

OBSTETRICS AND GYNÆCOLOGY

IN CHARGE OF

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OBSTETRICAL SUPERSTITIONS.

In no department of medicine does the practitioner meet with so many absurd superstitions and traditions as in the practice of obstetrics. Like all superstitions, they are difficult to eradicate, and woe to the venturesome practitioner who undertakes the job; he is at once set down as having very little knowledge and less experience. It is not my purpose to give a list of these superstitions or traditions, but merely to mention some of the most common ones, laying special stress upon those productive of great harm to the lying-in woman and her off-spring.

As soon as a woman is known to be pregnant she is overwhelmed with advice from those of her friends who have been through the mill; even the husband does not always escape, but is commiserated with an account of morning sickness, though I have never seen a case in the masculine that could not be more properly ascribed to the worship of Bacchus than to that of Venus. A favorite and largely advertised remedy for lessening the pains of labor is known as "Mother's Friend"—an ointment, to be rubbed daily over the abdomen, said to insure an easy and uncomplicated labor; I have heard intelligent and well educated women highly laud this remedy. The prospective mother is urged also to look only at beautiful objects of art, etc., if she desires a pretty child. I have known these same well educated women to invest in a beautiful picture and spend hours each day wrapped in contemplation of it; less frequently they betake themselves to the study of higher mathematics and the sciences, hoping by this means to bring forth a being of extraordinary intelligence. Some of the friends also predict with confidence the sex of the child according to the manner in which it is carried. When labor begins, there comes a deluge of suggestions as to the position the woman should assume: if she extends her arms above her head, she is at once told to lower them, as such a position will knot the cord around the neck of the

baby and produce its death. If her pains are very severe, and the attending physician advises the use of chloroform, the patient, if a multipara, will probably demur, because So-and-So told her that if ever under any circumstances she took chloroform it would kill her. If the patient does not object, some of the neighbor-women will "chip in," saying that it is not right to give it—that it is flying in the face of Providence, etc.

No labor is without some pain, but in many cases the pain is easily bearable; the ability to bear and to feel pain varies with the individual. I have delivered women who made no outcry and seemed to suffer a minimum of pain; they did not wish to take chloroform, and as there seemed to be but little suffering I did not insist upon its use. But I think it is the duty of every doctor to rob the lying-in chamber of all the agony possible; it is a cruel and disgraceful thing for him to sit and listen unmoved to the agonizing cries of a woman in this the most critical time of her existence when he has the power to safely and easily relieve her. With little effort on his part the lying-in room can be made very much less terrible to the prospective mother, and the frequency of abortions and conjugal onanism be thus indirectly diminished.

In the first stage the pain can be greatly mitigated by the use of chloral hydrate and the hypodermatic administration of morphine. Fifteen-grain doses of chloral given every half-hour until three doses have been taken will produce sleep, and after this the pain sets in with renewed vigor. A full dose of morphine may also be given; it quiets the pain for some hours, but when its effects die out the pains are stronger and more efficient.

In the second stage the analgesic *par excellence* is chloroform. No one now contends that its use in the lying-in room is dangerous. I have been unable to find a single well authenticated case of a death occurring from its use under such circumstances. If a retardation of labor occurs when chloroform is given, it is of short duration; if the