

[Headband and initial from the Hippocrates of Ludovico Dretou, Paris, 1588.]

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達生篇 [TA SHENG P'IEN]

A CHINESE HOUSEHOLD MANUAL OF OBSTETRICS

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THE book which bears the title above is one with a reputation. It is mentioned in Chinese novels, some of them written a long time back. Our copy was picked up at a bookstall outside one of the gates of the Tartar city of Peking for a few coppers. It is old, worm-eaten, printed from wooden blocks, and claims to have been written by a Chinese scholar at Nan-chang, Kiangsi in the reign of Kang Hsi. This Emperor reigned in 1661 A.D. and was one of the ablest emperors that has ever sat on the "Dragon Throne."

The author of this treatise is fully sensible of his own learning and value: "We hope every family will buy one of these books, put it in their bookcases and take care of it. In that case they will be fortunate indeed." "This book is correct and needs no change or addition of prescription."

The work is divided into two parts: The first, opening with a general statement and having briefly discussed life in general, takes up the questions of "labor"; "things to be avoided"; "false pains"; and ends up with a few "case histories." The second, covers sections on the "fetus"; "food for the pregnant"; "abortion"; "the puerperium"; "still birth"; "retention of the placenta"; "lack of milk"; and ends up with maxims and prescriptions.

The book disclaims being a treatise on the principles of obstetrics and is not a pharmacopeia, but lays especial stress on prenatal treatment. "Even these safe drugs are rarely used by us, because our antenatal treatment is so good that we do not need any medicine."

The writer has a very fair acquaintance with life and humanity as evidenced in the following:

It is a book that everybody should know, not alone the women. It is much more valuable than a book of theatrical plays. It is most impor-

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tant that rich people should know it well, for their style of life is different from that of the rest of the world. They eat well and of rich dainties, most of them have no special exercise, their health is poor, their temper easily excited, and they rarely take other people's advice. When they have a little pain they call in other people at once, and the room is crowded, and there is much noise. Many midwives are invited and each one wants to distinguish herself. They make the woman bear down before the separation of vessels and the rotation of the fetus; when there is difficulty they give many and wonderful drugs, and occasionally both mother and child die from the treatment.

The writer is not very keen on midwives:

Now we come to the necessity of having a midwife. Sometimes we have to use them, but as the majority of them are fools and know little about obstetrics one must take responsibility oneself, and not follow all the orders given by the midwife. When they come to a house, they ask the patient to bear down in labor at once, and say the child's head is just above the perineum, and rub the abdomen and back, paying no attention to the stage of labor. Sometimes they rupture the membranes artificially and this method may do much harm to the patient. In a word they do their best to exhibit their skill. The worst class of midwives sometimes charge an extra fee for the delivery. The meaning of the word midwife is as follows: As they are old and have some experience of deliveries, people ask them to receive the child and take it to bed; not to deliver the child. Rich families have their own private midwives and sometimes a family will have more than one, each of them has her own method, and between them they turn the house into a market. All these troubles are one's own fault.

Naturally in a work of this kind the writer has his good and bad points. His knowledge of the phenomena of normal labor is very poor. He has the idea that the child is, under normal conditions, in a breech position.

Before labor the child is sitting up straight in the abdomen, but when labor comes the child is trying to rotate its head downward. The abdominal cavity is not very wide and nobody can help the child's rotation from the outside, so we have to wait till the child rotates itself slowly and is born in a position of head downward and feet upward. If one strains too early before this rotation has taken place, the feet of course come out first and one has an unusual labor, to which a good name has been given: "The labor of standing on a water-lily flower."

If the strain is put forth during the rotation then the child lies transverse in the abdomen and a hand comes out first. The name of this is: "The labor of wanting salt."

Apparently, should straining take place just before rotation is complete one gets a brow presentation.

The conclusion from this faulty reasoning is that you are not to be in a hurry to bear down. One may ask, "During defecation we use strength to force the feces out, why do we not use this strength in labor?" The answer is as follows: "No! the feces is a dead thing and so it needs force to be put forth, but the child is active, so we ought to wait till it rotates itself." The writer looks upon the child as being born just as a ripe melon falls from its stalk and needs little if any force for delivery.

He is very much concerned about "false pains" and insists that the woman must (1) sleep, (2) bear the pain, (3) let the confinement proceed slowly. Maxims not at all out of place even at the present day.

The patient is not to walk about too much and get exhausted, but should try to get as much sleep as possible. She should lie on her back so that the child may rotate easily and our writer points out that when the mother is lying down, so also is the child.

He gives the following indications of the time when it is right and proper to bear down:

1. The presenting part is really pressed on the perineum.
2. All the joints are loosed.
3. The chest is depressed. (Presumably the meaning is that the uterus had descended.)
4. There is a heavy dragging sensation in the abdomen and back.

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5. There is frequency of urination and defecation.

6. There is gleam of the eyes.

Our writer is specially insistent on noninterference:

Look by analogy at the ripe melon falling from its stalk. One knows the child can make its own way out itself. Do not follow the example of the old man who was very anxious about the growth of his sprouts, and so dug them up and told the people round that he had to help his sprouts to grow. But he just killed them. So we do not need to try to help the labor. A chicken can break its shell when fully incubated without any wonderful drugs or midwives' skilful hands.

The old records talk of exceptional pregnancies, the term prolonged to three or four years. The cause of this was that the child did not want to come out. If the child does not want to come out, we cannot force it out and if it does want to come out, no one can hinder it.

The author has no belief in the hurtful action of pain in labor.

One may say: "It is not good to bear pain too long a time." No! it is just right, one never heard of a case of difficult labor in an unmarried woman and this is not because she is specially blessed, the real reason is, she wants to keep it secret, and she is willing to bear all the pain and wait, then when the pain becomes unbearable the child is born without any difficulty.

Transverse labors he treats by strict rest in bed, and a dose of *Kia Wei Kung Kwei T'ang.*[1] He pushes back the presenting part and keeps the patient in bed. If she is willing to lie down the presenting part can certainly be pushed back. He mentions prolapse of the rectum and says it is due to bearing down too soon, and that if she had had the trouble before it is likely to recur.

He is much opposed to drugs in labor. "The most renowned prescription of old was a pill of rat's kidney and rabbit's brain but this is not good as it keeps the hair and sweat ducts open and the wind can get in and cause much damage."

[1] See page 99. A mixture composed of extracts of umbelliferous plants and having a specific action.

Our author would only use himself two drugs:

1. *Kia Wei Kung Kwei T'ang.*[2]

2. Buddha's hand powder.[3] These can be easily gotten and have the power of changing waste blood into fresh blood and of acting like a tonic.

Hard and difficult labors are due to the following causes:

1. Insufficient nourishment of the fetus due to weakness of the mother.

2. Fever in the mother.

3. Too frequent sexual intercourse.

4. Excessive use of hot food substances such as ginger and peppers.

5. Traumatism.

If after a hard labor the child does not cry properly, keep it warm and burn off the cord slowly with fragrant oil paper cigarettes, then the warm air enters the child's abdomen and it gradually recovers and cries.

During labor food is most important; soup is considered the best, taken frequently in small amounts with not too much fat. In winter the room is to be kept warm; in summer, cool by sprinkling cold water on the floor.

False pains are very common. If due to food the pain is in the umbilical region, increased on pressure and you may find a hard lump near the umbilicus. If due to cold, the pain is under the umbilicus, comes continuously and is relieved by hot applications. He cites several case histories in support of the dicta referred to above.

I quote one of these.

Case 1. Mrs. Chang, a strong young woman, has had a series of children all eight months (i.e. eight weeks premature), all were difficult labors and lasted three days. All were girls and died under the year, causes unknown. I asked them to be sure to tell me next time she was in labor.

Next year she had another labor, eight months, in labor three days, and the child not yet delivered. Then they sent a sedan chair for

[2] See NOTE [1].

[3] A similar combination.

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me. On the way I met a cart sent for her parents, as they thought she was dying. I arrived about 12 p.m. and found that the pulse was very weak and the patient short of breath.

A midwife told me that the head was on the perineum. I asked the patient to go to bed and keep quiet and gave her a dose of medicine to soothe the baby. Next morning Mr. Chang came to me without a word but smiling. Asked about the labor he said: "Everything is right." Then I asked him about the baby's head. He answered: "The head cannot be seen any longer" and went away laughing. Four months after (i.e. twelve weeks) they got a full term boy who was my adopted son and is now eight years old.

Fortunately the mother was strong or she might have lost her life.

As to the general care of the fetus: Our writer forbids intercourse in pregnancy, advises moderate exercise for the mother, and the view is put forward that abortion is rarer in the country women than among the rich, because the former have strong bones and muscles from exercise. He advises an abdominal belt seven inches wide to support the wall during the pregnancy, and states that the patient is to be careful to sleep on both sides so that the fetus may become used to both positions. As to diet, the pregnant woman ought to have thin, soft, light food, but he states that this has to be modified for the rich as they will not stand it.

The best kinds of food are as follows: Pig's stomach; pig's lungs; chicken; duck; fish (carp); sea slugs; cabbages; spinach; bamboo sprouts; sesamum oil; skin of bean curd; water lily seeds; yams; *chien shih* (芡寔), a kind of water plant; well-done water lily roots. These foods are to be cooked by boiling and not fried in oil. After the seventh month one should take as much sesamum oil and bean-curd skin as one can. The oil acts as an antitoxin and the bean-curd skin as a lubricant for the fetus, cleaning and toning it up.

The pregnant woman is to avoid the following things: Pepper; ginger; fried food; especially tasty articles; pig's flesh; dog's flesh; ass' flesh; horse's flesh; flesh of sick animals; flesh from dead animals; pig's blood; eels; shrimps; crabs. Do not drink too much wine. Do not take too much medicine.

During pregnancy you are not allowed to see the following things:

1. All cruel and wicked things.
2. The digging of foundations, and commencing of buildings.
3. Turtles.
4. Rabbits.

On "abortion" he is insistent that it is not to be disregarded. It is a more serious condition than normal labor. The most fatal cases are due to careless after-treatment. He calls sepsis, "weakness of blood" and gives as its symptoms: fever, a flushed face, red eyes, great thirst, and restlessness. If it is mistaken for a feverish cold and cooling medicine is given, the patient will certainly die. With regard to the puerperium, directions are given as to the posture of the patient after labor. She is not to be allowed to fall into too deep a sleep, draughts are forbidden, and a routine drug of boy's urine and wine is to be taken for three days.

Our author is quite emphatic that the question of having a boy or girl depends entirely on the husband, but he gives no reason for his views. He mentions the killing of female infants to deprecate it, the method of murder being by drowning in water.

The following indications of the death of the child *in utero* are given:

1. Flushed face and blue tongue on the mother's part indicates that the mother will live but the child is dead.
2. Bluish face and flushed tongue on the mother's part indicates that the mother will die but the child will live.
3. Bluish face and blue tongue on the mother's part indicates that both mother and child will die.

Retention of the placenta is due to a premature attempt at labor. Our author

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has the idea that the pelvic bones have to open to let out the child. If the child is forced out before these are properly loosened, they close up at once and there is no time for the expulsion of the placenta. It is a serious matter but may be successfully treated as follows:

Do not use medicine. Tie the cord with linen thread, fold it over and tie again. This prevents the wind getting in. Now weight the cord with a slight weight for three to five days. Then the placenta becomes wrinkly and dry and comes away by itself. Tell the mother not to be afraid and do not let the midwife remove it by hand, as most of the cases die from the manipulation.

The causes of lack of milk are given as follows:

1. Anemia. Too much blood lost at labor.
2. Some disease of the mother during pregnancy.
3. Insufficient nourishment.
4. Improper management of the puerperium.
5. Old age (over forty).

Some of the prescriptions are very quaint. A few are given as examples:

Purple wine. For backache during pregnancy.

Black bean *q.s.*

Wine, 1 bowl. Take as decoction in the morning.

Yü Feng San (愈風散). For convulsions in the puerperium, shock, diarrhea and vomiting.

Ching Chieh Hsü (荊芥穗). ℥iii[4] salvia plebia.

Boy's urine *q.s.*

Kia Wei Kung Kwei T'ang (加味芎歸湯). For stimulating the fetus.

Tang Kwei[5] (當歸). ℥i[6] Japanese root, ligusticum acutilobum. Chinese root, angelica anomala.

Chuan Kung[5] (川芎). ℥vii[7] conioselinum univittatum.

Kwei Pan (龜板). Back of turtle, about a hand-piece baked with vinegar and ground to powder.

Woman's hair about the size of an egg baked on tile. Water, two bowls. Make a decoction. Half an hour after it has been given, the child will be delivered without difficulty. Sometimes this is not effective, the reason being that the patient is weak.

Bergamot powder: 1. To cause a dead child or one injured after an accident in or after the seventh month to be delivered.

2. Transverse presentations.

3. For pain, fever and headache during the puerperium.

4. For fulness in the epigastrium.

5. To get rid of waste blood and produce new blood.

Tang Kwei[5] (當歸). ℥v[8] Japanese root, ligusticum acutilobum. Chinese root, angelica anomala.

Chuan Kung[5] (川芎). ℥iii[9] conioselinum univittatum. Water, seven parts; urine three parts. Make a decoction and for transverse presentations add some black bean and boy's urine.

It will be seen by this *résumé* that our author, although he is wide of the mark in a great many of his conclusions, has one saving grace, that of objecting to unnecessary interference and counselling patience. Certainly he has a poor opinion of midwives and rich people in general.

[4] Three drachms.

[5] These are umbelliferous plants; *Tang Kwei* is a root whose properties are not as yet well-known. A private communication from Professor B. E. Read of the Union Medical College tells me that this drug has a specific effect on the uterus, which he is at present investigating.

[6] One ounce.

[7] Seven drachms.

[8] Five drachms.

[9] Three drachms.

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