THE GENERAL HOSPITALS AND THE TRAINING OF MIDWIVES.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—In commenting on the report of a meeting recently convened by the Association for Promoting the Training and Supply of Midwives, the *Times* in a leading article expressed regret that none of the speakers, beyond urging the necessity for increased support of the Association, gave any indication as to the means by which the serious difficulty is to be met which may arise in 1910 when the clauses in the Act forbidding the practice of midwifery by unqualified persons come into operation. The opinion was also expressed that "a very definite organisation with definite and clearly stated aims is a necessary condition of any extended support from the public." A subsequent letter from the Council of the Association makes the issue clear—viz., which is to come first, the plan or the money?

I am writing in the hope that the suggestions contained in this letter may help the Association to a decision upon this point. I cannot claim to speak with any authority on the general question, but I have been led during the past two years to take an interest in it owing to my appointment as a visitor of some of the lying-in hospitals of London by the Council of King Edward's Hospital Fund. No one can enter the wards of one of these hospitals without being struck with the enormous advantage which any poor woman whose labour is conducted there enjoys over her less fortunate sister who is confined in her own home, often amidst surroundings which can only be realised by those who have actually witnessed them. It is gratifying to learn that by the adoption of a rigidly aseptic and antiseptic method maternal mortality has in these institutions been practically abolished. It is equally saddening to reflect that whilst the lying-in ward has been transformed from a death-trap to a place of the greatest attainable safety, there has been little or no diminution in the mortality from child-birth throughout the country generally.

The Faculty of Medicine of the University of London was recently asked by the Senate to advise as to the action to be taken by the University upon the proposed regulation of the General Medical Council that every student shall be required to have received instruction and gained his practical knowledge of midwifery by attending the requisite number of labours, either in a lying-in hospital or in the lying-in ward of a general hospital. I am glad to say that a resolution was passed that in the opinion of those present "teaching in practical midwifery in the wards of a lying-in hospital or in the lying-in ward of a general hospital should be made compulsory as soon as practicable."

I lately suggested to the Weekly Board of the Middlesex Hospital that a lying-in ward should be established, so that our students may learn this most important branch of their profession under the best possible conditions and not, as hitherto, by attendance upon the poor living in the area supplied by the hospital. The suggestion received the approval of the board and of the medical staff and a committee is about to report upon the changes necessary to carry it into effect. The existence of such a ward is no new thing, as in 1747 it was enacted that "a third part of the beds used in the hospital from time to time be appropriated to the use of lying-in women." The total number of beds in the hospital at that date was either 18 or 22. In 1749 a rule was established that "whenever there shall be an increase of beds for sick and lame the same number be also added for lying-in women." In 1783, owing to lack of funds, retrenchments became necessary and these were continued at intervals until 1807, when the lying-in ward was abolished.

Such a ward in a general hospital to which a medical school is attached would serve a fourfold purpose: 1. It would insure that a certain number of poor women were delivered under conditions involving in a normal pregnancy the minimum risk to life. 2. The offspring would be free from the danger of contracting purulent ophthalmia, which two of the speakers at the meeting referred to stated to be the cause of fully one-fourth of the cases of blindness in the community to-day. 3. It would afford the students an opportunity of learning thoroughly the aseptic and antiseptic technique of modern midwifery, knowledge which must in their future practice be of the greatest service to them and therefore to the public. 4. It would allow the hospital to become a centre for the training of nurses skilled and certificated in midwifery and thus increase its claims to

public support. Some of these nurses might be available for attendance upon the poor living in the neighbourhood of the hospital, thus replacing the services of the students.

I would therefore suggest to the Association that it should forthwith institute a campaign throughout the country to urge: 1. That every general hospital should as soon as possible provide a lying-in ward. 2. That the general hospitals in each county should become centres for the instruction of midwives, who would obtain there the certificates necessary to secure admission to the Roll. 3. That one or more branches of the association should be established in each county in connexion with the general hospitals in order to ascertain and provide for the wants of the county as regards midwives and to organise and to supervise their work. 4. That the county councils and local authorities should exercise the powers given to them by the Act of making grants towards the cost of the education given to midwives in the hospitals; thus the whole community would bear a part of the expense to which the hospitals would be put in carrying this proposal into effect and not only those members of it who recognise their duties to the poor.

I venture to submit these suggestions as the basis of a scheme which may provide "the definite organisation with clearly stated aims" necessary to secure increased public support of the Association. I have not referred to the good work which I know Queen Charlotte's Lying-in Hospital is doing in increasing the provision for the instruction of students, as the need is for a scheme applicable to the country as a whole.

I am, Sir, yours faithfully,

J. K. FOWLER,

Dean of the Faculty of Medicine, University of London.
Clarges-street, W., Dec. 28th, 1907.

THE COEFFICIENT OF DISINFECTANTS AS REGARDS THE PLAGUE BACILLUS.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—The statements made with reference to the coefficient of various disinfectants against the bacillus pestis indicate that this organism is particularly susceptible to the influence of the various preparations used for disinfecting purposes, but I gravely doubt whether all these statements are absolutely reliable. My reason for saying this is based upon the results of a series of experiments made when examining a well-known disinfectant. I found that using broth for cultivating purposes, with and without the addition of a little butter, the results were sometimes doubtful. I therefore made from all the tubes giving no definite indications of growth agar slope cultures and was not surprised to find after several days that a distinct growth of the bacillus pestis made its appearance. The result was that the disinfectant under trial gave a coefficient about the same as that obtained when the bacillus typhosus was used, whereas judging from the broth cultures alone it was nearly twice as high. An attempt was made to use agar slopes in the first instance instead of the broth, but the results then differed widely from those obtained either with broth alone or with broth followed by agar. Probably other bacteriologists interested in this subject may care to repeat my experiments and confirm or disprove my results. This is my excuse for troubling you with this letter.

I am, Sir, yours faithfully,

JOHN C. THRESH, M.D. Vict., &c.

London Hospital Medical College, Dec. 23rd, 1907.

TWINS: A CURIOUS INCIDENT.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—At Stoke Newington recently inquests were held upon the bodies of twin boys, aged 18 months, who were found dead at the same time in the same bed on a Friday afternoon about 6 P.M. One child had been brought up by the bottle on cow's milk and barley water and the other had been suckled. Both had seemed well until the Sunday before, when both became poorly with colds in the head and coughs. The mother treated the children with castor-oil and embrocations of camphorated oil. She did not think either was seriously ill until the Friday, when one was taken to a doctor who prescribed for it at noon; the other had no medical attendance. The parents declared that both had