

### THE AGE AT WHICH CHILD-BEARING CEASES.

A PAPER was recently read by Dr. Fordyce Barker before the New York Medical Library and Journal Association, upon "The Age of Women when the Capacity for Child-bearing Ceases." The object of the writer, as reported by the *Medical Record*, was to show that physiologically, and as a matter of experience, there are limits to the reproductive function of women. Ovula-

tion and menstruation, though often coincident, do not necessarily bear to each other the relation of cause and effect, nor does ovulation always occur at the time of menstruation. Menstruation is, therefore, to be regarded as an accidental and incidental phenomenon, and is a flow of blood from the interior of the uterus at stated periods, irrespective of ovulation. Ovulation, but not menstruation, is essential to conception. The occurrence of menstruation in a woman advanced in years is no evidence of the occurrence of ovulation at the same time. When senile atrophy of the ovaries takes place, ovulation ceases and conception is no longer possible. Usually this period is reached between the fortieth and fiftieth year of the woman's age. In very exceptional cases this change does not take place until from one to four years later. Dr. Barker claims that these are well-established facts, proved by multitudes of post-mortem examinations; and, moreover, that not a single well-authenticated case has been known of a woman over fifty-five years of age who has given birth to a child, except that of Sarah, the wife of Abraham. Many such have been reported, but none are supported by conclusive evidence; hence the conclusion that the laws of physiology, the experience of mankind, and the decisions of the courts will justify the medical witness in declaring, when questioned in court as to the age during which child-bearing is possible, that a woman over fifty-five years of age is past the period of child-bearing.

In further proof of the fact that though menstruation and ovulation are generally coincident, they do not bear the relation of cause and effect, Dr. Barker stated that the one may exist without the other, as proved by many well-established cases; that cicatrices have been found in ovaries, indicating rupture of Graafian vesicles, many years previous to the appearance of menstruation, and that fresh cicatrices have also been found in old women a long time after the cessation of menstruation; that we have now eight well-authenticated cases in which women have menstruated and continued to do so after both ovaries were removed, rendering ovulation impossible.

In the discussion which followed the reading of the paper, Dr. Caro remarked that during his residence in Sicily the government recognized the possibility of child-bearing commencing at the age of eleven years and two months, and continuing to the age of fifty-four or fifty-five years. He reported that while living there he had personal knowledge of a woman who had given birth to thirty-one children; and that twenty-two of them had sat at the same table. This woman gave birth to her last child when she was fifty-four years old. It was supposed she had a double uterus, from the fact that a child was born every *six months*. Unfortunately when the woman died no post-mortem examination was obtained.