

PART VI.

OF MIDWIFERY.

INTRODUCTION.

WE approach this part of our work with seriousness and with diffidence; not because of its anticipated magnitude, or its difficulty of detail, though we look upon these, and especially the latter, as involving much responsibility. But it is the circumstances by which this reputed mysterious art is surrounded, that impress us with a seriousness and diffidence with which, in our other medical labors, we had not to contend. To oppose popular prejudices, or attempt innovations in matters ever so plain, and capable of the clearest demonstration, is certainly no enviable task; it is one from which the mind involuntarily shrinks, in contemplation of its responsibilities, and its interminable discussions and animosities. But when we attack a custom, the subject of which, both from its delicacy and by design, is kept hidden from the broad gaze of the world, and in attacking which we must have recourse to reason to a great extent, in the first instance, to supply the place of demonstration, the weight of responsibility, and other concomitant consequences, recoil upon the mind with redoubled force, and far more repulsive energy.

From the very nature and peculiarity of midwifery, it seems, by common consent, generally to be little inquired into, especially by men; and hence the too great ignorance respecting a matter of the highest importance to the whole community. It seems to be one of the consequent evils of civilized life, that we are disposed to devote our time and attention to things of lesser importance; such as acquiring some unmeaning accomplishment or personal embellishment; whilst the more important concerns connected with health and happiness are disregarded as if they were matters of small account. Hence we find in civilized nations, little is generally known respecting health and disease, and still less about the momentous concerns of pregnancy and child-birth; the very important knowledge of these things being, by common consent, yielded to a select few.

This highly interesting and necessary part of all female education, a correct knowledge of the phenomenon of child-birth, has for many years been passing into the hands of physicians, who appear to hold it with a most tenacious grasp.

We hope, while writing upon this subject, to be excused for any plain language which we may use. The subject is one of much importance to the world, and particularly to females; and it is to them we wish to address ourselves. Upon them devolves the office of mothers—the often tedious process of gestation—the more painful one of delivery, and the still more careful and responsible one of watching over and rearing their tender offspring from infancy to mature age. What claims, indeed, has a mother upon the sympathy, the compassion, and the gratitude of the world!

We feel most sensibly the responsibility of the task which we have imposed upon ourselves—that of endeavouring to convince women of their capacity to render to each other all the needful assistance which is generally necessary at child-birth, instead of continuing the present indelicate, unnatural, and immoral habit of calling upon the other sex. The prejudices which sanction this custom of employing men instead of women, to officiate as midwives, are of comparatively modern origin; and are no where to be met with but in civilized life: and no where are the difficulties of labor so severe, and the mortality in child-bed so great, as amongst those nations which claim to be the most refined.

“I have seldom,” says Dr. EWELL, in treating upon this same subject, “felt a more ardent desire to succeed in any undertaking, because I view the present increasing practice of calling upon men in ordinary births, as a source of serious evils to child-bearing—as an imposition upon the credulity of women, and upon the fears of their husbands—as a means of sacrificing delicacy, and consequently virtue—as a robbery of many of the good common women [midwives] of their employment and support. Truly, it shows as extraordinary a revolution in practice, as any afforded by a survey of all the arts.” “Should the strangers to the practice, inquire if our men have large unwieldy hands—great curiosity about women; should they ask if our women have the requisites for useful services—small hands, good sense of touch, and *patience in attendance*—they will absolutely deny this monstrous perversion of the course of nature.”

But so it is; the practice of midwifery, in all our towns and villages, and to a great extent in the country, is now almost exclusively confined to the hands of the physicians, who by their marvelous tales of the hair-breadth escapes of numerous women to whom they have been called just in time to save life, strike a terror in the mind of the suffering woman, which confirms her in the determination, no matter how repulsive to her delicacy, to employ none but doctors. These tales are told, of course, in presence of the attendants of the woman in labor;

and most commonly perhaps the individual whom the doctor has so fortunately rescued from such great peril, was at the same time in the hands of a female midwife, who, however skillful, was unable to render the needful assistance. The frequent repetition of these stories in the presence of the same women, with the affected mystery in which the transaction is enveloped, make a serious impression on their minds, and fill them with the most awful apprehensions; and they, in turn, employ the same individual, feeling themselves safe in the hands of no one else, unless it be some other physician who can tell equally marvelous tales.

We are truly sorry for poor human nature, that professional men are obliged to resort to such miserable shifts and criminal subterfuges, to secure to themselves a lucrative business, for which by nature they were never designed. And we are equally sorry to find ourselves under the necessity of thus exposing them and their artifices, in proper colors; in doing which we beg leave to say, that we are not actuated by malicious motives, but by a sense of the impropriety, impolicy, and immorality of the practice, and by a sense of duty to the female community and to the world. We will take this occasion also to observe, that we wish not by this honest expression of our sentiments, to wound the feelings of any who are not justly obnoxious to reproach. Some physicians who practice midwifery, do it more in compliance with common custom and the prejudices of those amongst whom they reside, than from the desire of retaining the business, or from a belief in the propriety of its being wrested from the hands of women. A few authors, too, have nobly stepped forth as advocates of the insulted rights of female midwives, amongst whom Dr. BARD and Dr. EWELL stand pre-eminently above the rest. But how has their devotion been appreciated, and their toil repaid? We are informed that professional opposition has so retarded the sale of EWELL's *Family Physician*, that the author remains unremunerated for his labor and expense; and Bard's excellent *Midwifery*, probably from the same cause, has passed through only a single edition. By a perusal of these authors we have been largely profited ourselves, and have made copious extracts from their works for the benefit of the readers of our own.

We have heretofore alluded to the marvelous tales of physicians to frighten women to a belief in the necessity of employing them at child-birth. The following, from Dr. EWELL, seems to have reference to this circumstance; "A thousand times you are told of *one* irregularity of nature; but seldom hear of her almost undeviating correctness in operating." Of the truth of this you may all satisfy yourselves, with only a little reflection. Even if you hear a long list of unfortunate cases related, with which all books more or less abound, remember that these are

gathered from all quarters of the world, and do not constitute, perhaps, one in a thousand. "Provident nature," says Dr. BARD, "is wonderfully kind to pregnant women; and when she is properly consulted, attended to, and obeyed, from the beginning—not weakened by excess, nor thwarted by preposterous management—will, nine hundred and ninety-nine times out of a thousand, carry her votary safely through all the wonderful changes of this eventful period."

"A thousand times," says Dr. EWELL, "you dwell upon the miseries of one sufferer, without thinking upon the millions who happily and healthily pass the period of parturition. Away with your forebodings! Believe the truth, when pregnant, that, in all human probability, you will do perfectly well; that the most ordinary women can render you every needful assistance, without the interference of men midwives. *Their hurry, their spirit for acting, have done the sex more harm than all the injudicious management of midwives, of which they are so fond of talking.* This, Dr. DENMAN, Dr. BUCHAN, and many other really great physicians, have long since remarked."

Why then, let us seriously ask, will you continue the practice of employing physicians, since it is asserted, even by themselves, that they do more injury than midwives of your own sex? You ought certainly to know that "the simple process of child-bearing is performed by yourselves, and not by attendants' hands—by the resources of nature, and not by the powers of art." But of these facts, physicians, as well as too many midwives, have criminally kept you ignorant. They have clothed the operation of child-birth with so much mystery, which is the very ground work of deception, as to make you suppose that midwives always render essential assistance; when, in fact, in almost all cases, it is completely out of their power to do it, or if they are so ignorant or impatient as to attempt it, they are sure to do an injury. Figure to yourselves, for a moment, the condition of child-birth. The head of the child presenting, is driven forward by the contractile force of the womb, in the same manner that the urine is expelled by the bladder, only that the pains of labor are not under the control of the will. The head fills completely the whole passage, and very greatly distends it beyond its natural size.

We would now ask, what can the midwife do to assist the mother in the expulsion of the child? Can she lay hold of the head and drag it forcibly away! By no means: it is impossible; and should she be so ignorant or presumptuous as to attempt it, would certainly repent her folly and rashness. Well, what then can the midwife do? Why, at the most, in cases of wrong presentations, she may, by careful and discreet management, assist nature in rectifying those errors; but beyond this, she can do nothing more than to receive the child when it

comes into the world. And what woman could not, what woman would not, nay, ought not, when necessary, to perform this simple office?

In confirmation of these views, we will introduce some sensible remarks from an anonymous publication by a female writer and midwife:—

“What arguments shall I use to convince you that it is out of the power of either midwife or physician, with safety to mother or child, to offer any assistance, even in the last stage of labor. Every woman who has borne children, knows, or might know, that in this stage, nature is so pressing that it would require a great resistance to restrain the child from coming forth, that is if there had been no mismanagement. I have seen this acted out by many, whilst they were waiting with fearful expectation, lest the birth should take place before the physician arrived.

“I am aware that many women may object to this proposition, thinking it was never so with them; but this is for the want of proper information. I recollect very well, that soon after I entered into this practice, a certain woman whom I had visited a second time, exclaimed immediately after the birth of her child, ‘I know that I could not have a child born without assistance.’ The fact is, she was not assisted; but because of the custom of the times, I thought best to pacify her by deception, as Dr. DENMAN justifies. I practiced in this way for a number of years, till a reproachful conscience bade me advance this light; though not without fears that some inexperienced female may consider this doctrine disheartening.”

Here is the frank and candid confession of one whose conscientiousness and moral honesty impelled her to disclose the light of truth, which has been too long kept hidden from the view of the world. And what a melancholy picture does it exhibit of the depravity of those practitioners who are insisting upon the propriety of employing men-midwives, and who have themselves disclosed nearly as much as the lady to whom we are indebted for the foregoing extracts. But we will omit our own remarks, and hasten to another quotation from the same author, which at the same time that it exhibits her very correct knowledge of human nature, also displays her exalted views of Deity, and a rational confidence in his wisdom.

“Therefore,” says she, “when your labor commences, be not afraid with any amazement, though a mother or any kind friend should insist on sending immediately for help; which we know is frequently done, but generally not without a bad effect, as it produces affright or embarrassment, which only retards the operation of nature: But let such know, (at least if you are a child of God,) that your trust is in your Creator, and that he

who appointed to the female this destiny, has also formed her equal to the task."

How much the embarrassment alluded to in the foregoing extract is increased by calling in *male* assistance, we must leave for females themselves to judge; as, indeed, too many of those who have become mothers know its extent from mortifying and painful experience. We beg the privilege here of introducing a remark of Dr. EWELL upon this subject. After speaking of the distress and disgust which husbands feel at the exposure of their wives to doctors, at child-birth, he says:—"But the opposition, the detestation of this practice, cannot be so great in any husband, as amongst some women. The idea has driven some to convulsions, and derangement; and every one of the least delicacy, feels deeply humiliated at the exposure. Many while in labor, have been so shocked at the entrance of a man in their apartment, as to have all their pains banished. Others, to the very last of their senses, suffering the severest torment, have rejected the assistance of men. There have been many of this description in all ages! Virtuous sainted souls—they preferred dying in all the agonies, the throes, and the convulsions of fatal labors! They did err on the side of delicate feeling, but their errors shall be blotted out forever! To be instrumental in relieving one of this truly interesting cast, will be a heavenly consolation to all who can be alive to the pleasures of serving the virtuous."

Can it be possible that it is a part of the wise plan of Deity, to subject the delicate, the modest, the virtuous feelings of women, to such agonizing emotions as these? No! never! It may possibly be said that the cause of all this distress, is the improper indulgence of a false delicacy—that child-birth is an extraordinary occasion, and it is the duty of women, at such a time, to conquer those feelings. But we must confess that we have no ear for philosophy like this. This sense of delicacy was given them by the all-wise Creator, for a noble and valuable purpose; and as well may we be told that hunger is a false deceptive feeling which should be overcome, as that the delicacy of women should be so far conquered as to admit, without emotion, the interference of physicians at child-birth.

The case then is clear, that none but women, excepting the husband, should in ordinary cases, be permitted to be present or officiate as a midwife at child-birth. But if nothing will satisfy but male assistance, let the husband be the accoucheur—the midwife; there is surely more propriety in this than in employing another, and it is certainly more natural, and, to the wife at least, must be far more agreeable; whilst it wants nothing but custom to make it consistent with popular sentiment. Let the feelings of none be shocked at the

idea of husbands waiting upon their wives in the capacity of accoucheurs; many have done it with the best success, and no one, that we know or have heard of, with any misfortune. Some have even declared their own husbands to be superior to any others. And who indeed can have more tenderness of feeling for both mother and child, than an affectionate husband? And truly, if physicians and midwives would but generally acknowledge the simplicity of most labors, it would be manifest that in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, the husband would do in every respect as well as the most experienced doctor.

Did physicians really possess that sympathy for female suffering which many of them profess, together with that nice sense of delicacy of which they are certainly not devoid, they would assuredly pursue a very different course from the one that has marked their conduct during the last thirty years. Instead of intruding themselves upon the sex as accoucheurs, whereby the feelings of all women are more or less shocked, and many of them most keenly distressed, they would endeavor to instruct and encourage prudent, sensible females, in the art of midwifery, and withdraw themselves from such an indelicate and, in some sense, immoral practice.

But the prevailing idea that none but men can be relied on in bad cases, has become so fixed in the minds of most women, that if a woman even consents to trust herself in the hands of a female midwife, and the labor prove tedious or severe; the assistants become alarmed, to which the prejudices of the day render them exceedingly prone, and nothing will satisfy them but calling in a physician. It is no matter whether the case be really difficult or not; the statements of the midwife avail nothing where prejudice is so strong in favor of midwives of the other sex. We have known many cases of this nature, and we can conceive of no surer means by which the best midwives are liable to lose both their reputation and business.

The doctor comes; makes a great display of affected knowledge; discovers something wrong, which however, by his superior skill and experience is soon set right; the patient and attendants acquire confidence, and, no matter whether difficulties, real or imaginary, exist or afterwards occur, the woman is delivered, for which the doctor is applauded, whilst the unfortunate midwife is silently condemned; when at the same time too, she would in all probability, have delivered the woman sooner, easier, and better than the doctor who is thus supplanting her in reputation and business on which perhaps she may be dependent for a precarious subsistence. It too often happens in cases like those of which we have been speaking, that the judgment of the midwife is not permitted to have any weight. Although she may give assurance that all things are right, and protest against

the necessity as well as propriety of calling in a physician, it is frequently presumed by surrounding and sympathizing friends that she does not, or may not, know the true condition of the patient. The patient, too, is probably suffering much pain, and being flattered with the idea that the doctor can relieve her, she consents that he shall be called. The husband, also, ignorant of the real state of the case, being moved by the solicitude he feels for a tender companion, is compelled to post off for a physician to violate his own delicacy in the person of his wife!!

Scenes similar to what we have endeavored to describe, have been acted again and again, whereby the practice of midwifery has become almost exclusively engrossed by the physicians, in which condition it seems likely to remain until women assert and exercise those prerogatives and powers with which they are endowed by Deity, and which they owe to their dignity and duty to claim.

And what, let us inquire, will be the effect upon society of employing men instead of women to perform the offices of midwives? Who is there that cannot, by a little reflection, perceive the immoral tendencies of such a custom? What is the natural consequence of those familiarities that are and must be taken by men, in the discharge of the duties of a midwife? Is it not to obliterate that delicacy of sentiment, and remove those salutary restraints, by which chastity of feeling is preserved, and immoral familiarities, and undue liberties prevented? Most assuredly such are the natural consequences; and we are not alone in these sentiments.

"Several observing moralists," says EWELL, "have remarked, that the practice of employing men midwives has increased the corruption among married women. Even among the French, so prone to set aside the ceremonies among the sexes—the immorality of such exposures has been noticed. In an anecdote of VOLTAIRE, it is related, that when a gentleman boasted to him of the birth of a son, he asked who assisted at the delivery; to the answer, a man midwife, he replied—then you are traveling the road to cuckoldom."

"The acute observing Count BUFFON, (on puberty,) observes, 'Virginity is a moral being, existing solely in purity of heart. In the submission of women, to the unnecessary examinations of physicians, exposing the secrets of nature, it is forgotten that every indecency of this kind is a violent attack against chastity; that every situation which produces an internal blush, is a real prostitution.' It is very certain, where these exposures have been most common, as in large cities, there adultery has been most frequent.

"Be it folly, or prejudice, or not, there is a value in the belief that the husband's hands alone are to have access to his sacred

wife. Break through this prejudice, if you please to call it so, but for once, unless powerful reasons command it, the rubicon is passed; and rely upon it, the barriers, on future emergencies, will not be so insuperable. Time and opportunity to press on a grateful heart, for a favor in regions where magnified favors have been conferred, have been used and more frequently desired. To convince you of this, you will not require me to enter into the secret history of adultery. Many of these modest looking doctors, inflamed with the thoughts of the well-shaped bodies of the women they have delivered, handled, hung over for hours, *secretly glorying in the privilege*, have to their patients, as priests to their penitents, pressed for accommodation, and driven to adultery and madness, where they were thought more innocently occupied."

Such, reader, is the picture drawn by an individual whose experience and powers of mind enabled him to portray, in its true colors, the temptations and vices consequent on the unwarrantable custom of employing men instead of women in the practice of midwifery; and dare any physician deny its correctness? We think not. It may possibly be thought to exhibit female chastity in a disparaging light; but whilst all admit that women, in common with the other sex, are the subjects of temptation, it is to be hoped that both our quotations and remarks will not be regarded as an indignity, but rather as an attempt to guard females as well against seduction as unjust suspicion. We can also most cheerfully admit, what truth will not allow us to deny, that in point of virtue, the female sex is superior to our own; and, moreover, that in the particular case under consideration, the latter are, in every sense, the original transgressors. They were, in the first place, the active and principal agents in producing those unnatural and unjust prejudices which have obliged females to submit to the interference of male midwives; and they stand in the same connection with regard to the crimes which grow out of this practice. And however few may be the deviations on the part of females from the path of strict rectitude, they nevertheless owe it to their moral character, as they would be above both temptation and suspicion—to their delicacy, as they would be released from the scrutiny of males—to their independency, as they ought not, in this particular, to be under any obligation to the other sex—to their own powers which Deity has endowed them with, as they are capable of rendering to each other all the assistance usually necessary at child-birth—to each and all these circumstances, we repeat, females owe it to encourage the employment of women instead of men as midwives at child-birth.

And we ought not to be satisfied by believing that our own wives are above the temptations, or beyond the dangers of which

we speak. The prevalence and increase of the custom of employing men midwives, as it adds to the number of those immoral familiarities, very naturally has an extensive and powerful influence over the prevailing character of the age. "The interest, the affection, the duty, of all, require that every effort should be made to preserve women delicate and virtuous; to keep them out of the way of temptation, as well for the present as for succeeding societies. Nothing," continues Dr. EWELL, "can be more certain, than that in defiance of our wishes and expectations, our own daughters will partake more or less of the prevailing manners of the times—will be pure and refined, or indelicate and unprincipled, according to their associates. It is therefore obvious, that by assisting in the establishment and preservation of good practices in the community, we assist in perpetuating them among those dearest to our hearts."

Some, no doubt, may conclude that our remarks on the immorality of employing men midwives, are unsupported by facts. To such we can only say, that if you are indifferent as to the importance of a high-toned moral standard in the community, you will not give yourselves the trouble of investigating the causes by which this standard is depreciated; for all who feel an interest in this matter, we think, will find sufficient evidence in the arguments we have adduced to satisfy them of the correctness of the position which we have taken. We well know that the subject upon which we are writing, has hitherto excited but very little attention; but does it follow from this fact, that the custom of employing men midwives has not had a demoralizing influence? We think not. Many things, although little seen and perhaps still less known, are, nevertheless, exercising a sway over the moral constitution of society, the effects of which it is much to be feared will, sooner or later, disclose themselves in the mutual and extensive corruption and degradation of both sexes and all classes in the community. It is not at all improbable that we may be censured as holding and inculcating uncharitable sentiments respecting the present and prospective state of social morality; but if the practice of employing physicians as midwives continues and becomes universal, as it seems likely to, we shall feel perfectly willing to abide the decision of discerning moralists who live fifty, nay, but thirty years hence.

But however important may be the consideration of the demoralizing influence upon the community, of employing men midwives, this is not alone the serious object of our present solicitude. "It is," in the language of Dr. EWELL, "to wrest the practice of midwifery from the hands of men, and transfer it to women, as it was in the beginning, and ever should be;" and to this object we most earnestly request the attention of every female in the community. Your good sense, your deli-

cacy, your virtuous feelings, all must approve what we are endeavoring to accomplish. And permit not, we entreat you, any childish affectation of feeling to induce you to say or to think the knowledge of this subject is too indelicate for you to acquire. How inconsistent is such an idea with the exposures which your ignorance and your prejudice make necessary, by the employment of men to perform a simple office which properly belongs to yourselves.

"Indeed," says Dr. EWELL, "it is on account of your delicacy, that I entreat you to acquire valuable information respecting your own structure. Nature has given you functions to perform, and every body knows that you perform them; and can you seriously think there is as much indelicacy in endeavoring privately to acquire accurate information, as there is in your neglecting to do it rendering it almost indispensable to expose yourselves to the hands and eyes of strangers?"

We do not expect all to become midwives; but we wish all to acquire a correct knowledge of the simple process of childbirth. This knowledge will have the most powerful tendency to dispel those anxious fears and gloomy forebodings so common to pregnant females, and which is a source of more misery, and of more disasters, than labor itself. But do not suppose that the idea rests upon our assertion alone. It is the opinion of observing writers, deliberately formed and candidly expressed, not for selfish purposes, but for the benefit of the world. By acquiring a correct knowledge of the simple process of childbearing, what consoling influence might you possess and exercise over the minds of many a tender timid woman, in those painful scenes through which the greater part of you have to pass—a consoling influence which perhaps you all need, at times, the benefit of yourselves.

"Many times," says the anonymous female author whom we have before quoted—"many times has a house been set in an uproar, without any ground for alarm, and the unhappy patient driven to despair and thrown into fits, when all might have remained in peace, if those present had properly understood the case, and been properly enlightened." How important it is, on such occasions of alarm, that the husband should be competent to direct the proper measures, and thus prevent premature trouble and unnecessary panic.

We cannot dismiss this part of the subject without introducing a quotation from Dr. EWELL, which is directly in point. "It requires," says he, "but little understanding of this subject, to enable you frequently to prove of great service in removing the fears and forebodings of many ignorant sufferers, who imagine that only professional skill can afford relief. Many such objects of commiseration have languished day after day, solely for the

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want of a little information in one of the attendants ; all unnecessarily lamenting that physicians cannot be procured."

Indeed, in whatever light we view the subject of midwifery—a branch of knowledge, simple as it is, of the highest importance to the whole community—decency, delicacy, reason, morality, all conspire to sanction the propriety of restoring it back to women, as it was in the beginning. Every woman knows with how much more confidence she can unbosom herself to a female than to a male, and how much more freedom she feels in the presence of a midwife of her own sex, than of the other ; and that nothing short of the most exquisite suffering can make the presence of a physician even tolerable.

Most women also know, not only from the general habits and temper of men, but also by experience, the impatience of doctors in those protracted, tedious cases which sometimes occur in child-birth ; and hence the disposition too often indulged in, by physicians, of hurrying on the birth, to the great and frequently irreparable injury of both mother and child. On the other hand, how well do the retired occupations of women fit them for that patience of attendance which it is well known they possess ; and how well does their own experience in similar circumstances qualify them to sympathize with the sufferer, and extend to her that encouragement and consolation which she so often needs. And are not women qualified—have they not the capacity to perform the common office of midwives ? Most assuredly they have.

"Every day," says EWELL, "shows that the practice of midwifery requires no particular skill, no superior knowledge, no slight of hand, nothing beyond the most common sense and observation, to do all that is required with perfect success. Nature has so wisely provided for the birth of the young, that even the extensive practice so highly rated among ladies is not necessary for the discharge of all the duties required from attendants. The male practitioners who in general from accidents have got into great repute, received their first impressions from books, from directions which any one in the country can comprehend."

"At Athens," observes EWELL, "a law was passed forbidding women to practice ; but from perseverance among the delicate, preferring death to exposure, the law was speedily repealed. Since then no government, it is believed, has been so ridiculous as to compel such unnatural interference. In consequence, the practice has been confined to women, until within a few years, in some European countries and their colonies."

As a contrast to the indelicate and ungallant spirit of the Athenians, however, we cannot well omit noticing the liberal, elevated, and more refined views of a few nations of more modern date. "The Danish government," says EWELL, "viewing the employment of men midwives, in natural labor,

as highly improper, established schools for the instruction of women in the principles of midwifery. Several of the German states have imitated the example."

But with all the advantages of light and knowledge which it may be supposed the people of the United States possess, there are few countries in which the anxiety, nay the folly, of employing men as midwives exceeds ours. And yet it is an undeniable fact, admitted by BUCHAN, DENMAN, EWELL, &c., that men midwives have done women more harm by their hurry, their spirit for acting, and we will add, curiosity, than all the ignorant and injudicious management of female midwives "about which the doctors are so fond of talking."

Many cases of the most wretched, inhuman management of midwifery might be detailed in proof of these assertions. Two cases of this character came under our own observation, in which the physician inhumanly introduced his hand, which was of unusual size, to extract the after-birth, without waiting a moment for the powers of nature to do it in the only proper manner.

In one of these cases the woman lingered out a wretched existence for a few months, and died. The other suffered much, and did not long survive. Our recollection is still often haunted by the sensations which the bare recital of one of those cases produced in our mind—the tears, the groans, the shrieks, and the earnest entreaties to be spared the torture, were such as one might think would ring in the imagination of the guilty practitioner to the end of time! The coloring of this picture is not heightened above the reality; and it would no doubt apply with equal force and propriety to thousands of cases.

A variety of the most shocking circumstances might be given from various sources; some, of doctors forcing deliveries when in a hurry, and from no other earthly cause; some, of their exhausting all their skill to produce such a result, and after being obliged to desist, nature has done her work in her own way and in her own time; some, of the mutilation or entire destruction of children, to say nothing of sudden or lingering deaths, and many other painful occurrences of minor importance. But time would fail us in collecting and rehearsing the sickening catalogue; and moreover, we wish rather to convince the judgment than to excite the fears of our female readers. Truly there has been enough to create alarm; but the greater part of the really bad cases have been made so by art and not by nature—by improper interference, instead of patient acquiescence; and instances of this kind have been full as frequent in the practice of physicians as of the most ignorant women. Nature is, in general, competent to perform her own work, and cannot be meddled with only at immense hazard.

Dr. DENMAN, in enumerating the causes of difficult labor,

observes: "There is one much more frequent than the rest, which is the derangement of the order of labor by an officious interposition, or by improper management. Upon this subject," continues he, "it would be unpardonable to make an assertion, which is not supported by experience; but I am now fully convinced, that the far greater number of really difficult labors to which I have been called, (and I must not conceal the truth on this occasion, that many of those which have been originally under my care,) were not difficult from unavoidable necessity, but were rendered such by improper management, in the commencement or course of labor." There is certainly a great deal of candor in this acknowledgment of DENMAN's; more, we fear, than often falls to the lot of professional men. Indeed candor and honesty seem to be diffused through the whole work of this eminent individual; evincing that he wrote for the benefit of the world, rather than the selfishness of the profession.

It is agreed, we believe, by the best authors, that natural labors do not come within the scope or purview of the art of midwifery, which can only be properly applied to those cases which need assistance. The great object, therefore, of the works upon this subject, is to instruct how to manage difficult labors; and hence, the bare contemplation of what these works contain, strikes the mind of the inexperienced with alarm and terror. Indeed, but few persons, we presume, excepting those who are accustomed to the practice, could cast their eyes over a ponderous volume, and find it contained little else than details of cases the most desperate, or operations the most painful and horrible, without concluding that child-birth is a scene of hazard from which scarcely one could escape with life.

But should these same books contain general registers of all cases indiscriminately as they actually occur in midwifery practice, the *unnatural* interspersed amongst the *natural*, those desperate and alarming ones, so much the objects of dread and terror, would be so "few and far between," that child-birth would be stripped of almost all its terrors. And when from this number we deduct those cases which are rendered difficult by malformation, or by improper management of either mother or midwife, the simple though painful process of parturition, would be found to present much less cause of alarm than is commonly attached to it. And why is it, we will ask, that popular opinion has become impressed with such sentiments of terror at the consequences of labor. We answer—in part, because of the mystery which has designedly been thrown about the process of delivery; and partly because of the high colored tales of difficulties and dangers which practitioners of midwifery too often represent themselves as having been the means of dexterously or miraculously removing.

But to correct the false impression which the affected knowledge and dexterity of those trumpeters of their own fame have so injuriously made upon the public mind, we are happy in having it in our power, from registers or tables, to set the thing in its true light before the reader. These registers are derived from different practitioners, both male and female, and from different countries. The following is a condensed result of them, obtained from a late work on Midwifery, by a French author:*

MERRIMAN gives, as the result of 1800 cases of midwifery, 1746 natural or spontaneous labors, to which may be added 23 more that were regarded as unnatural only because there was more than one child, making in all 1769 natural, and leaving only 31 unnatural labors in the whole 1800 cases.

At the Maternité, at Paris, out of 20,357 labors, 20,153 were natural, and 204 only unnatural.

Under the superintendence of Dr. BLAND, out of 1897 cases 1860 were brought to a conclusion by the hand of nature.

"Madame LACHAPELLE, in her new tables, divides the labors that have fallen under her notice into two periods; the first, extending from the 1st Germinal, year IX, to the 31st December, 1811, comprises 15,662 cases; of which 15,380 were spontaneous, and 272 were difficult; the second, which extends from the 1st January, 1812, to the 31st December, 1820, comprises 22,243 labors; of which 21,974 terminated without any artificial assistance, and 269 by the assistance of art."

In Dr. BOER's statement of cases at the Obstetrical School of Vienna, out of a total of 9,590, only 102 were difficult or unnatural.

It would also seem probable, from a comparison of different presentations, by VELPEAU, that another French lady, Madame BOIVIN, had been equally fortunate with LACHAPELLE. He cites, in one 20,357 cases, and in another, 20,517 under the practice of Madame BOIVIN; almost all of which, from the mode of presentation, must have terminated without aid.

The cases which we have selected are, we freely acknowledge, from amongst the most favored practitioners. But as these often very justly accuse those who are less fortunate than themselves, with injudicious management, may we not also suppose that even those most favored might also have the same charge applied in a less extended sense to themselves? There is certainly too much reason to concur in the idea of DENMAN, "that the abuse of art produces evils more numerous and serious than the imperfections of nature."

We can very cheerfully admit, however, that the art of midwifery has, when rationally and judiciously practised even by men,

* See VELPEAU's Midwifery, p. 283.

been the means of saving some lives; but when we compare the small amount of good done in this way, with the vast amount of evil which has resulted from the haste, the impatience, the inquisitiveness, and the want of caution, too frequently predominant in men midwives, we shall very probably arrive at the conclusion, that it would have been better for the world, had men never interfered with the practice. We wish, in making this suggestion, to be correctly understood. We believe that ninety-nine cases in a hundred will terminate without any aid *from art whatever*; leaving but one case in a hundred requiring assistance. Of this number, probably nine-tenths could be delivered by the ordinary female midwives; the other tenth—suppose they die, the mortality would be far less than it now is. Hence we infer that the custom of employing men midwives is productive of more harm than good.

We do not wish to be understood as attempting to give the exact proportions of difficult cases occurring in practice, though perhaps it might not be far from the truth. But we are morally certain that with judicious female midwives, and the use of such botanic medicines as act in harmony with the laws of life, many of the most alarming difficulties attending the practice of midwifery may be removed and the number of deaths very much lessened.

The dangers attending, and evil consequences following, the incorrect or improper treatment either of diseases arising during pregnancy or of difficulties occurring at the time of child-birth, are acknowledged as well as justly deplored by all humane physicians. And these consequences are not only more liable to take place at the times alluded to, but they are also liable to be far more serious than at other times and under other circumstances. And why is this so? We ask this question in allusion to the mineral practice. The answer, to us, is obvious: It is because the remedies employed act contrary to the laws of nature, perverting the very order they are designed to restore!

In the progress of pregnancy, and during the process of child-birth, a greater number of organs are brought into play than at other times, which are acting a new part in the grand machine. Hence the machinery being more complicated, is more easily affected and more extensively influenced by the same causes, than at other times. Therefore, if any mode of treatment adopted be wrong, the evil consequences will be more immediate, and more extensive, and the effects more sensible. These we conceive to be the true reasons why more difficulty and more danger attends the administration of improper medicines at or during those periods of which we have been speaking, than at other times.

But in the employment of innocent botanic remedies, which act as medicine should always have acted, in unison and har-

mony with the laws of nature, these difficulties are all avoided. The machinery, however complicated, or however deranged in its action, may, with such medicines, be restored, if its structure be not too much injured, or its powers exhausted, without the uncertainty and hazard of doing it an injury instead of a benefit. This is the plain and distinguishing difference between the botanic system and the too common practice of bleeding, physicking, refrigerating, and starving, so much relied upon by the medical faculty.

In every point of view then, it is most proper, most rational, most correct, and most agreeable to both husband and wife, to have the practice of midwifery restored back again into the hands of women and of nature. Although we do not expect all women to become midwives, yet we wish them generally to become acquainted with the simplicity of natural births, which, as we have heretofore said, constitute at least ninety-nine hundredths; and no doubt, with proper management, might far exceed that proportion. This knowledge would enable any woman to act on any ordinary occasion, when no professed midwife was at hand, as very frequently happens in remote situations. And if women possessed this information, and would teach it to their daughters who are about to become mothers, how much painful anxiety would it save? how much distress and anticipated trouble and pain of mind would it remove?

We beg leave once more, in these introductory remarks, to employ the language of Dr. EWELL. "If the difficulty," says he, "of obtaining doctors at the proper time—if the indelicacy and tendency to immorality of having them in any but the critical and unnatural cases—if the propriety of giving to helpless women proper employment and support—if the salvation of many women, who, shocked at male interference, have their pains vanished and their minds deranged, and who sometimes prefer death to exposure—if the salvation of many children, born almost without warning—if the prevention of the destructive interference of ignorant attendants, cannot, united, induce you to attend to this subject, the mechanical advantage between a man's and a delicate woman's hand, ought to command your decision in favor of employing and encouraging female assistants. Such is the confined organization of the parts for our birth, and such the large size of men's hands, that I verily believe *as much mischief as good has been done by them*, as has been stated by more extensive observers than myself."

"The rule," continues he, "that I would prescribe for the females for whom I felt the most affection and solicitude, would be that which I now urge—on no account submit to the interference of men in common labor; but do it most readily in the uncommon cases, when a nurse, under the direction of a physi-

cian, cannot afford relief. I will venture to add, that there is not a physician, disinterested, of sound sense, who would not approve the rule. The best authors on midwifery decidedly recommend it."

We have already extended this introduction to a great length, hurried on by the high importance of the subject under consideration; but we cannot yet dismiss it without an appeal to every feeling of the female breast which repels the idea of employing male midwives. And you all know that these feelings are strong: they are modesty, delicacy, and a sense of moral and conjugal propriety, over which nothing can, or ever has predominated, but the pains of child-birth, joined to the mystery under which this process is designedly cloaked; together with the thousand changes which have been rung upon the few cases of difficulty and danger which have occasionally occurred in the practice of midwifery. No! nothing else than what we have enumerated has driven women to the unpleasant—the unnatural dilemma, of calling upon men instead of women to act as midwives. Away, then, with all these false ideas; satisfy yourselves of their absurdity; inform yourselves that nature is simple—her operations simple, and that in almost all cases she is adequate to their complete performance, whilst interference can only be offered at the certain hazard of doing an injury.

And to husbands we beg leave to tender the same advice. Make yourselves acquainted with these things; they are matters of high moment to you, as well as to your wives; they are susceptible of your complete comprehension; and your love for a tender wife, and your duty to her and to your children, alike impel you to the task. Let no false delicacy nor "mock modesty," we anxiously intreat, deter you from it. Your wives, by your means, bear children; they contribute alike to your happiness as well as hers; and you ought to neglect no opportunity of acquiring every information by which you might be of service to her during the tedious months of pregnancy, or in the painful hour of labor.

Satisfy yourselves, we beseech you, that the difficulties and dangers of child-birth are very much, and no doubt designedly, magnified—that they are scarcely to be dreaded, when compared with the happiness and high duty on the part of wives, of being mothers. Teach them the simplicity of the process so fearfully anticipated, and that whilst one is destroyed by it, hundreds pass safely and without difficulty through it. Nor let that kind of delicacy which forbids men to inquire into or understand the art, or the situation of their wives when in labor, deter you from this important duty. If, by this knowledge, you are, as you might on some occasions be, able, by preventing officious interference, to save the life of wife or child, or perhaps both, it

would be an ample, a more than equivalent compensation, for ~~sacrifice of delicacy~~ which you might feel compelled to make. ~~Indeed what has ~~any~~ false delicacy to do with~~ a matter of such deep interest to the husband?

Nay, with but little qualification, you might be enabled, in cases of emergency, to act as midwives yourselves, or if you chose, you might, as many do, perform at all times this office for your wives. There is no immorality, immodesty, nor indecency in it. And how infinitely more natural, more proper, and more consistent with morality, than to employ a physician at the sacrifice of so much delicacy of feeling on the part both of yourselves and wives? These feelings were not given to be violated—to be thus wantonly trifled with. They are a part of that law which the Creator has ordained for the regulation of the creature, and cannot be violated with impunity. There is a punishment annexed to the transgression; and in this case seems doubly severe—it is a tax upon the delicacy of your own and your wives' feelings, with the frequent loss of them and your children.