dissections, or who had come into contact with dead bodies without thorough cleansing afterwards. After he had introduced the practice of washing the hands with a solution of chloride of lime before the examination of expectant mothers, the mortality sank from 18 per cent to 2.45 per cent. He also soon formed the opinion that not only infection from septic virus caused puerperal fever but that it also came from other causes of putridity.

When he broached his theory, Semmelweis was at first ridiculed — and then slandered and persecuted. His dislike of public speaking or writing was probably the reason why his views were misunderstood. Many scholars, among them the doctors of the Academy of Paris and even Rudolph Virchow at Berlin, regarded him unfavourably. The petty persecution and malice of his opponents excited in Semmelweis a sensitiveness that increased from year to year. He was ever filled with hot conflict and fairly burst with the courage of a man with a true cause such as this; the appalling loss of lives, the indifference and neglect around him, were deep anguish to him.

The first account of his discovery was published by Professor Ferdinand Hebra in December, 1847, in the Journal of the Imperial and Royal Society of Physicians of Vienna (December, 1847), followed by a supplementary statement from the same physician in April, 1848. The following year, Professor Josef Skuta delivered an address on the same subject at the Imperial and Royal Academy of Sciences. Unfortunately, Semmelweis had neglected to correct the
papers of these friends of his, and thus failed to make known their mistakes, so that the inference might be drawn that only infection from septic virus caused puerperal fever.

It was not until May 1850 that he could bring himself to give a lecture on his discovery before the Society of Physicians; a month later he followed with a second one. The medical press noticed these lectures only in a very unsatisfactory manner. He was crushed but in time his zeal returned. In October he became lecturer on obstetrics in Vienna. A few days after the appointment, for reasons unknown, he removed to Pesth where he was made head physician at the hospital of St. Roch and in 1852 was appointed regular professor of theoretical and practical obstetrics.

His theory would not be accepted, though, and with each succeeding "betrayal" of his work, as he felt denied of his discovery to be, mental disturbance became more evident. Heart-broken at the deplorable conditions prevailing and becoming worse, when his instruction were disregarded, he finally succumbed but not before he had made one final attempt to reach the world outside, having failed within. His mind was failing, but one morning before he was taken to the public insane asylum near Vienna, he stole off to a printer. He wrote busily. He commanded his intellect. He handed what he had written to the printer. "Tomorrow!" was the command. When the printer protested that he could not prepare the circulars in a day, Semmelweis paid him substantially to work through the night. Next morning early he crept from the house. He went directly to the printer. The man timidly handed him a huge pile of circulars. They were printed in bold letters. The words were: "Young men and women! You are in mortal danger! The peril of childbed fever menaces your life! Beware of doctors, for they will kill you! Remember! When you enter labor unless everything that touches you is washed with soap and water and then chlorine solution, you will die and your child with you! I can no longer appeal to the doctors! I appeal to you! Protect yourself! Your friend, Ignaz Philipp Semmelweis." He put the bundle under his arm. He went out into the streets of Pesth. He ran to every young man, every young woman. He pressed his handbills on them. He would not be denied. They were gone. He had given away the last handbill. He went home, and then they took him to the asylum. His friends Bathory and Hebra were with him. Reluctantly they left him there. "There is a great man," said Bathory. "There is the greatest man we will ever know. There—in that asylum. And we are not worth it. We are none of us worth it." "No," replied Hebra. "it is probable that we are wholly maimed, blind, imbicically cruel, ungrateful, that the thoughts by which we live make our very presence here on earth fantastic. And yet—I think we will always have men like him. We don't deserve it; but what we are composed of is shining and indomitable. It is not shoddy, and it is wholly pure. It is the cell which is eternal, beyond good and evil, the mortal and immortal symbol of the Almighty. And because of this the covenant will continue and the world and our petty thoughts which people will continue to receive redeemers. And now this sweet and gentle and bewildered and raving man bears the burden of what we are not. Now he stumbles. Now he carries the cross. But to the end of time Medicine will bear this guilt and the human race will share the burden and the disgrace." From a bad gash in his finger, blood-poisoning developed and a month after he had been admitted Ignaz Philipp Semmelweis died. Though his mind had failed, in one last lucid moment he whispered, "I will never stop... no... never." The date was August 13, 1865.

Though it was hard for Semmelweis to write, he published his work "Die Aetiology, der Begriff und die Prophylaxis des Kindbettfiebers" (Vienna), in which he bitterly attacked his supposed and real opponents. He was not respected by all. The Etiology had gone out into the world. Some praised him and hope had been raised for awhile, but when Virchow, the man to whom all the world of medicine looked with reverence, said coldly that childbed fever was caused by erysipelas and inflammation of the lymph glands, it fled. Another claimed, "The strictest cleanliness is of little use in preventing such colossal outbreaks of childbed fever as we experience here (Munich). The doctrine of Semmelweis is one-sided, narrow, and erroneous."

His doctrine was ignored and misrepresented for years after his death. By 1890, as the older men died and young men replaced them, his theories began to spread, to become universal.

In 1891 a Hungary suddenly conscious of her greatest son took his body to Budapest for burial over the strenuous protests of Austria and Germany, where it now was claimed that the "Pesth Fool" was a German.

In 1906 a statue was unveiled in his honor in the city of his birth.

In the world today puerperal fever has by no means disappeared. But the children and the mothers his doctrine saved, the great men and women who live because he died, are as countless and unimaginable as the waves of the oceans.

Sir William Joppa Sinclair, Professor of Gynaecology and Obstetrics, University of Manchester, has paid this tribute: "It is the doctrine of Semmelweis which lies at the foundation of all our practical work of today. Through all the details of prevention and treatment, the temporary fashions and the changes of nomenclature, the principles of Semmelweis have remained our steadfast guide. The great revolution of modern times in Obstetrics as well as in Surgery is the result of the one idea that, complete and clear, first arose in the mind of Semmelweis, and was embodied in the practice of which he was the pioneer..."

And Joseph, Lord Lister, Professor of Surgery, Kings College,
The main change in this fourth edition of Father McFadden's book is the addition of a chapter entitled "Man's Life—His Duty to Preserve It." In the earlier editions, many references were given at the conclusion of the chapters. For good reasons, explained in the preface, the author has decided to drop these references. Other changes consist of a re-arrangement of some material and the use of new data on various topics. Readers of THE LINACRE QUARTERLY need not doubt realize that we now have a revised edition of Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Hospitals. It would be well to note, therefore, that Father McFadden's book still has the text of the old Directives. Those who use his book for classroom purposes should call attention to this and should, if possible, provide their students with the revised edition of the Directives.


This is a doctoral dissertation. After giving the history of the operation and the moral principles that should govern it, Father Lohkamp considers practically all the possible indications for hysterectomy, cites medical authorities concerning its need or value, and then gives a moral appraisal of each case. Unfortunately, the author never gives a summary of these appraisals. A concluding chapter deals with the reasons and remedies for unnecessary hysterectomies. There is a glossary of medical terms, a bibliography, and a good index.

Religion and Medicine

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In mid-December the Medical Society of the County of Kings and the Academy of Medicine of Brooklyn sponsored a panel discussion on religion and medicine. Father John J. Lynch, S.J., our consultant on medico-moral problems, was invited to participate, presenting the Catholic viewpoint. Other panelists were Rev. Dr. Dwight J. Bradley, Counsellor, The Associated (Religion and Medicine) Counselling Service, and Rabbi Ralph Silverstein, Temple Sinai (Arlington Temple), Brooklyn, New York, imparting the Protestant and Jewish attitudes. Father Lynch's remarks are published here and will appear in the Bulletin of the Brooklyn Medical Society.

Ordinarily it is a breach of good taste for a platform speaker to make reference to his own qualifications. But may I, without apology, refer briefly to my limitations? I am not a psychologist; I am not a psychiatrist; and therefore I am not competent to express a professional opinion as to the impact which religion exerts as a therapeutic agent in the practice of medicine. If religion be understood in terms of a personal faith, i.e., in terms of one's own intellectual convictions with regard to the existence and nature of God and with regard to his own relationship with that God, I am not prepared to expand an empirical psychology which would define and evaluate religion's role as an adjunct to medicine. That type of discussion is properly reserved to the experts in a field other than my own.

Since I am a moral theologian, with something of a predilection for the problems of medico-moral-

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