

Dr. Bedford's position in the profession is well recognised, and he has already acquired no mean reputation by his former labours. His qualifications for the task which he imposed upon himself, are unquestionable, and we are especially pleased that he has not adopted that peculiar and familiar style of dialogue, even when opportunities in the volume before us presented themselves, which in our opinion marred his first publication.

The subject of midwifery proper is considered in all its details under the form of forty-three lectures, while the three last of the series are devoted to the consideration of puerperal fever, puerperal mania, and the employment of anæsthetics. We cannot observe a single item of importance in the discussion of his subject, which the author has omitted to notice.

Of the various problems which have engaged the attention of physiologists, scarcely one is invested with more interest than the determining causes of labour, in other words, why, at or about the expiration of the 280 days from conception, the uterus should throw off its contents. Quite a number of theories have been advanced to explain it, from the days of Avicenna downwards. After rapidly going over those previously advanced, and exhibiting their futility, he adopts the following original one, that it depends on "the matured development of the muscular structure of the organ itself." By which he means that "from the instant of fœcundation the uterus becomes an active centre, the effect of which is an increased nutrition, which results in the growth and development of the various structures composing it." Pursuing this observation the author continues, "if you consider on the one hand this fact of increase of development, and on the other the interesting circumstance, that as pregnancy approaches its termination, the uterine muscular fibre is, as a necessary result, proportionably gaining in maturity of growth and development; if, I say, you consider all these things, does it not seem within the range of probability, that under the constant influence of nutrition and repose so far as regards its functional display, the muscular tissue of the gravid uterus becomes as it were surcharged—in a word, so full of contractile power, that in perfect consistency with the general laws regulating the animal economy, it commences its series of acts, through which alone the exit of the fœtus, after full intra-uterine development can be accomplished." Now in this explanation of one of the most extraordinary phenomena in physiology, we think that our author has rather begged the question, than answered it satisfactorily, nor do we consider his hypothesis by any means as tenable as that of Dr. Powers, which he regards as merely "plausible," which he has given in full detail, and which has been very commonly accepted. The theory of the latter in few words, is as follows: The os uteri is regarded as a true sphincter, a fact which the arrangement of the muscular fibres in it confirms, and that like those of the anus and bladder, it is endowed with a high and peculiar sensibility. During the first four or five months of pregnancy, the uterus enlarges in capacity at the expense of the tissue of the fundus and body, but after this period it continues to do so at the expense of that of the cervix, as it is a well recognised fact that about the end of the fifth month, its length begins to diminish, until at full term it is wholly obliterated. Finally, the nervous influence with which the os uteri is more endowed than any other part of that