

A CASE OF LABOR AS DESCRIBED BY A POPULAR NOVELIST.

MEDICAL men who can scarcely find time to digest properly the material brought to them by their medical journals, or to do more than endeavor to grasp the new ideas evolved by their recent text-books, may desire to learn more of the class of reading which some of their patients indulge in, and to judge thereby of its possible influence upon diseased conditions.

This is deemed to be the only apology necessary for giving below what finds its most suitable place in the columns of a medical journal, the translation of a half dozen pages from a very recent and popular French novel, Emile Zola's *Pot Bouille* (pages 471-477). This novel can be found on the table of any dealer in foreign publications, alongside of Mme. de Staël or any other French work which a young person might desire to purchase for the purpose of improving his or her proficiency in the French language. The English translation is to be found with all booksellers, the realistic and graphic portions being in part omitted, but the references to the same preserved; so that it is of no use to one who reads for information of the style of the writer, and flat and unprofitable to one who reads for any other purpose, being merely a stimulant to curiosity to know what was omitted.

The plot is *nil*; the scenes lay in a respectable house with a series of flats, and with a young man who pro-

¹ The College Story. Valedictory Address by the Dean, Rachel L. Bodley, M. D., March 17, 1881.

² The Practice of Medicine by Women in the United States. By Drs. Emily F. Pope, Emma L. Call, and C. Augusta Pop. Read before the American Social Science Association, September 7, 1881.

ceeds to attempt to debauch each available woman in succession. The seductions are conducted in a refined and elegant manner, but as a contrast to this there is a servants' floor, where obscenity and free comments upon such matters are indulged in. One of the characters is a young girl of fourteen years of age, who is very curious, and who obtains a large fund of information as to the sexual relations by looking through the keyholes of bedchambers, which information she illustrates practically upon her nurse by encouragement from the nurse.

Adèle is a servant who finds herself pregnant, but manages to conceal it from her mistress up to the last moment, and here begins what is certainly, from a medical standpoint, a remarkable description.

"On this evening Adèle went to bed about eleven o'clock. Her approaching period of labor was still to her in the uncertain future; she did not care to reflect upon it, but preferred to keep it out of her mind in the hope that in time it would all come right. Consequently she had made no preparations, was ignorant of the symptoms, incapable of recalling or calculating any fixed period, without any idea, without any project. She was only comfortable in bed, stretched out on her back. As it was quite cold, she went to bed in her stockings, put out the light, and endeavored to get warm. Finally she slept, when some slight pains caused her to open her eyes. These were slight pinchings near the surface of the skin; she thought at first that an insect had pricked the abdomen, about the navel; afterwards, these prickings having ceased, she thought no more about it. But suddenly, in about a half an hour, during a troubled sleep, a dull, griping pain awoke her anew. This time she became angry. Was she going to have the colic? She would be very fresh, next morning, if she had to run to the pot all night! The idea of a disturbance of the bowels had been in her mind all the evening; she had felt a sense of weight, and anticipated a discharge [*debâcle*]. However, she wished to restrain it, rubbed her belly, and believed she had quieted the pain. In a quarter of an hour the pain returned more violently.

"*Cré, nom d'un chien,*' said she in a low tone, concluding to get up this time.

"In the darkness she drew out her pot, squatted upon it, and exhausted herself in fruitless efforts. The chamber was cold, and she shivered. In about ten minutes, as the colic had subsided, she returned to bed. But ten minutes later the colic commenced again. She arose, made another fruitless effort, and went to bed chilled through, where she again enjoyed a little repose. Afterward she was griped with such force that she made a smothered plaint. Now the pains persisted, were almost continuous, with ruder shocks, as if a brutal hand had squeezed some part in the belly; and she understood it, and tremblingly stammered, under the coverlet, 'My God! my God! then it is here!'

"An agony seized upon her, a necessity for walking. She could no longer remain in bed, relighted the candle, and walked about her chamber; her tongue became parched, a burning thirst tormented her, whilst the red spots burned her cheeks. When a contraction bent her brusquely, she supported herself against the wall, seizing the wooden furniture. And hours passed in this cruel condition, without her daring even to cover her feet for fear of making a noise, protected from the cold solely by an old shawl thrown over her shoulders. Two o'clock struck, then three o'clock.

"There is no good God!" she said in a low tone, as if she must speak out. "It is too long; it will never come to an end."

"However, the work of preparation advanced, the sense of weight descended into the buttocks and thighs. Even when her belly allowed of a little respite, she suffered a fixed and obstinate pain there without intermission. To relieve herself, she seized her buttocks with both hands, supporting them, while she continued to walk with a hobbling gait, the legs naked, being only covered to the knees by her large stockings. No, there was no good God! Her devotion revolted; her resignation as a beast of burden, which made her accept her pregnancy as one burden more, finished by breaking down. It was not sufficient not to be able to have enough to eat to satisfy her hunger, to be the awkward and dirty scullion wench upon whom the whole house trampled; it was necessary that the masters get her with child! Ah! les salauds! She could not say whether it was the young one or the old one, for the old one had again overcome her after mardigras. . . . 'My God! I shall die!'

"And with her two contracted hands she squeezed the buttocks the more, her poor, pitiful buttocks, restrained her cries, hobbling always in her painful ugliness. About her no one stirred, they snored; she heard the sonorous drone of Julie, while with Lisa there was a whistling like the shrill music of the fife.

"Four o'clock sounded, when suddenly she believed her belly would burst open. In the midst of a pain something ruptured, water flowed out, and her stockings were soaked. She remained for a moment motionless, terrified, and stupefied, with the idea that she was draining herself in that way. Perhaps she had never been pregnant, and in the fear of some other disease, she looked at herself; she wished to see if all the blood in her body was not flowing from her. But she felt relieved; she sat for a time upon a trunk. The dirty chamber annoyed her, the caudle was dying out. Then, as she could no longer walk, and as she felt the end was coming, she still had the force to spread an old oil-cloth on the bed, which Madame Josseland had given her to put before her toilet table. She had hardly got back to bed when the labor of expulsion commenced.

"Then, during nearly an hour and a half, the violence of the pains increased without cessation. The internal contractions having ceased, it was she herself now who exerted all the muscles of her belly and loins, under the necessity of relieving herself from the intolerable weight which pressed upon her flesh. Twice she was deluded into getting up and seeking the pot with a hand fumbling with feverishness. At each new effort a trembling shook her, her face became burning, her neck was bathed with sweat, whilst she bit the bedclothes to smother her plaint, the tear, terrible and involuntary of the wood-cutter when he cleaves an oak. When the effort was over, she stammered out, as if speaking to some one, —

"It is not possible . . . it will not come out . . . it is too large."

"The throat thrown back, the legs wide apart, she clung with her two hands to the iron bedstead, which she shook by her convulsive efforts. It was, fortunately, a perfect head presentation [*des couches supérieures*]. At times the head which presented seemed to recede, repulsed by the elasticity of the tissues, stretching almost to rupture, and atrocious cramps

seized them at each recurrence of labor pains, the great pains binding them as with an iron ring. At last the bones cracked, everything seemed to be broken, she had the frightful sensation of being split before and behind, making but one opening through which her life passed out, and the child rolled on to the bed, between her thighs, in the midst of a pool of excrement and bloody slime.

"She had given vent to a great cry, the furious and triumphant cry of mothers. Presently there were movements in the neighboring chambers, and sleepy voices saying, What was that! Is somebody being forced! Don't dream so loud! Becoming alarmed she stuffed the bedclothes again in her mouth, and by squeezing her legs, heaped the clothes over the child, which cried like a kitten. But she soon heard Julie again snoring, after turning over; whilst Lisa, again asleep, did not even whistle. Then for a quarter of an hour she enjoyed an immense relief, an infinite sweetness of calm and repose. She lay as if dead.

"Then, the colics returned. A fear aroused her: was she going to have a second! The worst of it was that when she opened her eyes she found herself in perfect darkness. Not even a candle end! and to be there all alone, in a puddle, with a viscid something between her thighs that she did not know what to do with! There were doctors for dogs, but none for her. Die, then, you and your little one! She recollected having once assisted Madame Pichon when she was confined. She must take some precautions for fear of perishing! In the meantime the child no longer cried. She put out her hand, sought for it, and felt a gut [*boyau*] coming out of the belly; and the idea came to her that she had seen this tied and cut. Her eyes had become more accustomed to the darkness; the moon which was rising vaguely lighted the chamber. Then, partly by groping and partly by instinct, she performed, without getting up, a long and painful duty. Unhooking an apron from behind her head, she broke the string, tied the gut, and cut it with the scissors taken from the pocket of her petticoat. She was in a perspiration; she laid down again. The poor little one she certainly had no desire to kill it.

"But the colic continued, very much as if there was still something there which the contractions were influencing. She pulled on the gut, at first gently, then quite strongly. Something became detached, and a mass fell out, which she removed and put in the pot. This time, thank God! it was all over, she no longer suffered. Only some warm blood ran down her legs.

"She slept for more than an hour. Six o'clock struck, when she awoke to a consciousness of her condition. Time pressed, she got up with difficulty to put things in order. A cold moon lighted up fully the chamber. After dressing, she enveloped the child in some old linen, and then wrapped it up in two newspapers. It no longer cried, but its little heart was still beating. As she had forgotten to ascertain if it was a boy or a girl, she opened the papers again. It was a girl. One more unfortunate! food for some coachman or valet, like that Louise, found on a doorstep! Not a servant was moving, and she was able to go out, leave her package in the passage Choiseul, and return quietly. She met with no one. For once in her life fortune favored her.

"Then she put her chamber in order. She rolled up the oilcloth and put it under the bed, emptied the pot, and sponged the floor. After which she stretched her-

self out in bed, with her waxy pallor, and the blood still running down between her thighs, having tamponed herself with a napkin. It was in this condition that Madame Jossrand found her at nine o'clock; being surprised at her non-appearance she came up to look after her. The servant complained that she was completely exhausted from the effects of a terrible diarrhoea which had disturbed her all night." W. L.