CHAPTER II

DYSTOCIA THE RESULT OF FAULTS IN THE FORCES

Undue Strength of the Forces—Precipitate Labour—Inefficiency of the Forces.

IF the question were asked, What is the commonest cause of minor dystocia and delay in labour? without doubt the answer would be— Faults in the expulsive forces. But, while such an answer is quite correct, all who have had much experience of obstetric practice must admit, that very frequently such an explanation is given too readily and without sufficient consideration. It is so simple and vague that one is tempted to be satisfied with it, whenever the cause of the dystocia is not strikingly apparent. I have frequently found the real cause some little departure from the normal in the pelvic cavity or in the position or attitude of the child, so much so that I think it a good rule to attribute delay and difficulty in labour only to faults in the forces, when one has absolutely satisfied oneself that the fault is not in the passage or passenger.

In approaching this subject of the forces as a factor of dystocia, one is arrested at the very outset, by the fact that there is no standard for, or means of, estimating the forces. With dystocia associated with the passage and passenger, we shall see that it is quite otherwise, for by investigation and careful consideration the degree of difficulty may be fairly correctly surmised.

I have said that there is no means of estimating the forces. By that, I mean, there is no practical method of doing so beyond the simple expedient of applying a hand over the abdomen and estimating the frequency, duration, and effect of the uterine contractions. One cannot measure the forces, and say that one has a force of so many millimetres of mercury too little or too much.

There have been many attempts to measure the forces of labour. Duncan and Poppel, for example, estimated the resistance of the membranes to a bursting force. Others attempted to measure them by attaching a dynamometer to the forceps, and so estimating the amount of force required to extract the child. It is, however,