

CHAPTER IV.
MIDWIFERY.

SECTION I.

THE abuses and impositions resulting from the present practice of midwifery by physicians, are as serious and reprehensible, and call as loudly for a reformation, as those pointed out under the head of Physic and Surgery: and, notwithstanding the severe animadversions on the subject by many persons for a length of time, the custom still continues.

Females have been made to believe that physicians *only* are *competent* to assist them in the hour of child-birth, and that midwives are *incompetent*; by which this branch of medicine has been very unjustly and improperly wrested from them, and monopolized by the faculty. Did females know the ignorance, the untimely and rash interference with the unwieldy hands of doctors, the exposure, the rash attempts to accomplish delivery, the injury done by bleeding, minerals, ergot, and instruments—I state, did they know all this, the serpentine charm which now unfortunately deludes them would be broken, and they would shrink with disgust and horror at the very thought of employing males in parturition, or child-birth. Nothing but the grossest ignorance leads them to embrace a practice so unnatural and revolting. In nearly every case nature is quite sufficient to expel the child; and where aid is required, females are in every respect calculated to render all the assistance required, except, perhaps, in some rare or extraordinary cases. A very little instruction and experience will enable any sensible female to become proficient in this branch of medicine; and I venture to affirm that her success will be far greater than that of male practitioners: in proof, I refer to the practice of Mrs. Ruth Stebbins, of Westfield, Mass., Mrs. Halsey, of New York, and hundreds of others, whose great success is ample evidence of their skill and competency. Also, Madame Boivin, and Lachapelle, of

France, who have been present at the delivery of more than *forty thousand cases*, nearly all of which terminated favourably, even without aid: and observe, also, the great success of other midwives in Germany, Denmark, and other parts of the world. So stupidly or wilfully blind are many females, that they are ignorant that nature accomplishes the delivery, and that the doctors get the credit and the fee, while the worthy and skilful midwife is pronounced ignorant or incompetent. I cannot see why such a custom, so recent, unnatural, and novel in its character, should have prevailed, and gained such an ascendancy, except in the same manner that every other foolish and absurd fashion prevails.

I have practised this branch of medicine ever since I began my profession; but so fully convinced have I been that it is wrong, and belongs to the other sex, that I have abandoned it to its rightful owners, female midwives: and I am, therefore, as anxious to bring about a reformation in this department as in other branches of medicine. I trust that I shall have at least the enlightened portion of the community to sustain me in a cause of such vital importance, both to the moral and physical well-being of the female sex.

In the next section I will give a communication on this subject from a worthy and respectable lady, Mrs. E. Arnold, of Westfield, Mass.

SECTION II.

From the Botanic Medical Reformer.

MIDWIFERY. BY MRS. ELIJAH ARNOLD.

I RECEIVE regularly the "Home Physician," and I hail it as a welcome visiter, for I feel more than ever interested in the subject of "*Medical Reform.*" While the subjects of abolition, temperance, and moral reform have been much agitated, and become quite popular in the community, the subject of medical reform has been much neglected, especially by women; for many, no doubt, think it far above their comprehension, and suitable only for the medical faculty, but I do not so regard it. I believe women are created with minds capable of improvement; they have intellect and reasoning faculties; they, too, unlike Mahomet's doctrine, have souls capable of existing through a never-ending eternity, and of course will be required to render an account of their stewardship on earth; they, too, are commanded, equally with their brethren, to improve their talents, to the honour and glory of God; and if their pilgrimage on earth is passed in vain and trifling amusements, or in heaping up gilded treasures—if they have disregarded the bodies and souls of their fellow-men—how will they answer to an offended God? I believe it is the duty of a Christian woman to do good, and not only do it, but qualify herself for more extensive usefulness.

By this, I do not mean to be foremost in the popular reforms of the age, but take up some branch of duty that has been neglected or passed over with indifference; and what more claims the attention of women at the present day than the subject of medical reform, and a knowledge of the human system generally. We are, indeed, "fearfully and wonderfully made;" and can we think ourselves so much above it as to refuse to study into the workmanship of God? And why should not women be qualified to act as physicians for their own sex? have they not minds capable of im-

provement, hearts to sympathize with the afflicted, and hands to administer to the comforts of the sick? I do not ask that women alone should have this place; I do not desire that they should become fashionable physicians, to deal out *mineral poisons*—but that they should become qualified to be useful members of society, and ready, in any emergency, to administer to their own sex when required.

Another branch of medical reform, and one to which I would more particularly call the attention of women, is *Obstetrics*, and upon this subject I can hardly speak without manifesting my indignant feelings that a physician should ever occupy this place. It is contrary to every principle of delicacy and refinement, and disgusting to every feeling of our nature. It is an unheard-of practice in most countries, except in some parts of Europe and enlightened America. It is degrading to our natures, and a reproach to any people who submit to the practice, and is universally reprobated by moral writers. Says the celebrated Dr. Beach, of New York, “the practice is unnecessary, unnatural, and wrong.” Many others, justly celebrated writers, might be named, of the same sentiment, but we need not appeal to physicians or moral writers; our own sense of propriety teaches us that we must sacrifice all principle of right, before we submit to the practice. Now, upon this point we shall probably agree that a reform is necessary, and a change must be effected in order to have our practice to correspond with our moral feelings, with reason, and with the revealed will of God. It remains now to inquire in what way this can best be done. So long as women are so ignorant upon this subject, and public sentiment is so much against it, and designing physicians are endeavouring to keep it in their own hands, through self-interest, very little, comparatively, can be accomplished; but let an interest be awakened in the community, light disseminated, and knowledge increased, then we shall clearly perceive that a change is necessary. Let two or three, or more women in every town or village, of piety, talents, learning, and respectability, make a sacrifice, and step forward to become properly qualified to act as midwives, and then let them be suitably instructed, and let those physicians who have honesty and candour enough about them to give up this practice from principle, patronise them, and public sentiment would soon turn in their favour. Let the most respectable women of every town be guarded about whom they employ; let them give no countenance to a physician, but patronise the women thus qualified, and this would soon be instrumental in turning the tide of public sentiment. Let our brethren, Botanic physicians, and editors of Botanic journals throughout the length and breadth of our land, continue to pour a flood of light upon the community, and no doubt but this practice, by the blessings of God, will soon be restored to its original place, where our Creator designed it should be. I appeal to Botanic editors, because apparently they alone dare come out in opposition to public sentiment, to advocate this cause.

This subject must come before the public through the medium of your periodical, and others of a similar kind, because Christian newspapers, and some edited by our own sex, too, have refused to publish well-written communications upon this subject; and even some, who profess to have for their object the advancement of moral reform principles, refuse to take up this branch of the subject, which every investigating mind must know is a branch of moral reform; and how can they expect to exterminate the sin of licentiousness, if they refuse to lay the axe to the root of the tree? The celebrated Dr. Ewell, in speaking of *man* midwifery, after thirty years’

practice, says, "it is the secret history of adultery." I appeal to my brethren and sisters, is not this a fact? If so, let us arise in the power of our might, and exert our influence in this cause of truth. I bless God that our world is being enlightened upon this subject; and though some of our sisters are too delicate to favour this cause, or refuse through self-interest, yet God is raising up brethren and physicians to enlighten the world on this subject, and may they do it in the fear of God. I regret that the Church and the Watchmen are so silent; ought they not to investigate the subject in the fear of God, and exert their influence in its promotion? When will the time arrive when virtue, and purity, and peace shall prevail on earth!—O Lord, hasten the day.

Westfield, Mass., June, 1841.

"I have seldom," says Dr. Ewell, in treating upon this same subject, "felt a more ardent desire to succeed in any undertaking, because I view the present increasing practice, of calling upon men in ordinary births, as a source of serious evils of child-bearing—as an imposition upon the credulity of women, and upon the fears of their husbands—as a means of sacrificing delicacy, and consequently virtue—as a robbery of many of the good common women (midwives) of their employment and support. Truly, it shows as extraordinary a revolution in practice as any afforded by a survey of all the arts." "Should the strangers to the practice inquire if our men have large unwieldy hands—great curiosity about women; should they ask if our women have the requisites for useful services—small hands, good sense of touch, and patience in attendance—they will absolutely deny this monstrous perversion of the course of nature."

But so it is; the practice of midwifery, in all our towns and villages, and to a great extent in the country, is now almost exclusively confined to the hands of the physicians, who, by their marvellous tales of the hair-breadth escapes of numerous women to whom they have been called just in time to save life, strike a terror in the mind of the suffering woman, which confirms her in the determination, no matter how repulsive to her delicacy, to employ none but doctors. These tales are told, of course, in presence of the attendants of the woman in labour; and most commonly perhaps the individual whom the doctor has so fortunately rescued from such great peril, was at the same time in the hands of a female midwife, who, however skilful, was unable to render the needful assistance. The frequent repetition of these stories in the presence of the same women, with the affected mystery in which the transaction is enveloped, make a serious impression on their minds, and fill them with the most awful apprehensions; and they, in turn, employ the same individual, feeling themselves safe in the hands of no one else, unless it be some other physician who can tell equally marvellous tales.

"A thousand times," says Dr. Ewell, "you dwell upon the miseries of one sufferer, without thinking upon the millions who happily and healthily pass the period of parturition. Away with your forebodings! Believe the truth, when pregnant, that, in all human probability, you will do perfectly well; that the most ordinary women can render you every needful assistance, without the interference of men midwives. *Their hurry, their spirit for acting, have done the sex more harm than all the injudicious management of midwives, of which they are so fond of talking.* This Dr. Denman, Dr. Buchan, and many other really great physicians, have long since remarked."

SECTION III.

TESTIMONY OF DR. J. KING.

DR. JOHN KING, of New Bedford, Mass., writes as follows on the subject of midwifery: "I agree with you, and I insist upon it wherever I go, that this is not the part of a physician's labour. It is not a sickness in reality—but a natural effect, intended by our Creator, and should be solely in the hands of women; yet, owing to prejudice and the custom of society, however much they concur with me in this fact, when the hour arrives, the man is called, and she, whose modesty would at any other time mantle her cheeks with crimson, willingly submits to the laws of custom.

About four-fifths of the female patients whom I attend for falling of the womb and other diseases, have satisfied me beyond a doubt, that the sole cause of their afflictions was the improper interference of their MAN MIDWIFE; and you would not only laugh at the ignorance and stupidity of some of our most celebrated physicians, but would be surprised and disgusted, were I to inform you of the manual operations for dilating the vagina, &c., that the woman might get through labour sooner and with less pain.

I shall continue to decry this unnatural and immodest practice as long as life remains."

I conversed with a person a few days ago, who stated that his wife had been afflicted nearly twenty years with falling of the womb, produced, while living in England, by her doctor during parturition. He was in a great hurry to get through, and took such means to facilitate delivery as thus to injure her.

Females, dare you any longer hazard your health and lives by employing men to attend you instead of females, whose province alone it is to officiate in this branch? Remember, if you do, it is at your peril, and I fear a curse instead of a blessing will attend you. Let the public be aroused to a proper sense of the evils and abuses connected with this subject, and let them adopt proper means for instructing suitable persons in midwifery. Let selfishness and ignorance be sacrificed on the altar of benevolence.

SECTION IV.

STATEMENT OF A LONDON PHYSICIAN.

To show how grossly and wickedly women are sometimes deceived and imposed upon by medical men, I give the following paragraph from the London Practice of Midwifery:

"A patient, after the waters are discharged," says the author, "requires a little management; it is not just to stay with her at the time; and yet it is necessary, if we leave her, to leave her in confidence; therefore we may give her the idea of making provision for whatever may happen in our absence: we may pass our finger up the vagina or opening to the womb, and make a moderate degree of pressure for a few seconds on any part of it, so that she may just feel it, after which we may say to her, 'There, ma'am, I have done something that will be of great use to your labour.' This she

trusts to ; and if, when she sends for us, we get there in time, it is well ; if later than we should be, we easily satisfy her. (For the doctor knows.) ' Yes, you know I told you I did something which would be of great service to you in your labour.' If the placenta is not yet come away—' oh, I am quite in time for the after-birth, and that you know is of the greatest consequence in labour ;' and if the whole has come away—' we are glad the after-birth is all come away in consequence of what we did before we last left the patient, and the labour terminated just as we intended it should !' "

This farce and deception probably costs the husband five or ten guineas. Do you think, reader, that one of our North American Indian women could be thus cheated and humbugged ?

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THIS WORK EMBRACES THE
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