

ORIGINAL CONTRIBUTIONS

ANESTHETICS IN MIDWIFERY.

BY DR. E. ASHCROFT, MONROE, N. C.

From the Charlotte Medical Journal.

NO other contribution to the science of obstetrics has been so beneficial as the introduction of anesthesia. In addition to the unmeasurable suffering it has prevented, it has acted directly and positively toward the development of the art itself by making possible manipulations and procedures which were before impossible or unthought of.

Sir James Y. Simpson, in January, 1847, delivered with ether the first woman ever under an anesthetic in parturition, and in November of the same year he began the use of chloroform in labor. His defence of the practice maintains with equal force to-day: "pain in excess is destructive, and even ultimately fatal, and the great pain accompanying parturition is no exception to this general pathologic law."

He was not satisfied with the results he obtained under ether; he did not consider chloroform perfect; and after seventy years' use of these and many other agents for induction of amnesia and anesthesia, when indicated in the lying-in chamber, the ideal agent is yet unknown. Ether, chloroform, chloral, opium, morphine, nitrous oxide, cocaine locally to cervix and external genitals; morphine-scopolamin; pantopon; heroin, and tocanalgin; all have been tried—all have had their enthusiastic advocates—but none have produced results sufficiently satisfactory to convince and convert the profession, as a whole, to their use. The profession demands more of an anesthetic than they formerly required. Not so long ago, anybody who could hold an ether can and tell the patient to "breathe deeply" was considered "good enough" to give the anesthetic in surgical operations. Of late years we have exacted more skill and experience from the anesthetist, and more exact results from our anesthetic, in the surgical operating room; but only a very few physicians have given the matter the attention it deserves in obstetrics—where two lives, instead of one—are at stake.

ETHER.—The year 1847 saw the introduction of ether in midwifery. While Simpson experimented in Edinburg, Dubois and Deschamps worked in Paris, and Morton and Keep in Boston. Ether is undeniably the safest of all anesthetics for obstetrical use, with the sole exception of nitrous oxide, and many of the well known objections to its