

## NOTICE OF A "PULVIS AD PARTUM"

### IN THE FIRST EDINBURGH PHARMACOPŒIA.<sup>2</sup>

(From Edinburgh Monthly Journal of Medical Science, May, 1851, p. 493.)

By the older authors, many different medicines are described as being supposed to have an oxytoxic effect upon the uterus ; or, in other words, as capable of either originating or increasing the parturient contractions of that organ. From the time of Dioscorides and Galen downwards, various and diversified plants, &c., have been described in medical works, as possessing these alleged virtues. The only two believed at the present day to have a decided oxytoxic effect, are ergot of rye and Indian hemp ; and each of these plants, when used medicinally, seems to possess also in common, a depressing or sedative effect upon the spinal nervous system. Is their oxytoxic power dependent upon this action on the centre of the reflex system ? Various mineral substances used to be reputed also oxytoxic in their properties, as eagle-stone, &c. Borax has long enjoyed such a reputation. Homberg<sup>3</sup> and Lamotte<sup>4</sup> long ago spoke of its oxytoxic properties. In the first edition of the Edinburgh Phar-

<sup>1</sup> See Wood and Bache's United States Dispensatory, 1851, p. 323.

<sup>2</sup> "The dose of the powder to a woman in labor is fifteen or twenty grains, to be repeated every twenty minutes till its peculiar effects are experienced, or till the amount of a drachm has been taken."—(Ed.)

<sup>3</sup> Extracted from Proceedings of Edinburgh Obstetric Society, March 26, 1851.

<sup>4</sup> Histoire de l'Academie Royale des Sciences, 1702.

<sup>5</sup> Lamotte's Midwifery, translated by Tomkyns, 1746, p. 237.

*macopœia*, published in 1699, there is given a recipe for a "Pulvis ad Partum," containing borax as its first ingredient. The powder contains, besides, crocus and amber, substances to which oxytoxic powers were ascribed in olden times; and two animal ingredients that were endowed with the same properties. Its exact composition consists of Venetian borax, British crocus, the livers of eels dried with their gall, white amber, of each two drachms, and of horses' testicles dried in an oven, one ounce.

"R. Boracis Venetæ.  
Crocī Britannici.  
Jecorum cum felle Anguillarum exsiccatorum.  
Succini albissimi, ana drachmas duas.  
Testiculorum Caballinorum in clibano siccatorum unciam unam.  
M. F. Pulvis s. a."

This last ingredient is almost a forestalling of the absurd modern therapeutic doctrine of isopathy. And the whole is perhaps not uninteresting as showing one of the resources officially recommended in tedious labor, in Edinburgh practice, some hundred and fifty years ago.

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## INDIAN HEMP AS AN OXYTOXIC.<sup>1</sup>

(From Edinburgh Monthly Journal of Medical Science, July, 1850, p. 91.)

DR. SIMPSON stated, that, in the early part of the winter session, he had given Indian hemp (*Cannabis Indica*) in several cases of tedious labor, with the view of ascertaining if it possessed any oxytoxic effect, like ergot of rye, in increasing and exciting the parturient action of the uterus. He had been induced to try the effects, if any, of Indian hemp during labor, in consequence of Dr. Churchill<sup>2</sup> stating, that it possessed powers similar to those of ergot of rye in arresting hemorrhage, when dependent upon congested states of the *unimpregnated* uterus. In the few cases of labor in which it was tried, parturient action seemed to be very markedly and directly increased after the exhibition of the hemp; but far more extensive and careful experiments would be required, before a definite opinion could be arrived at, relative to its possession of oxytoxic powers, and the amount of those powers.

<sup>1</sup> Extracted from Proceedings of Edinburgh Obstetric Society, March 13, 1850.

<sup>2</sup> *Diseases of Women*, 3d edition, p. 113.