

THE HYGIENE OF CHILDBEARING

that no great degree of accuracy is possible. The average length of pregnancy is 280 days, or 40 weeks; but many pregnancies are longer than this, and some are shorter. Add to this the fact that the exact date of conception is seldom known, and it is clear that it must be impossible to foretell the time of delivery very closely.

Method.—The usual method is to take the last day of the last menstruation, count back three months, and add five days. For example, suppose the last menstrual period ended July 23rd. Counting back three months (which is more convenient than counting ahead nine months) brings us to April 23rd. Adding five days makes April 28th the probable date. We have one check on this calculation, and this is the fact that the mother feels life ("quickening") about the middle of pregnancy, or four months and a half after conception. This, too, is subject to variation. Life may be felt as early as four months, or it may be delayed until five. But this sign has sufficient value that every prospective mother should note carefully both the date of the close of the last menstruation, and the date when life is first felt.

A Superstition.—In regard to this matter of feeling life or quickening (as it was formerly called) there prevails extensively in the public mind an error or superstition that has come down from the ignorance of the past. This is the belief that the child actually comes to life at this time when the mother first feels its movements. Of course, this is not true. The fetus is alive and makes movements from the beginning, but it is so small and its movements are so feeble that they are not felt by the