

CLEANSING

In 1818, Ignaz Phillip Semmelweis was born into a world of dying women. The finest hospitals lost one out of six young mothers to the scourge of "childbed fever." A doctor's daily routine began in the dissecting room where he performed autopsies. From there he made his way to the hospital to examine expectant mothers without ever pausing to wash his hands. Dr. Semmelweis was the first man in history to associate such examinations with the resultant infection and death. His own practice was to wash with a chlorine solution, and after eleven years and the delivery of 8,537 babies, he lost only 184 mothers--about one in fifty.

He spent the vigor of his life lecturing and debating with his colleagues. Once he argued, "Puerperal fever is caused by decomposed material, conveyed to a wound. . .I have shown how it can be prevented. I have proved all that I have said. But while we talk ,talk, talk, gentlemen, women are dying. I am not asking anything world shaking. I am asking you only to wash...For God's sake, wash your hands." But virtually no one believed him. Doctors and midwives had been delivering babies for thousands of years without washing, and no outspoken Hungarian was going to change them now!

Semmelweis died insane at the age of 47, his wash basins discarded, his colleagues laughing in his face, and the death rattle of a thousand women ringing in his ears. "Wash me!" was the anguished prayer of King David. "Wash!" was the message of John the Baptist. "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me," said the towel-draped Jesus to Peter. Without our being washed clean, we all die from the contamination of sin. For God's sake, wash. Boyce Mouton.

RENEWAL

Dr. J. Elder Cumming contended that "in almost every case the beginning of new blessing is a new revelation of the character of God--more beautiful, more wonderful, more precious."

J.O. Sanders, Enjoying Intimacy with God, Moody, p. 14.

Compared with salamanders and starfish, mammals have a dismally limited ability to replace lost parts. But now reports of children growing back finger tips and spleens are changing that.

In 1974, Cynthia Illingworth, an English physician specializing in emergency medicine, discovered that when children accidentally sever the finger tip (down to the first joint), the best treatment is no treatment. Cleaned and covered with a bandage, the finger tip, including the nail, grows back. In 11 or 12 weeks the new finger tip usually looks as if nothing had happened to it.

There seem to be three requirements for regrowth: the patient must be under 12 years old, the cut must be above the crease of the first joint, and surgeons must keep hands off the injury. Any operation performed on the finger destroys its ability to grow back. The last condition is the hardest to accept, admits Dr. Michael Bleicher, a pediatric surgeon at Mt. Sinai Hospital in New York City.

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