

## INTRODUCTION.

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**CONCERNING** matters pertaining to midwifery, friends of Water-Cure sometimes ask questions like the following :

1. What methods of treatment shall we adopt to enable us the better to pass through the period of pregnancy ?
2. What methods to aid in mitigating the pains and perils of childbirth ?
3. Shall we employ a physician on such occasions ?
4. If so, shall it be a male or female practitioner ?

As regards the first and second of these queries collectively, I remark, that in 1848 I commenced the practice of midwifery according to the hydropathic plan, and have, from time to time since that period, published articles on the subject of pregnancy and childbirth, and have put forth, also, a small work which has had a wide circulation, and been the means of doing some good. There is, doubtless, no branch or department of the medical art in which a judicious regulation of water, air, exercise, and diet, are more strikingly beneficial than in that now under consideration. I would speak earnestly on this point, and as to the truthfulness of what I affirm, I may confidently refer to the experience of those who have a knowledge of the subject—to *those who have themselves experienced the effects of hydropathy*. We do not hear persons say, “We have resorted to the water-treatment in childbirth and have found it to be an injury to us;” but on the contrary, we *do* hear it said, “We had borne a number of children under the old methods, suffering at each time more than mortal tongue can describe; but now, since we have become informed on the subject of Water-Cure, we find childbirth—hard as it necessarily is—a much more

easy thing to bear." I repeat, the *uniformity of the testimony* in favor of water-treatment among those who have in their own persons tested it, is remarkable and without parallel in the healing art.

But I must here allude to the fact, that different practitioners in the new system must, some of them at least, entertain honest differences of opinion in regard to the hydropathic uses of water in pregnancy and childbirth. One tells us that too much bathing is usually practiced on such occasions; another that too little is done. One tells us that water patients are everywhere allowed to get up *too soon* after childbirth; another that they are kept in bed too long. One says that the vagina syringe is almost the all in all for woman kind, and would almost make us believe that women were made for syringes, and not syringes for women. Another says that the vagina syringe, so far as labor and the getting up are concerned, is at best comparatively only a poor affair; that it is not in accordance with the principles of sound physiology or pathology to throw *cold* water upon any bleeding surface—external or internal of the body; that the use of the vagina syringe is revolting to the feelings of nine tenths of all midwifery patients who have had it used; that so far as the limited experience of hydropathic practitioners extends in this department, it would appear that those who have not in their practice thus used cold water internally, have had, at least, as good success as those who have.

In regard to preventing the "pains and perils" of childbirth, there seems likewise to be some differences of opinion among the water doctors, so called. Some who are, as it were, just commencing the practice, and have more zeal than knowledge in the matter, would have us believe that water almost wholly prevents the pains of parturition and the perils thereof. But there are others who maintain, that do what we will, labor must, as a general fact, be attended with severe suffering; that as a mere palliative of pain at the time of labor, little can be claimed for water; that labors are not, probably, on the whole, shortened by the use of water either before or at the time; that very short labors are not, probably, more frequent in the new than in the old way; that very quick labors are not desirable, since experience teaches that they are not so safe as those which are more protracted. It is maintain-



ed, too, that say what we may, childbirth is, and must necessarily be, in all civilized societies, a serious thing to enter upon. What woman who has ever passed through this ordeal does not regard it so? and what physician, no matter how old, or experienced, or skillful he may be, does not, every time he enters the lying-in chamber, feel this responsibility to be a great and trying one? Admitting all that can be done by the water-treatment in matters of midwifery, and much, very much, certainly may be—childbirth is yet an agony, and must ever continue so to be.

Various other points might be mentioned in which there is honest disagreement of opinion among hydropathists. This must, in the nature of the case, be so. Nor should such disagreements make us enemies toward each other. One thing is remarkable, and speaks volumes for the new method, namely, *the good success that everywhere attends it.*

Respecting our third question—Shall we employ a physician on occasions of childbirth? I remark that people should, themselves, be the judges. If you possess the courage that I have seen exhibited among the peasantry of the Silesian mountains of Germany, you may get along almost without an assistant of any kind. There childbirth is looked upon in a light very different from what we see in our own country. If, moreover, you can, by great and continuous effort, arrive at the degree of physical hardihood and strength which is possessed by those vigorous, out-of-door working females to whom I have referred, then you may, as a general thing, get along safely without the aid of a physician. But things are different with us here; we are not to expect that our females will, for generations to come, be as hardy and enduring as the peasant women of many parts of the old world.

In this country we find that the younger married people are more apt than the older to resort to water-treatment in childbirth. I imagine I am addressing myself to a young couple, who hope soon to become parents. They have talked the matter over, and resolve that they will try to get along without a doctor of any kind. I say to them, Young friends, you are about to pass through a matter which you can know but very little about beforehand. Would it not be safer to get a physician into your house, at least? Pay him for his time accordingly as you are able, and, mark my

word, he will be very willing to stay in the parlor, kitchen, anywhere, if you do not need him. If it be in the night, get him off to bed, and tell him you will call him when needed. Thus you will both feel safer than if he were away. You might need him very much before morning, and possibly when it would be too late to get him from a distance. Once the birth is over, and the mother rested a little, he will allow at least a tepid sponging; and the word tepid allows a good deal of latitude, so that the water may be taken quite cool. Besides, too, once you have got the liberty to do it, you can repeat it often. By so doing the doctor will be astonished to find how well you get along.

Should male or female physicians be employed in midwifery? This is a bone of contention with many. The facts are these: the world got along anciently very well without physicians, or, at most, with those only who were rude and untaught in schools. I do not know that we have statistics enough to prove much in regard to the question, as to whether the world is more thriving with or without physicians; and as to whether male or female midwives are more successful, the great Dr. Rush—who was certainly a most candid and liberal-minded man, and in all particulars not only in favor of human right, but of “woman’s rights,” of which we nowdays hear so much—tells us “that it appears from the bills of mortality in London and Dublin, that about one in seventy of those women die in childbirth who are in the hands of female midwives; but from the accounts of the lying-in-hospitals in those cities which are under the care of man-midwives, only one in a hundred and forty perishes in childbirth.” But admit that the female doctors in those cities are not properly educated, or so well educated in their calling as the men are—a thing, however, which does not appear—it is not yet proved to us that males should not practice in this department.

The broad ground I take on this subject is this: educate **THE PEOPLE** in all matters pertaining to health; let physiology and hygiene be taught at the fireside and in the schools as much as any other science. At a proper age let both sexes throughout be taught all that may be concerning pregnancy and childbirth; and, all this accomplished, let those of both sexes practice whom skill, talent, and experience dictate. Educate the **PEOPLE**, and they will find



out soon enough who are the most competent, and who are not, to practice the healing art.

As to the talk we hear so much of at this day about *the indecency of man-midwifery*, it is idle twattle, that scarce needs a remark. Indecent for a man to get up of a cold, wet night, and attend a poor, suffering woman in labor, and night after night, as not unfrequently happens! Indecent for us to resort to the use of instruments with which to destroy the life of the unborn child, in order to save that of the mother, as must sometimes, with the best possible management, be done! Away with all such foolishness, and the worse than false modesty which dictates it! They ought to take shame on themselves who utter it.

Yes, friends, I will tell you in a word how I feel in this matter. When I was born, my most worthy mother was very young. I was her first child. And since I have come to years of understanding, and often when I have attended women in childbirth, I have thought it was not possible for me to be thankful enough to that good old man—and who is yet living—for attending my mother at my birth, young and inexperienced as she was; and although I know that I could now teach him some things, which in his hoary age he does not at all understand, I have yet often felt in my heart that I would go leagues long to take him by the hand, that I might thank him for the good he had done.

Depend upon it, friends, there are only two things that can induce *men* to practice midwifery; and these are, first, that it may be necessary for a man so to do, in order to get his living; and, secondly, if he be a benevolent man, he will most gladly relieve suffering, if he can be the means of doing so. And do not physicians, almost to a man, the world over, attend the poor in childbirth, gladly and willingly, when they know they are to receive from them no pay whatever, except such as God gives them?

Is it said that man-midwifery leads to licentiousness? I answer, go to the veterans of the "godlike art"—those who have toiled long and hard in their calling, and who will not consent to relinquish it so long as their powers of body will allow them to pursue it, and ask them to tell you candidly, if the practice of midwifery has made them bad and unprincipled men? Mark, they will tell you, "No; but rather our knowledge of woman's sufferings,

and the pains and perils which we have but too well and sadly often learned that it is her lot to endure, have chastened us, and made us more what we ought to be."

Suppose that now and then it may happen—as a rare exception to the rule, it is true—that a physician conducts himself in a lascivious way before a patient, are we for this reason to call all physicians bad men? Do we not also hear of bad men among clergymen? And because there is now and then a bad one in the clerical profession, are we to scout them altogether, and say they shall never preach to or converse with women?

I wish, therefore, to be understood, that I speak in strong terms against the foolishness of the cry we so often hear against man-midwifery. On the other hand, too, let it be understood, that I never have and never shall object to female midwives; the more of them the better, if they become properly qualified, and women choose. I know something of the benevolence, sympathy, kindness, and assiduity of woman in her care of the sick. We attend a man at a New York boarding house, lonely in the world, without wife or children, or brother or sister to console him in the day of his disease. Death lays hold of him in the morning, and takes away his senses, and all the long day, as he still breathes on, with the cold sweat upon him, the women of the house gather about him, watching anxiously, tearfully, for the last death agony to come. All this have I witnessed, here in this city of New York; and far be it from *me* to withhold from WOMAN any share which it may be her duty or privilege to perform in that noblest of earth's callings, the attendance of the sick.

I do not, however, wish to conceal the fact, that I do not believe woman will ever, as a general thing, in any well-regulated society, practice the healing art. I give her all credit for her purer and more devoted sympathy with the sick, for her kindness and benevolence, as well as for her capability of acquiring science. But I do not believe that it is her mission to pursue that toilsome and life-wearing calling, which requires, oftentimes, the exercise of all the sterner faculties and powers, mental and physical, of the stronger sex. In the city of Paris, women, so far as I am acquainted, have had equal medical privileges to those of men; and yet the great proportion of medical practice is done by the latter.



In referring to the following letters it will be seen that I have presented some very striking facts illustrative of the effects of water in childbirth. But it may be asked—Do you have no *unfavorable* cases in water-treatment? I answer, yes. A few months ago it was my lot to advise a most worthy lady, of active and industrious habits, in this city, in her third pregnancy, and to attend her in childbirth. Owing to mal-position of the child, the face presenting forward instead of backward, as it should, to answer to the wider part of the pelvis, the labor was a very severe and protracted one. She suffered incomparably more than she had in both her former confinements. Expecting to have to resort to the use of instruments, I went for them late in the night; but before returning nature had done her own work. The child's head, however, was dreadfully misshapen in consequence of the wrong presentation, and the result was, it soon had a sort of convulsions, which, after some weeks of suffering, carried it off.

Another sad case, too, has happened while I am preparing these letters for the press. A most estimable lady of this city, in whom I had for years felt a deep interest, and who was one of the most devoted friends the Water-Cure has ever had, was for the third time pregnant. She had probably always been scrofulous, and a good deal subject to disease. She had, moreover, an old rupture, which at this time was so bad she could not sit up. Such, at least, was her state, for the most part, during the last three or four months she lived. She became very weak, and at about the end of the sixth month of her period she sank. I had not the whole charge of her case, it is true, toward the last, for she was willing, at the most urgent solicitation of her friends, to resort to means which I could not approve of. My candid opinion is, that she would have died, whatever treatment might have been pursued.

If my words are to be believed, it will be seen that I have very great confidence in the Water-Cure. But if I know my own heart, I would in nowise overstate the truth; nor would I knowingly, for my right hand and my left, say that which would mislead either myself or my readers, or make us presumptuous toward that Being who alone can sustain us, and whose paternal care is ever over us, giving us every thing we have—mercy, blessing, and health.

I have not in the following letters spoken particularly of the treatment of spinal disorders. The subject is a most fruitful one, upon which a volume might be written. You are already, many of you, aware of the fact, that almost all of the young ladies who attend boarding-schools nowadays are more or less crooked in the spinal column. The ill hygienic management they receive from birth onward at home, and their too great confinement in school-rooms, too often badly ventilated, renders the young and growing body of the girl too feeble to maintain itself in its proper position. The brain is likewise too much drawn upon in the mental exercises, which also causes debility of the bodily structures.

In after-life, as well, we see among females a great deal of complaining nowadays in regard to the spine. How few of the sex, indeed, do not, sooner or later, suffer with some form of spinal infirmity! True, in many cases the difficulty at the vertebral column is only sympathetic with some other disorder, as of the womb, stomach, bowels, etc. Yet spinal disease, in some of its protean forms, is a very common complaint.

In all cases of this kind, the water-treatment will be found an invaluable remedy; not that all can be cured—for that is not possible by any earthly means—but as a remedy for either cure, prevention, or palliation, water is the greatest of all remedies for spinal disease. In multitudes of instances, when the patient cannot walk, the new method proves an effectual one. In other cases, palliation is all that can be hoped for.

In multitudes of instances of so-called spinal disease, all that is needed is to re-establish the general health. Patients have often wondered how it is that by simply pursuing a course of *general* treatment the *local* part becomes so much benefited. The reason why a weak spine is often cured without any special applications to the part, appears evident when we consider that the local weakness is merely symptomatic of the general health.

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