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## ORIGINAL COMMUNICATIONS.

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THE EVOLUTION OF THE MALE MIDWIFE, WITH SOME  
REMARKS ON THE OBSTETRICAL LITERATURE OF  
OTHER AGES.

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THE art of midwifery is coeval with the history of mankind. Midwifery has been essentially the same in all countries and ages since the beginning of the world. That this is true may be seen from the structure of the human frame and the emphatic testimony of the primeval curse upon woman, "that in sorrow she should bring forth children." The testimony and allusions of all the older authorities render it indisputable that women were in the beginning the chief, if not the sole, practitioners in midwifery, and that they also assumed the right of treating the diseases peculiar to their sex, as well during the pregnant state as at other periods.

"That woman bringeth forth her children in sorrow" appears to be a law of the function of reproduction imposed upon the women of all tribes and countries and times. From the remotest periods the occurrence of a human birth has always excited something of alarm and sympathy. From the dictates of such sympathies and apprehensions the first rude efforts of the art of midwifery took their origin.

In the earlier ages of the world, while the human race continued to live according to the suggestions of a natural instinct, without necessity or motive for hard labor, under the blessings of a kinder climate and exposed only to the few influences and accidents inseparable from the simplest wants and the simplest institutions, it cannot be supposed that there was much need of trained midwives.

In such a state of society woman rendered to one another such kindly services as the function of natural labor would require. In the course of time there would be some one in a community professing in such matters to be more intelligent or experienced than her ordinary neighbors, who invoked for herself the office of midwife.

The earliest reference to midwifery in Holy Writ is in Chapter xxxv of Genesis, where we are told that Rachel, the wife of Jacob, died in giving birth to a son, although comforted by the midwife that she need not be alarmed over the outcome. In the latter verses of Chapter xxxviii of the same book there occurs another reference to midwifery in which is described a rare occurrence. It is a case of twins, born to Tamar, the widow of Er, son of Judah, and one of the twins presenting by the arm, on which, to distinguish it as the first born, the midwife tied a scarlet thread. However, the beribboned arm receded, the second child came down, and was eventually expelled first.

Moses, the Jewish legislator, who lived 1000 years before the time of Hippocrates, speaks of midwives as a respectable and distinct body amongst the Hebrews. That Hebrew women were accustomed to be delivered sitting upon stools we learn from the first chapter of Exodus. The labors of Hebrew women were quickly terminated. This is purely presumptive, but it may be inferred that it was so, since it was stated by the two midwives, Shiprah and Puah, whom Pharaoh had commanded to kill all the male children, that the Hebrew women were not as the Egyptian women, but were delivered 'ere the midwives came in unto them. Additional facts relating to obstetrics exist in the fourth chapter of the first book of Samuel, where we are told that, through grief, premature labor, terminating fatally, was brought on in the wife of Phineas, the high priest's son. The same comforting assurance of *fear not* was applied to her by the midwives as in the case of Rachel. The assurance of *no danger* was the customary form of greeting under such circumstances, and may be regarded as not so much a matter of inspiring confidence as of ignorance in the face of danger. In Chapter xvi of Ezekiel a very singular allusion is made—that is the comparison of Jerusalem to a wretched infant whose navel string is declared to be uncut on the day of its nativity. It is possible that the Jews were in the habit of dividing and not of placing a ligature upon the cord, for mention is made of swaddling and salting. As this was written some 594 years B. C., the practice of that period evidently anticipated some of the antiseptic rules of the present day.

That the conditions referred to above should have existed is in some measure a mark of civilization, for in savage or primitive states the process of child-bearing is viewed as a physiological one, needing no help. In Southey's *Tale of Paraguay*, speaking of Monnema, wife of Quia'ra, the primitiveness of childbirth from a physiological standpoint is referred to most graphically:

"But human help she needed none.

A few short throes with scarce a cry;

Upon the bank she laid her new-born son.

Then slid into the stream and bathed, and all was done."

The quaint customs of certain tribes in the remote periods of savage life also point to the immunity of female suffering in childbirth. Writing of what is known as the *Couvade*, Max Müller describes some of these customs, and comments upon them thus—"Who would believe that there was a single tribe, however silly in other respects, which would carry its silliness so far as to demand that on the birth of a child the father should take to his bed while the mother attended to all the duties of the household?" Yet there are few customs more widely spread than this and better attested by the historical evidence of nearly 2000 years. The term *Couvade* has a definite meaning in that it is used to describe a man who takes the place of his wife when she is in childbed. In the thirteenth century the celebrated Marco Polo traveled through China and observed this custom. Without a doubt the knowledge of this gave rise to the couplet in *Hudibras*:

For though Chinese go to bed,

And lie in their ladies' stead.

The people called "Gold Tooth," in the confines of Burmah, are *couvades*. M. Francisque Michel tells us that the custom existed in certain parts of Biscay until recently. It is declared that the practice is still prevalent in Yunnan and among the Miris in upper Assam. The same custom has been observed among the Caribs of the West Indies, the Abipones of Central South America, the aborigines of California, in Guiana, in West Africa, and in the Indian Archipelago. Diodorus speaks of it as existing at one time in Corsica; Strabo says the custom prevailed in the north of Spain; and Appolonius Rhodius declares that the Tabarenes on the Euxine Sea observed the same:

In the Tabarenian land,

When some good woman bears her lord a babe,

'Tis *he* is swathed, and groaning put to bed;

While she arising tends his bath and serves.

Nice possets for her husband in the straw.

*Appolonius Rhodius: Argonautic Exp.*

It might be interesting to know that a singular relic of this credulity exists amongst us even in the present stage. There are not a few instances where men have seriously declared that the fact of the wife's pregnancy has always been known to them in the various disorders and ills which they themselves suffer on such occasions. In this connection the sympathetic morning sickness of the husband is most interesting.

The subject of midwifery in its other and, perhaps, equally interesting phases is so very interesting, that the writer feels he must ask the indulgence of the reader for his frequent wanderings far afield from the main discussion.

At this juncture it might be well to review the obstetrical literature of other ages. It would appear from the frequent allusions to midwives and their duties in the works of Hippocrates, Plato, Aristotle, the elder Pliny, Galen, and Aetius, that midwifery as a calling was held in high esteem. Aetius transcribes some chapters from the works of a female practitioner by the name of Aspasia, containing directions for the management of women in natural labor. In Rome, also, midwives were persons of some importance, as would appear from the writings of Terrence and Plautus.

It is to Hippocrates that we are indebted for the first authentic information concerning the problem of midwifery. This author describes in detail certain symptoms accompanying menstrual derangements, and the signs which precede uterine hemorrhage. As causes leading to abortion he enumerates many recognized to-day. His observations regarding puerperal fever are summarized in a most clear and distinct manner. Hippocrates calls attention to the various warning signs of eclampsia, such as headaches, fullness in the head, syncope, and a tendency to sleep, and expatiates upon their significance.

As to operative midwifery, the rules laid down by Hippocrates serve rather to increase the dangers of parturition than to diminish its difficulties, and stand as lamentable proof of the little progress which had been made in the manual side of the art up to his time. For instance, if the presentation is any other than the head he advises that the presenting part be pushed up and the head brought down. If labor was difficult or tedious the patient was to be shaken by two assistants until the child had been expelled. Failing to effect delivery by these means Hippocrates directs that the child's bulk be diminished by cutting instruments, and then to effect delivery by the application of the crotchet to either shoulder or clavicle. In dealing with the delivery of the placenta Hippocrates suggests several measures, but cautions against the use of force.

The keen obstetrical observations of Aristotle are, indeed, worthy of our notice. In a treatise entitled *The Generation of Animals* he deals with the signs of puberty, of the physiological side of menstruation, the symptoms of pregnancy, of the situation of the fetus in utero, of natural head presentations, and of the fetal development and sustenance through the placental cord.

Celsus, a Roman physician, in the time of Augustus and Tiberius, in his excellent work "De Medicina," offers some very practical observations on midwifery. In the seventh book Celsus describes the operative procedure to be followed in cleaning the parturient canal of tumors and other obstructive processes. He urged the necessity of antepartum prophylaxis. And it is to Celsus that we are indebted for many valuable hints regarding the most effective means of doing podalic version. Celsus declares that delivery by the feet was not at all a difficult feat. This Roman physician contrived a most admirable instrument for decapitation. Students of obstetrics will recognize in the instrument of Celsus the rude original of the instrument in present-day use. Celsus did not agree with certain Hippocratic teachings regarding delivery of the placenta. Patience in delivery of the placenta as advocated by Hippocrates did not meet with favor from Celsus. The latter believed in hasty delivery of the placenta.

The next author entitled to our notice is Aretaeus, a physician of Cappadocia, who lived about the time of Nero, A. D. 80. In his principal work he devotes a chapter to diseases of the uterus, and assigns as the causation of *prolapsus uteri* a relaxation of the uterine ligaments. Aretaeus was more interested in gynecology than midwifery.

Moschion, who is said to also have lived during the reign of Nero, follows Aretaeus. Pliny and Galen make reference to Moschion and his endeavors in the field of science. This author treats of the female genitalia and of the diseases peculiar to the sex. The question of natural and difficult labors he deals with in a very interesting manner. In the management of difficult labor he orders the evacuation of the bowels by an enema, and of the bladder by catheterization. In no unmeasured terms does Moschion condemn the practice of shaking the patient to facilitate delivery according to the Hippocratic practice. After delivery he advises the cord to be pulled gently from side to side to promote delivery of the placenta. Should the placenta not come away by these means Moschion advises that the hand be introduced and the placenta extracted if detached and loose; but should it remain firmly attached to the uterine walls

he advises that extreme care be employed in its separation. Moschion in a brief way deals also with the management of children.

Soranus, of Ephesus, who lived in the time of the Emperor Trajan, in the early part of the second century, next engages our attention. He left a good description of the uterus, and demonstrated the nonexistence of cotyledons in the human subject.

Rufus, also of Ephesus, lived at nearly the same time as Soranus. In his description of the womb he expressly calls attention to the passages in the broad ligaments (Fallopian tubes) a discovery subsequently claimed by Galen.

Galen was born at Pergamus, and flourished during the reign of the Emperor Adrian, about 600 years after Hippocrates. He directs attention to the contractile efforts of the uterus while labor is going on, and ridicules the then prevailing notion of the uterus wandering about the body.

During the reign of the Emperor Julian, Oribasius flourished, and was held in high esteem in scientific circles. He collected a good deal of data along gynecological lines. His remarks concerning certain preliminaries in reduction of a prolapsed uterus reflect a keen technical judgment.

Aetius was the next writer of importance on the subject of midwifery. He lived at the end of the fifth and beginning of the sixth century. Aetius was one of the first obstetrical writers to call attention to the symphyseal separation at the time of labor.

The last of the old Greek authors, Paulus of Aegina, flourished in the beginning of the seventh century. He was the most original and trustworthy of medical observers since the days of Hippocrates. He understood perfectly the mechanism of the child's transit through the pelvic canal, so that he, in truth, blazed the trail for what Smellie, first of all the moderns, was later to accomplish in instrumental obstetrics.

We have now arrived at that long and gloomy period of history which, as far as literature and science are concerned, has been aptly distinguished by the name of the Dark Ages. On account of the many invasions from the northern nations, and the constant warring of the peoples, the arts first languished, and finally deserted the western division of the empire. For a time Alexandria was the seat of science and the asylum of the fine arts, but in the sacking of this city by the Saracens 640 A. D., the once famous library was consigned to the flames. Through this act of barbarism that vast storehouse of knowledge of the ancients, both in literature and in arts, was lost to succeeding ages. After this world

calamity a period of two centuries was to elapse before medicine made any further progress.

Arabian medicine now became the vogue. The works of the Arabian writers chiefly consisted of voluminous excerpts from the Greek authors, manuscripts of whose writings had been preserved from pillage and flame. Serapion, who wrote on the diseases of pregnant women, was one of the first of the new Arabian school.

In the tenth century, the use of the fillet in difficult births was suggested by Rhazes, a physician of Bagdad. This same physician was one of the first to treat the diseases of children as a special branch of medicine.

Avicenna, a practitioner who flourished in the beginning of the eleventh century, compiled many volumes from Greek authors. He was quite an adept in the use of the fillet.

The next author entitled to our notice is Albucasis, who was acquainted with the occurrence of extrauterine gestation. In his various treatises may be found many drawings, together with a description, of two kinds of forceps of a circular form, with a row of spiked teeth on the internal surface to squeeze and crush the fetal head.

The decline of learning in the East dates from the destruction of the Egyptian caliphate by the Turks in the twelfth century, and closes our brief account of the Arabian writers.

While educational advancement for a few ages seems to have been cultivated by the Mahomedans, it must be remembered that learning was not allowed to go entirely neglected by the Christians of the West during the same period. As early as the seventh century the study of languages was encouraged at Salerno, and Charlemagne in the beginning of the ninth century founded a University at Padua, the medical school of which was held in high esteem up to this day.

In their trips to the Holy Land the Crusaders contributed indirectly to the revival of learning in Europe. The maritime states of Italy through their spreading commerce contributed also, in no small measure, in restoring to the people of Europe those arts and sciences which they had lost through the wars waged by the early barbarians.

However, it was not until the middle of the fifteenth century that literature and the arts began to show signs of reawakening. Through the invention of printing the scientific light of the ancients, as contained in the existing manuscripts, was rapidly diffused over the whole of Europe.

To the early Britons we owe much of our knowledge of the subject of midwifery. Midwives were more or less under the control of the church, in that they were licensed by the bishop, and subjected to an examination as to fitness and character. That the church exercised a protecting care and ecclesiastical guidance over midwives is evident, as certain important rites were entrusted to them as a part of their duties. As far back as the seventh century the midwife was in cases of necessity allowed to baptize newly born infants. Centuries later this privilege was revoked, it being declared "that baptism is only to be ministered by a lawful minister or deacon called to be present for that purpose, and by none others."

In 1532, Eucharius Rhodion, a German published a treatise on 'Parturition.' This work was subsequently translated into Latin and other languages, and became almost universally the "Midwife's Handbook" throughout the whole of Europe.

In the middle of the sixteenth century appeared Ambrose Parè, surgeon to several successive rulers of France, and the father of modern surgery. Parè was really the first of the moderns who contributed materially to the improvement of the obstetrical art, and the first who decided positively, and upon clear and distinct principles, in favor of the operation of turning the fetus in utero, the introduction of which into practice marks a mile stone in obstetric progress.

Up to the time of Parè the practice in breech cases had, with few exceptions, been to shake the patient vigorously and to change her position in various ways, with the intention of bringing down the head. If this procedure proved of no avail, recourse was had to mutilation of the fetus. Parè's operation of turning the feet differed materially from the method alluded to by Celsus. Parè was a strong opponent of Cesarean section.

The practice of midwifery up to the advent of Parè had been almost exclusively in the hands of females, and the advice and assistance of male practitioners being obtained only in cases of difficulty and apprehended danger.

A remarkable era in the interest of midwifery was that inaugurated by the Chamberlens during the reign of King James I, of England. In 1616 Peter Chamberlen presented to the Sovereign a petition calling attention to the lamentable state of this branch of medicine. Behind this petition there was some personal motive; such at least was attributed to him by his enemies, for later on Peter's son wrote "Fame begat me envy and secret enemies which mightily increased when my father added to me deliveries and the cure of women."



While the proposed reforms of the Chamberlens were laudable and humane, it must not be forgotten that there was a commercial side to the whole affair. In short, the Chamberlen family attempted to monopolize the practice of obstetrics among the ruling classes. Following the protest of Chamberlens the midwives themselves presented a petition resenting the proposed changes in obstetric practice. Though declamations against the ignorance and clumsiness of midwives were loud and frequent, they still continued in the same path of stubborn superstition and blind ignorance. This state of obstetric incompetency among midwives prevailed throughout the whole of Europe. In the seventeenth century the effects of the campaign for better midwifery began to show itself. Excellent texts upon midwifery were now being published. Many of these texts were written by women who took this means of criticizing their male competitors.

At this period, there was a deeply rooted prejudice to male midwives. This feeling was well nigh universal throughout the whole of Europe. In France, Julian Clement was hired to attend the mistresses of Louis XIV in their labors. The employment of Clement was kept as a secret of the household. To his first delivery Clement was conducted blindfolded, while the King was concealed among the bed curtains, and the face of the lady enveloped in a network of lace. The term "accoucheur" was given to the obstetrical world by Clement after he had, in December 1663, delivered La Vallierre. It was after this delivery that the Parisian midwives rose in protest against their most formidable competitor and subjected him to the most humiliating forms of derision and ridicule.

However, it was not until the introduction of the forceps that the midwives realized that their calling as an "exclusive female art" was being seriously threatened. All who used instruments were dubbed "instrumentarians." The dispute as to the wisdom of this mode of delivery was acrimonious. Smellie, who had introduced the use of forceps, was assailed with all the rancor and acerbity at command, and this was plentiful; his female opponents vied in the malevolence of their criticisms, and waxed eloquent in wrath. He suffered, as all medical innovators do, and as usual his detractors and critics were not all limited to the one sex. Smellie was ungainly and awkward in his manners. A prominent midwife, Mrs. Nihell, satirically alluded to Smellie's large hand in the following manner: "the delicate fist of a great horse-godmother of a he midwife." This same mild mannered lady, in the outpourings of her feelings against the man midwives, scoffs against "that multitude of dis-

ciples of Dr. Smellie, trained up at the feet of his artificial doll—in short, those self-constituted men midwives made out of broken barbers, tailors, or even pork butchers; for I know myself one of the last trade who, after passing his life in stuffing sausages, is turned an intrepid physician and man midwife.” Thus, to Clement of France, and Smellie of England the world is indebted for the male accoucheur.

The professional war between the he and the she midwives was indeed a bitter struggle. Opprobrious epithets, ridicule, and sarcasm were all employed with unremitting vigor. However, the revolutionary forceps continued their work until the complaint was made that there were more men midwives than streets. Man had at last come into his own—the man midwife was now a real factor to be contended with. And, finally, obstetrics was soon to occupy its proper niche in the realms of scientific medicine.

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