

**LABOUR IN PRIMIPAROUS WOMEN LATE IN
THE REPRODUCTIVE PERIOD OF LIFE.**

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(Communicated by Dr. BARNES.)

IN common, I believe, with most obstetricians, I held the opinion that labours late in life were almost necessarily severe and difficult. The experience of several such labours, which were not only free from severity and difficulty, but which were positively easy, has led me to the conclusion that difficulty is the exception in these cases as a class. I take the age of forty-five. There is in subjects at this period of life, contrary to what is assumed, an absence of that rigidity and tenacity of structure which we meet with in those prior to the decline of the reproductive function. The soft parts about the outlet of the pelvis are thin, flabby, and elastic, from want of tone, and offer but a feeble

resistance to the passage of the child ; they afford a strong contrast to the firm, plump, tonic, and unyielding tissues of middle life.

In the primipara at the age of forty-five there is generally a peculiar lean and thin, and almost wasted, condition of the soft parts which line and close the outlet of the pelvis, in consequence of which the second stage of labour is rendered easy. Assuming the cervical portion of the uterus to be healthy, the first stage of labour is also free from difficulty. It is a clinical fact observed in these cases that the uterus acts with great vigour ; its powerful contraction is remarkable as compared with the uterine inertia of the multipara at this period of life ; the power of the one is good and has never been used, that of the other is worn out.

On looking over Dr. Robert Lee's ' Report of Eighty Forceps Cases of Difficult Labour,' I find that 39 were primiparous cases ; in 13 the age is not stated ; of the 26 in which the age is recorded, 3 were in those under twenty-five years of age, and 2 over the age of forty ; 21 cases occurred between the ages of twenty-five and forty. As by far the largest number of primiparous labours occur before the age of twenty-five, it is inferred from this experience that difficulties are rare under this age. Only 2 cases being recorded over forty years of age, it is concluded that difficulties at this period are not common, considerable allowance being made for the infrequency of first labours at this time of life ; yet if difficulty were so essentially connected with labour at and above the age of forty-five, a larger number of cases might have been expected. As between the ages of twenty-five and forty we find 21 cases, this bears out my own experience, that cases of difficulty or severe labour in primiparous women most commonly occur at the mid period of the reproductive function, say at an age between twenty-eight and thirty-eight. The object of these remarks is not to give an authoritative opinion, nor is it desired to elaborate from statistics what might be conclusive on this point, but rather for the purpose of eliciting the opinions of the Fellows of the Society on a question in which it is felt there is some

error in regarding primiparous labours at an advanced period of life as almost necessarily difficult or severe.

The PRESIDENT observed that the paper was instructive in correcting a common belief that first labours in women at an advanced age were always severe and dangerous. He had seen many instances confirmatory of the author's proposition that these were often really easy. He had recently read a memoir by Dr. Matthews Duncan, in which it was shown that the maximum weight of the foetus was attained by women pregnant at the age of twenty-five to twenty-nine, and that the weight afterwards fell. If this were so, we had here a circumstance that would help to explain the more easy labours of women who had passed the age of forty.