

AN OBSTETRICAL PHENOMENON.—CRYING OF THE FETUS IN UTERO.

By A. HARLOW, M.D., Detroit, Mich.

The following case is sufficiently striking, I think, to warrant its publication, even at the risk of having my veracity called in question by doubting Thomases.

The lady to whom I was called moved in the humbler walks of life, and was about forty years of age and in her fifth confinement, eleven years having intervened since giving birth to her fourth child. I would state for reasons that may be apparent to the reader before closing this note, that another physician, one of high respectability and standing, had been previously called, but prior engagements preventing his attendance in time, I was summoned in his stead. Soon after my arrival, finding her pains rapidly increasing in severity and frequency, in absence of all female assistance, I helped my patient upon her seat, and from digital examination found the waters just gathering, and after one or two additional pains the membrane broke and the amniotic fluid quite flooded the bed. I had no difficulty in satisfactorily diagnosing the position, which I found to be a vertex presentation of the sixth variety, according to Baudelocque. Immediately after I had thus satisfied myself as to the nature and character of the presentation and before the labor had further progressed, and while the head was yet engaged in the superior strait, the child made two distinct audible screams that could be plainly heard in any part of the room. When this cry was first heard I was alone with the sick woman, and being greatly surprised at what I heard, gently passed my hand up the vagina and found the head still in the superior strait. Immediately following this cry of the foetus there was another free discharge of amniotic fluid. During the space of an hour or more before the arrival of female help to assist me, I made several ineffectual attempts to disengage from its fixed position, that it might be forced down the passage by the same uterine contractions that were regularly taking place, but with all my efforts and the assistance of nature, did not succeed in getting any descent of the head, and during this time the child had several spells of crying, the same as was heard at first, the tone and voice being unmistakably that of a child. Two or three elderly women coming in to sympathize and assist, as is usual on such occasions, I made little or no further attempts for one or two hours of hurrying on the labor. Satisfied there was no danger in the case, I did little but watch and wait for a time, to see what rest and nature would do where art and officiousness had apparently failed. During this apparent lull the pains did not entirely cease; and generally following each one the child would cry as before. At the first cry after the arrival of female help one old lady exclaimed in her joy:

"La me! the child is born."

"No, madam, the child is not born."

"You don't say, Doctor, that the child is not born, and crying, too?"

"Yes, madam, it has had spells ever since my arrival the same as you have just heard."

"Dear me!" was the exclamation of the good woman, and as soon as she could take a long breath, said, "and is not that strange?" and as a mark of veneration settled the matter by declaring that "with God there is nothing impossible."

Waiting as long as I thought it justifiable for the ineffectual contractions to disengage the head from its impacted position, I applied the forceps, and with suitable traction, accompanied with one or two good pains, delivered the woman of a large female child.

I saw my patient next day, and found her very comfortable and apparently doing well; her pulse was normal, no unusual heat or tenderness across abdomen, and was free from all pain. Finding her alone on this my second visit, and in a mood and condition for conversation, I took occasion to investigate her more fully relative to this curious phenomenon. She told me "the child first commenced crying four weeks before it was born, and kept it up at intervals till its birth, since which time it has not cried at all." This lady declared and persisted that she went four weeks over her regular time; that at the proper period for the birth of the child it commenced crying and kicking, as though, to use her own language, "it would come right through her ribs." At first, she said, she was greatly surprised and alarmed, but as this peculiar freak of nature continued without producing any particularly alarming symptoms, she became so accustomed to its frequent repetition that her alarm vanished. After many thanks from my patient for bringing her so safely through her perilous condition, I left after prescribing her favorite opening medicine, which she informed me on such occasions was castor oil, a little to be taken that evening at 9 o'clock, and if need be repeated next morning.

The following day I called according to promise, expecting to dismiss my patient from further medical attendance as intimated the day before; but to my surprise on calling according to appointment, found another doctor present, an occurrence, whether agreeable or otherwise, not altogether unknown to the medical profession. I learned that the woman had taken the oil as I directed the night before. About 1 o'clock a.m. she was taken with a pain in her stomach, and claiming that there was no messenger at hand who knew where I could be found in the night, sent for the gentleman I found present at his second visit. I was told that the woman had not only had no operation from the oil, but that medicine had been given to prevent any movement of the bowels. Without expressing myself pleased or displeased at the course taken, I left the patient in the hands of the physician first called, who could not attend in time to render relief. And