

DISCUSSION ON INCOMPETENT MIDWIVES.

Dr. Duff: It appears to me that we, as obstetricians, ought to exert an influence not only upon ourselves and the profession, but upon the laity as well, in bringing them to a realization of the necessity for proper culture on the part of him or her who would be an obstetrician. On last Monday I was notified to attend a lady in confinement. Was told when the message came (I attend the family in ordinary practice) that a midwife had been called in, and that she was unable to deliver the woman. The messenger had followed me to a house in which I was attending a case of labor, and as I could not leave immediately, I sent him for Dr. Mundorff, asking that gentleman to go in my stead, and that I would arrive as soon as I could get through where I was. I happened to get off within a very few minutes; went up to the house and found the doctor there. He had simply examined the woman; told me that there was a breech presentation, but that there was something wrong about the privates of the child. I delivered the woman in a very few minutes; pain came on violently, and on exam'nation I found that the midwife had passed her finger into the vagina of the child and torn it clear through into the rectum,—torn the whole septum through. The child fortunately only lived about ten minutes afterward. This woman is practicing midwifery right along, and I could enumerate quite a number of very grave errors she has committed, and quite a number of deaths for which she is accountable. You are well aware that we had on the other side of the river within the past

three weeks a case of ruptured uterus in the hands of a midwife, in which she did not recognize what the condition of the patient was until it was too late for any one to attempt to save the life of the woman. I relate this case simply to bring up discussion upon the matter of bad midwifery.

Dr. Sutton: I think it a point well-taken. I think a good way to ventilate this subject is right through the medical journals. I have been the victim myself of a good deal of imposition lately from a female practitioner on Dr. Duff's side of the river. There is a German woman on the South Side by the name of S——. A doctor from the East End came to my office one day and asked me if I knew her. I said no. "Well," he said, "she is attending a number of ladies in my immediate neighborhood, and she says she is your assistant; that she frequently consults with you at your private hospital, and that your success there is largely due to her; and on the strength of this she has taken quite a number of cases in my neighborhood." I sent for Roger O'Mara and put him on her track, with a detective, and I have his report, which confirms that of the doctor. About two months ago a lady living in Allegheny, the wife of a merchant, good people, asked me if I knew Mrs. S——. I said I did not know her. "Well," said the lady, "she uses your name; she told me she had been over in consultation with you recently, assisting you in an operation, and so forth." Recently I met with another lady, who told me that she had met Mrs. S—— in a street car, and she told her she was just on the way over to assist me in an operation. I thought for a little while of reporting the matter to some of the South Side doctors, asking them to look the woman up, and I am very glad to have this opportunity to speak of her, and I would like to see her. She is untruthful. I never saw her in my life, but I would like to see her very well; and I would say, through this meeting, that the people of Pittsburgh who have employed her on the strength of her statements concerning me have been fooled, and that they are employing a woman

who possesses neither skill, conscience nor truth.

Dr. Duff: In connection with Mrs. S——, I would like to report a case. I was called one evening hurriedly to see a lady. When I went to the house I found her in bed, and in the room there was a stench almost unbearable, such as we have after confinement where the discharges are uncared for. She told me that Mrs. S—— had been treating her. She had had considerable hemorrhage a few days before, and Mrs. S—— had told her that was caused by falling of the womb. She pushed her womb up, made a ball of wax, and put it in her, and told her to stay in bed for a little while until she had a rest, and that it would keep it up all right. I made an examination, and found something in the vagina; it was stinking. I passed my finger further, and found a soft and decomposed mass. I made some traction upon it, and with but very little difficulty I delivered her of a three-months rotten child, with a ring of Mrs. S——'s wax around its neck.

President: Has anybody else a report to make of this woman?

Dr. Burns: Some years ago I was annoyed very much by one of these midwives, who was taking all my practice. It was a very great source of annoyance, and I thought that probably the gods would be favorable some time, and, like the old Spartans, I waited until my opportunity came. One evening I was sent for in great haste to see a patient who had been delivered, and found my friend, the midwife, present. She said she thought something was wrong, did not know what it was, but the patient was bleeding profusely. I had no time for discussion, but asked her if she had taken the placenta away; she thought she had it away, and showed me what she had, which was wrapped around her finger four or five times. She had pulled the cord off. The rest of the placenta remained in the woman. This Mrs. S—— you speak of in such eloquent terms, I think I have had a patient from recently. This patient had in her a pessary of remarkable construction, which

I removed; and the supposition was that it was put there to lift up the womb, and the end of the organ had an erosion upon it. I was obliged to put the pessary into a solution of lime for about ten days. I intended to present it to the society here, but have neglected to do so; it was rotten.

Dr. Werder: Speaking of Mrs. S——, I had a case four weeks ago which had had the attention of Mrs. S—— and two or three dozen doctors. She had been suffering for fifteen years. When I saw her she told me that her last doctor was Mrs. S——, who said she had cancer of the womb. I made an examination and found there was no sign of cancer, and that which I discovered was something very interesting, and I report the case on that account more than on account of Mrs. S——. Her principal trouble for the last fifteen years had been constant irritation of the bladder, with severe pains. She had to get up probably fifteen to twenty times at night to pass urine, and very often she could not lie down at all at night, but had to sit up in a half-upright position some time for hours on account of intense suffering in the region of the pelvis. On making an examination I discovered something in the urethra. Passing my finger up into the vagina, right under the pubic arch I found a hard body in the urethra, or at the neck of the bladder. I told her then that it felt like a stone in the bladder, and she told me she had been examined three times for stone in the bladder under ether, and none could be found. As she was extremely tender I gave her an anæsthetic, with the intention of dilating the urethra, which was very small, so that it did not look as though it had ever been dilated. It was two or three years since the last examination. I passed in a small uterine dilator first, and then dilated the canal further by introducing my finger. With my index finger passed into the bladder I could not feel the body at all; there was no evidence of a stone. I passed the other hand into the vagina again, and could feel the hard body under my two fingers. With the index finger I tore the mucous membrane until I reached a stone, buried in

the mucous membrane at the neck of the bladder, probably as large as a hickory nut. I removed it without any trouble and washed out the bladder. The next day when I went to see her she said she had not felt so well for three or four years. I thought I would mention the case on account of its interest. Speaking of stone in the bladder reminds me of another case I had, something similar, six or eight months ago. A patient came to my office complaining of a great deal of trouble in the bladder, great pain constantly with desire to urinate. Making a vaginal examination I detected a hard body in the bladder. Finding the urethra very dilatable I introduced my little finger into it, which caused some pain, but not a great deal, and then I passed and dilated it so that I could pass my index finger into the bladder, and found a stone buried in the mucous membrane, but not as completely as in the first case. There was some roughness on the surface. I was able to dig it out, as in the previous case. It was also about the size of a hickory nut. The patient made a very good recovery. In this case there was a history of gravel, as she called it. She had passed pieces of stone two or three times before.

Dr. Sutton: It seems to me it would be a pretty good thing to suggest that a committee of the Allegheny County Medical Society look after Mrs. S——. The testimony that I gathered from the detectives is intact, and I can produce other witnesses to appear against her at any time; and I think that as an illegal practitioner, and as one who is doing an immense amount of evil in this community she ought to be looked after, and I think the gentlemen of this society should refer the matter to the County Medical Society.

Dr. Duff: She doesn't trouble us so much on the South Side as she does you folks on this side of the river; she is pretty well known on the South Side.

Dr. Sutton: I think most of her patronage is in the East End. It was Dr. Rugh, of the East End, who first reported her to me, which was the first time I heard her name

mentioned, and since that I have had his story confirmed by others.

Dr. Green: Sometimes it is relief for a doctor who has a large number of cases of obstetrics to get rid of a case, but that is no argument in favor of incompetent obstetricians. I do not know how the physicians of the South Side get along; I don't know how many incompetent midwives they have there, but I know how it is in my neighborhood and Dr. Kearns' neighborhood. While we have one or two midwives there who are pretty good, ordinarily speaking, there are five or six who are very incompetent. Some of them are beginners, only having commenced within the past year or two to attend cases. Only last Sunday morning I received a message to visit a case, and took my instruments with me. I went there and found a doctor present, also a midwife, a pretty good midwife, too. There was contracted pelvis, the conjugate was as nearly as I could judge about two inches. There was a little curvature of the spine; she had increased in flesh to the extent of thirty pounds within the past twelve months, she said, and had before always been delivered by forceps. I told the doctor there was no use in trying to do anything without forceps. We applied them, but they failed, and we had to break down the head. The child was dead. Lack of proper cleanliness has often been the indirect cause of puerperal fever. Only a few weeks ago I was called to see a lady in the morning at four o'clock. I went there and found a midwife present who had very recently lost a lady in my immediate neighborhood. I studied a little while whether I would do anything or not; I did not know whether to go to work or abandon the case; I knew that only two weeks before a lady had died in the hands of this midwife. Every physician who attends many cases of confinement is constantly annoyed by such people. There is no method I know of by which we can get rid of them; to make a public complaint against them I think would be useless. I do not know whether the laity, as we term them, will ever be sufficiently educated to know when they have a good doctor or not.

Dr. Kearns: I don't know that we may occupy our time longer in discussing this. How to remedy the fault I do not know; I fear it is one of those faults that always have existed and always will exist, and I don't know that we have any positive right because there are a few midwives who are unscrupulous to condemn the whole class of midwives. There are some very worthy women among them, conscientious, knowing, skilled, of long experience, and clean. I know there is trouble caused by midwives not infrequently, yet I think the cases very rare if we take into consideration the vast number of child-bed cases which midwives attend. Their work in the long run will compare very favorably with the work of regular practitioners. I have been working with midwives thirty years, and am more charitable toward them than I was fifteen years ago. Our regular practitioners make many mistakes, as well as midwives.

Dr. Green: One remark in regard to one case in my neighborhood. The midwife had been there during the whole night, from early in the evening until four o'clock in the morning when I arrived there. She had used up nearly a half a pound of lard. I always look over the room to see if there are any marks of lard. If there are a midwife has been around. In that room there was neither towel nor wash-basin nor water. I called for it. I speak of this as an illustration of the carelessness of the average midwife.

Dr. Sutton: I wish to say a word in reference to this question so that we may not be misunderstood. I for one believe that a female can be educated so as to become a successful obstetrician. I never saw a woman delivered more successfully in my life than I have seen them delivered by the midwives in the obstetric wards of the Vienna Hospitals, but there is a difference, if I mistake not, between the educated European midwife and the people to whom Dr. Duff refers. If I am right, Dr. Duff refers to women who are not educated in the practice of midwifery, women who have no conscience, women who have no more knowledge of the anatomy of the pelvic organs than they have of the geo-

graphy of Saturn, women who while they follow the vocation of the midwife ostensibly, are also plying the trade of the apothecary who deals out medicines which are intended to produce abortion. These cities of Pittsburgh and Allegheny have plenty of such people in it. This is the class of people I understand Dr. Duff to mean when he speaks of incompetent and dangerous midwives. Another class of these women go about lying in regard to their professional associates, and impose upon the public by referring to regular practitioners as endorsing them. This class should be silenced, and they can be silenced if the Allegheny County Medical Society has the courage to silence them. Take these people before an alderman and prove what they are about, convict them of their attempts to produce abortion, convict them of such malpractice as Dr. Duff has given us an instance of, convict them of the methods they have of carrying on business; let it be seen that they are people dangerous to the community. As for honorable midwives, who are properly educated, I welcome them. I have seen them deliver women as successfully as a man can do it.

Dr. Werder: About a year ago I had intended to read a paper on the education of midwives, and the reason of it was that at that time I had a number of cases that had been attended by midwives, a number of cases of puerperal fever, and I thought it a disgrace to the community to allow such people to practice midwifery, and in order to prove how much harm was done by midwives I went to the Board of Health of Pittsburgh and wanted to get statistics of how many of the cases reported there were attended by midwives, and how many by regular physicians, but I found it would be such a great task to compile the information that I got discouraged and abandoned the idea. I had at that time a plan which I think would be very easily executed, and I think would be successful in the educating of good midwives. There is no doubt there are people in this community, and in every community, who will employ midwives only, who will not employ physicians, some of them because

midwives are cheaper, and others on account of false modesty with regard to employing a physician. This is particularly the case among Germans and among Poles. Now, I think it would be a very easy matter to educate good midwives in this way: In almost every city there are maternity hospitals. In every maternity hospital there are nurses and physicians. It would not be difficult to get some intelligent nurses, train them in the first principles of nursing and in the principles of antiseptics during the first year or six months, then during the next year give them practical instructions and training in obstetrics with charge of confinement cases under the supervision of the physician, or of a competent midwife who has been educated at the institution. These things are done in the German schools of midwifery, and I think with very good results. They could be done here. It would not be necessary then to ridicule midwives as is done now. Midwives and physicians would practice in harmony. The midwife could help the physician, and the physician the midwife. Often physicians if they had a good midwife in their neighborhood would be glad to refer a number of confinement cases to her, and the midwife could send for the physician if there was anything abnormal present. I think an arrangement of this kind would be productive of a great deal of good.