

# M I D W I F E R Y .

## CHAPTER I.

### HISTORY OF MIDWIFERY.

**ANCIENT MIDWIFERY.**—All history, sacred and profane, attests that the general practice of midwifery has been in the hands of females until a very modern date. It is true Hippocrates *theorizes* on obstetrics, but we have no evidence of his possessing any experimental knowledge on the subject. Historians tell us that in Greece, Rome, Persia, Egypt, Arabia, and Chaldea, woman was woman's physician. The Old Testament informs us that *female* midwifery was an honorable calling among the ancient Hebrews. "Since the beginning of history," says Mrs. C. M. Dall, "the lives of eighty-seven women, eminent not only for obstetrical skill, but capable of extended practice, have been written."

So far as the world has had experience in this matter, the success of female accouchers has been at least as great as that of male accouchers; and the statistics of all ages show that the *attendance* of woman has been accompanied with fewer accidents and a less number of fatal cases than the *practice* of man. Since it has been as fashionable as it is foolish to drug and bleed pregnant females occasionally, on the absurd notion that there are a great many *natural* "diseases of pregnancy," the success of our most eminent professional men-midwives compares rather unfavorably with that of many professional female midwives, who lived in happy ignorance of the whole of the modern drug and bleeding art.

**MODERN MIDWIFERY.**—Save in most parts of Great Britain and the United States, the general practice of midwifery still is in the hands of woman. In several European countries, the business is divided between male and female practitioners; but in the greater number of

countries on earth, civilized and uncivilized, woman officiates in all ordinary cases. Throughout Russia, at this day, educated females attend all classes of society, from the royal family to the meanest serf. The Chinese employ midwives in all ordinary cases, obstetrical surgeons being called upon only when instrumental assistance is necessary. The American Indians, the Otaheitians, the New Zealanders, and many other nations and tribes, who employ female midwives or none, are celebrated for easy births and exemption from accidents. In France, the *sage femme*, wise woman, is the principal accoucher. In Germany, the *vroedvrouw*, skillful woman, officiates. In Denmark her title is *iordermoder*, earth-mother. In Sweden and Norway she is called *iord-gumma*. In Spain and Portugal, the *co-madre*—literally, with mother—attends. All of these terms are equivalent to midwife in our language.

**FEMALE AUTHORS AND PRACTITIONERS.**—Soon after the institution of the first medical school in Greece, the exclusive spirit of the faculty obtained the enactment of a statute prohibiting the practice of this art by "women and slaves." The tyrannical act spread dismay among the women of Athens; and so tumultuously did they rebel against the outrage upon "woman rights," that a new act was soon after passed allowing free-born women to learn midwifery. No other attempt was made by the profession to wrest this practice from its rightful owners until after the accession of Henry IV.

Among those who have attained eminence in this their peculiar department of the healing art, the following names may be mentioned in this place: Agnodike, the daughter of Hierophilus; she practiced successfully at Athens in defiance of the medical clique. Artemesia, the queen who assisted Xerxes at the battle of Salamis. Elpindike, of Greece, daughter of Cimon, and sister of Miltiades. Yroutata, of Salerno, who practiced in the latter part of the thirteenth century, and wrote several books. Mad. Perrette, who was sworn into the office of midwife, in Paris, in 1408, and became famous throughout France. Mad. Gancourt, later in the fifteenth century, became equally celebrated. Mad. Francoise, the midwife of Catherine de Medicis, was an approved lecturer on obstetrics near the middle of the sixteenth century. Olympia Morata, born in Ferrara in 1626, wrote the lectures which her husband, a young physician, delivered at Heidelberg. Mad. Perronne had the reputation of contributing all the obstetrical matter which was published in the works of the eminent French surgeon, James Guillemeau. Louise Boursin Bourgeois, born in 1580, married a surgeon, was appointed to attend the Queen of France, and

published many valuable works. Mad. La Marche, born in 1638, was an accomplished literary scholar, as well as extensive obstetrical writer and practitioner. Justine Dieterich Siegmunden, born in Silesia in 1650, was one of the most accurate anatomists of her day, an extensive practitioner of midwifery, and the authoress of several obstetrical works. Mad. Breton, in the eighteenth century, invented a plan for the artificial nourishment of babes. Elizabeth Blackwell, born in England in 1712, was the authoress of the first illustrated work on medical botany ever published. Mad. Ducondray, born at Paris in 1712, was the first person who lectured with a manikin, which she invented herself. Morandi, born at Bologna in 1716, was among the first to invent and perfect wax preparations. Mademoiselle Biheron, born at Paris in 1730, made still greater improvements in wax figures illustrative of obstetrical knowledge.

Sarah Stone, of England, was the authoress of a work published in 1737, called the "Complete Practice." Elizabeth Nihell, of London, was distinguished for successfully opposing a distinguished physician on one hand, and a notorious quack on the other. In 1760 she wrote a treatise on midwifery, in which she exposed the use of instruments, which the male accouchers were becoming too fond of employing; advocated the employment of women, and strongly protested against the interference of men. She declared that a curse followed their intermeddling, in evidence of which she adduced the increasing number of difficult and fatal labors. Mad. Reffatin, born in 1720, was the author of a work on "Delayed Accouchments." Margaret Stevens was the authoress of the "Domestic Midwife," published in London in 1795. Mad. Lunel published a work in Paris in 1750. Mad. La Chapelle, who officiated in over twenty-two thousand cases at the Maternité Hospital in Paris, ranks among the standard authorities on midwifery. Mad. Bovin, another standard authoress of several works, attended over twenty thousand cases, and performed nearly all the manual and instrumental operations known to the art as successfully as any male accoucher has ever done. Mad. Lesebours was the authoress of a work published in 1770. An Irish midwife, named Dunally, performed the Cæsarean operation successfully with a common razor. Mad. Rondet, born in 1800, perfected a tube for the restoration of children born asphyxiated. Mad. Dian was practicing reputably in 1821. Mad. Wittemback was consulted in relation to obstetrics by the most experienced physicians.

In the United States the following names occur in this connection: Old Mrs. Wiat, who died at Dorchester, Mass., in 1705, aged ninety-four years, assisted as midwife in more than eleven hundred cases. Mrs. Whittemore, who died in Marlboro', Vermont, at the age of

eighty-seven, often traveled through the woods on snow-shoes to attend her patients, and of more than two thousand cases of births, she never lost a patient. Mrs. Elizabeth Phillips, who was born at Westminster, England, and commissioned to act as midwife by the Lord Bishop of London in 1718, removed to Charlestown, Mass., the following year, where her gravestone now records the honorable story that she assisted in successfully bringing into the world above three thousand children. Mrs. Jane Alexander, who died at Boston in 1845, aged sixty-one years, studied midwifery with Dr. James Hamilton, of Edinburgh, and practiced in this country twenty-five years without losing a patient. Mrs. Stebbins, who died at Westfield, Mass., in 1844, at the age of seventy-five, was an extensive and successful practitioner for many years. Similar facts could be greatly multiplied, but I have already enough for my purpose.

**MAN-MIDWIFERY.**—According to the best authorities we can find, man-midwifery, as a regular part of the physician's duties, dates back precisely one hundred and eighty-eight years, and then it originated with a court prostitute of Louis XIV., the Duchess de Villiers, who, under arrangements of the utmost secrecy, submitted to be attended by Julian Clement, an eminent surgeon. Clement was soon after appointed to the new and lucrative office of midwife to the Princess of France. Until that event the ordinary practice was entirely in the hands of female midwives, surgeons being called upon only as *surgeons* in cases of unnatural labors.

In the most uncivilized and unenlightened portions of the globe, a male midwife has never been heard of. A male accoucher was not known among the "Puritans" until this country had been settled more than a century. In 1723, Dr. John Maubray, the first male lecturer in England on this subject, wrote a book against the abuse of instruments, which the male accouchers were becoming too fond of employing. In fact, at that time the use of instruments was considered such an improvement on nature that, in the language of Dr. Gregory (*Man-midwifery Exposed*), "Almost every doctor, old or young, was for trying his hand at it." So notorious, indeed, was the rage for instrumental operations, that Sterne, in 1757, satirized it in "The Life and Times of Tristram Shandy, Gent."

Dr. Shippen, of Philadelphia, was the first lecturer on midwifery in the United States—1762. Dr. Atwood, of this city, in the same year, was the first to advertise himself as a man-midwife. And no longer ago than 1820, a Boston physician published and circulated a pamphlet advocating the exclusion of females from the practice, and the substitu-

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tion of males. At the present time, nearly every allopathic medical journal in the world is vehemently opposed to relinquishing this practice into the hands of females, while every progressive and reform periodical I am acquainted with as earnestly advocates the restoration.

WHO SHOULD BE MIDWIVES ?—I confess to be of that number who advocate a restoration of the practice of midwifery to *educated* females ; but I am very far from desiring to see it taken from the hands of educated physicians and entrusted to ignorant nurses. I hold, however, that *all* females should be sufficiently intelligent on this subject to manage an ordinary labor, and certainly the education required for this purpose is exceedingly simple—so much so that the majority of females could and would acquire it without any teacher whatever, if they were entirely left to themselves, and thereby compelled to become self-instructed. It is very true, moreover, that the multitudinous disorders and deformities existing in artificial society, do now, and will for a long time to come, render surgical assistance necessary in certain cases ; and for this purpose the practical surgeon-accoucher should be retained for accidents, complications, and emergencies. His services would be rarely called in requisition if we had properly-educated females to take the entire management of the ordinary practice ; and surely no one will pretend that young men can be taught the simple yet delicate duties of a companion and attendant during childbirth, more readily than young women can, or be more efficient in the discharge of the responsible duties devolving. The reason young women are not so educated, or are but imperfectly educated, is because the immense influence of an interested profession is arrayed against them.