Statistics of the Waterford Lying-in Hospital.

There was no post-mortem examination, but the appearance of the body immediately after death left no doubt on my mind that the hemorrhage was into the stomach.

Death from hemorrhage into some vital organ is not an uncommon termination to purpura. The case is interesting, occurring as it did, at the same time with the purpuric fever, and yet being a typical uncomplicated case of purpura hemorrhagica.

ART. XV.—Description and Statistics of the Waterford Lying-in Hospital, in Illustration of the Conditions under which the Occurrence of Puerperal Fever in such Establishments may be Lessened or Prevented. By John Elliott, A.M., M.B.; M.R.C.S., Eng.; Medical Attendant to the Workhouse, Fever, and Lying-in Hospitals, Waterford.

It is not probable that puerperal fever has of late years become more prevalent or fatal than formerly in Lying-in Hospitals. Indeed, such an undesirable and unexpected result would seem scarcely consistent with the hygienic and sanitary precautions and improvements which have been so largely and generally introduced into those Institutions; for although one may not be convinced that the outbreak of zymotic disease is always due to preventible causes, yet the general adoption of the measures above alluded to, as well as improvements in treatment, one would suppose must have limited the range and lessened the mortality of this terrible scourge. However this may be, and whether the mortality from puerperal fever be greater or less in Lying-in Hospitals than of old, it is certain that it has excited so much dissatisfaction, as to originate the inquiry whether these establishments, extensive and magnificent as they are, should not be closed; and the patients, for whom they are intended, be relieved and treated at their own homes. This dissatisfaction may, indeed, have been quickened into activity under the influence of the questioning and critical spirit which is testing all established institutions as well as all received opinions; nevertheless, the important question thus raised has already attracted considerable attention, and been the subject of keen discussion, as well within the ranks of our profession as amongst the lay public; and the interest already excited is pretty sure to increase rather than diminish, unless the circumstances under which it has originated can be altered for the
better. The alternative to which this inquiry points would also prove very injurious to various interests, and not last nor least to the interests of the patients themselves. Any modification, therefore, of Lying-in Hospitals, consistent with their maintenance as hospitals, is worthy of consideration, provided it remedy the evil which threatens their very existence.

Facts, however, rather than theories, are the desiderata for this purpose. It is, therefore, felt that the experience afforded by the working of a Lying-in Hospital, however small, which, for more than twenty-nine years, has never been closed for a single day on account of puerperal fever, and in which, during that period, 3,409 women have been received and delivered, with the loss of only five of that number by that fatal disease, is not without value as a contribution towards the consideration of this important subject. Under the influence of this feeling alone, the following description of this institution and its working is subjoined.

A Lying-in Charity for the relief of poor women at their own homes had been in existence in Waterford from the commencement of the present century. It had been got up and mainly supported by the Society of Friends; and in the year 1838, at the instance and with the aid of the same benevolent body, it was determined to supplement and extend the benefits which had been derived from the charity, by the establishment of a Lying-in Hospital, sufficient for the wants of the town, which should be supported, as the former had been, entirely by voluntary contributions, and managed, like it, by a committee of ladies.

Some preliminary difficulties having been surmounted, and the necessary funds having been collected, the hospital was opened in the month of March, 1838, at a small house rented for the purpose, in an elevated and airy part of the town.

Of this house, only two rooms were available for the occupation of the patients. One was a very small room, in which were two narrow couches or beds, on which the patients were delivered; and the second, a larger room, in which were eight beds. Into this last-mentioned apartment the patients were removed at the end of some hours after delivery, and they continued to occupy it during their stay in the hospital. This larger ward was lighted by three windows with a louvred pane in the upper sash of each. The door was removed from its hinges, so that the entrance was rendered a mere door-way, necessarily open at all times; the bedsteads were plain iron couches, very roomy, but devoid of tester, curtains, or