

Meig's views on smallpox vaccination are criticized on the next page.

*Obstetrics: The Science and the Art.* By CHARLES D. MEIGS, M. D., etc. etc. Fourth Edition, revised. With one hundred and twenty-nine illustrations. 8vo. pp. 730. Philadelphia, 1863. Blanchard & Lea.

THE present edition of Dr. Meigs' well-known treatise on obstetrics exhibits, throughout every chapter and section, the marks of the careful revision to which the work has been subjected by the author, and the very decided improvement it has undergone by reason, as well of omissions from the text as of additions to it. The work, notwithstanding its blemishes, which, though prominent, are but few in number, and far outnumbered by its unquestioned excellencies, forms, beyond doubt, one of our very best treatises on the science and the art of midwifery, whether regarded in the character of a guide for the student, or as a counsellor in the hour of need to the actively engaged practitioner. In respect to everything embraced within the scope of obstetrical practice, in the strict sense of the term, we know of no work from which more sound, clear and fuller instruction is to be derived than from the one before us.

We have no intention to enter into a formal criticism of the treatise. Its general scope and peculiar characteristics have, by this time, become pretty well known to the medical profession, in this country at least, of whom the almost unanimous approval has been conceded to the work as an exponent of the science and the art of obstetrics. All, therefore, that would seem to be called for, is a brief notice of the additions and improvements by which this fourth edition is distinguished from those which preceded. We shall merely refer to one or two points in the teachings of the author to which our attention has been attracted, as well from their actual importance and the weight which must necessarily be attached by the junior members of the profession to the views held in respect to them by one having the authority of Dr. Meigs as an expounder and practitioner of obstetrics.

In respect to the use of anæsthetics in midwifery, Dr. Meigs expresses his opposition as strongly in the present as he had in the former editions of his treatise. Notwithstanding he is willing to admit that there may occur some instances in which the parturient woman will be benefited by the use of ether employed as an anæsthetic, he contends that such instances must be extremely rare; while, on the other hand, the mischiefs, he contends, arising from the lavish and indiscriminate employment of anæsthetic agents, so strongly tempting as it is, are many and of a very serious character.

In the general run of cases of natural and ordinary labour we feel well persuaded that the resort to any anæsthetic merely to get rid of pain is entirely unjustifiable. In many cases, however, of labour where manual or instrumental interference is demanded, or in cases in which there is an abnormal amount of pain present, or when the labour is rendered protracted from a rigid condition of the os uteri, vagina, or perineum; as well, also, in cases of puerperal eclampsia unattended with cerebral congestion, and in other contingencies occurring during labour, which it is not necessary to here enumerate, we have the concurrent testimony of the most distinguished and authoritative obstetricians, that the employment of anæsthetics, especially pure sulphuric ether, will be productive of highly beneficial effects, and when conducted with a due amount of caution is attended with but slight danger.

The section devoted to the consideration of placenta prævia has been entirely recast in the present edition. The one leading indication laid down by Dr. Meigs in all cases of placental presentation is, as soon as the os uteri has be-

come sufficiently dilatable, to turn the child and deliver by the feet. The views of Drs. Radford and Simpson in respect to the treatment of placenta prævia, the arguments advanced by them in its support, and their experience in proof of its superior efficacy, receive not the slightest favour at the hands of Dr. Meigs.

"Let no man," the latter remarks, "suppose me to be so bold, not to say so impudent, as to call in question the perfect good faith with which Messrs. Radford, Simpson, and others, have stated their experience; it will ever be far from me to do so, though I can find in the mystery of their success no other solution than the errors of their observations, since I know—not believe—that a child deprived for many consecutive hours of all its sources of aëration must, of necessity die, and since I know equally well that when the os is not very greatly dilated and practicable for speedy delivery no man can, or will ever be able to detach an unassailable implanted placenta—unassailable, I say, because it lies far beyond his finger points. There ought to be a public recantation made of so considerable and so mischievous an error—an error that assuredly will not long withstand the light of the nineteenth century."

We would recommend to the young practitioner a careful study of the entire section devoted to the consideration of placenta prævia and its treatment. It will be found particularly instructive. The views of Dr. Meigs will, we believe, be endorsed by the great majority of well-instructed and experienced obstetricians.

Whilst pointing out the very serious consequences which usually result from the occurrence of smallpox during pregnancy, especially towards its latter period, Dr. Meigs urges upon his readers not only the immense importance of sedulously guarding the pregnant female from exposure to the contagion of variola, but of abstaining under every and all circumstances from subjecting her to vaccination.

"The shocking spectacles of distress that I have witnessed from the vaccination of pregnant females have so impressed my mind," says Dr. Meigs, "with the enormity of the imprudence, that nothing, I think, could tempt me to commit it myself. The most furious phlebitis, which is endangitis, and which becomes pyæmic fever, is one of the consequences likely to result from every true or spurious vaccination of a pregnant female. I am firmly convinced that it is far better for the physician, during an epidemic of smallpox, to leave his pregnant patient to the chance of a natural infection, than to certainly bring her within the range of its virulent power by a vaccine inoculation, which is but a variolous inoculation modified by the generical force of an inferior zoological genus. If I venture to put forth such opinions as the above, it is hardly incumbent upon me further to protest against the temerity of those who, during the existence of a smallpox epidemic, recommend, and even proffer, what is called *revaccination* to those who, having been already vaccinated, might be held to be protected; I mean to pregnant women. I have seen pregnant women very nigh to term, unnecessarily revaccinated, with consequences so terrific that I think I would not, for a thousand golden crowns, either vaccinate or revaccinate any woman knowing her to be pregnant."

We candidly confess that the foregoing extract embraces statements which to us are as novel as they are adverse to all our experience. We have had frequent occasion to vaccinate females during pregnancy, and still more frequent occasion to revaccinate such individuals, but in no instance have we known any bad symptom or the slightest evil consequence follow the operation. We should not, certainly, make choice of the period of pregnancy to either vaccinate or revaccinate our female patients; but in any instance where there was imminent danger of a pregnant woman being attacked by smallpox, in consequence especially of its prevalence as an epidemic in her immediate neighbourhood, we should consider ourselves warranted in securing to her without delay the protection afforded by the lesser evil, vaccination—if it can, indeed, be considered in any sense an evil—against the much to be dreaded because often deadly effects of the variolous poison. Nay, we should consider ourselves derelict in the duty we owed to our pregnant patient if we did not, under the circumstances referred to, urge her to submit to vaccination, even though in early life it had been already performed in her case.

The curious argument by which Dr. Meigs attempts to sustain his opposition to vaccination during pregnancy, will hold equally good against the safety of vaccination under many other conditions. Thus, if the argument be at all valid, it should deter us from resorting to vaccination in the early stages of life, and in the midst of those severe epidemics it has been our ill fortune more than once to witness, when even those are no longer safe who, at other times, were found proof against infection, though they had been exposed fully to the action of the variolous poison.

The peculiar views advanced many years ago by Dr. Meigs in respect to the pathology and treatment of what he denominates "child-bed fever," are reiterated in the volume before us, unmodified in the slightest degree in any of their features by the vast body of facts in elucidation of the subject that has of late years been accumulated by medical observers everywhere. These facts are as completely ignored by our author as though they had no existence.

A correct scientific account of the so-called puerperal, or child-bed fever, is still to be written. Whether we have as yet in our possession all the materials requisite for the preparation of such an account may, with good reason, be doubted. But upon a careful collation and analysis of all the recently recorded facts, observations and researches directly bearing upon the subject, every unprejudiced inquirer will be obliged, we think, to admit that, under the term "puerperal fever," meaning thereby to indicate a single special fever incident to the puerperal state, simply varying in intensity in different cases and in its different visitations, there has been in fact embraced various morbid conditions resulting from very different causes, attended by very different phenomena, pursuing a very different march, presenting very distinct pathological lesions, and requiring very dissimilar courses of treatment. And while it is found that the so-called puerperal or child-bed fever is neither a single nor specific disease, it will as clearly appear that the several morbid conditions which have thus been named and classed, are not confined to the puerperal period, but may occur to woman at any period of her life, and in the male equally as the female.

Dr. Meigs will find few among his contemporaries in the profession, either at home or abroad, willing to endorse his one-sided and exclusive teachings on the subject of puerperal fever, or the treatment to which he believes his convictions as to the true pathology of the disease necessarily lead. They will soon become—they are even so now—to a great extent exclusively his own.

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