

OUR OBSTETRICAL AND GYNECOLOGICAL ANCESTORS.

The latter half of the seventeenth century marks a glorious date in the science of obstetrics, and for that matter, in gynecology as well. Mauriceau's writings alone are quite sufficient to attest this fact, but around this great obstetrician there gravitated a pleiades of celebrated accoucheurs who contributed to give a new and firmer basis to the art of obstetrics and gynecology founded both on observation and serious anatomical knowledge, and who little by little did away with the ancient theories of Hippocrates which up to that time had been received and accepted without comment.

The list of writings which had been published up to that time was short, and the first real treatise on the art was published in 1572 when Ambroise Paré gave to the medical world his memorable book. In it we find a great progress made in the symptomatology of pregnancy as well as in the principal causes of dystocia, and the means, both medical and surgical, by which they may be prevented or overcome are dealt with intelligently and, considering the epoch, at quite a length.

Paré describes cephalic version, which so often made it necessary cruelly to sacrifice the child, and strongly condemned it, while its rival, podalic version, was brought back to honor by this great man. He also proscribes the use of the crochet on the living child and reserves the Cesarean operation only in case of the mother's death. Paré was probably the first to perform vaginal hysterectomy.

After Paré came the renowned Franco; and a little later the great Guillemeau, a student of Paré's, appeared upon the scene and commended and vulgarized the teachings of his master, extolling immediate extraction of the child in cases of placenta previa or eclampsia.

Among other illustrious obstetricians of this epoch may be mentioned Rousset, who dwelt at length on the Cesarean section in his writings, and Pineau, whose anatomical studies of the female pelvis contributed not a little to the carrying of obstetrics toward a higher point of perfection. The renowned Louise Bourgeois echoed the teachings of Paré and Guillemeau and again in-

sisted upon the advantages presented by podalic version, upon the necessity of rapidly interfering in cases of uterine hemorrhage, and demonstrated the possibility of delivering a face presentation which later on was considered most dangerous.

Lastly, in 1668, appeared that great and classic treatise on obstetric science from the pen of Mauriceau which caused such a gigantic stride in the advancement of the science, while seventeen years later was published a treatise, less known but perhaps of equal importance, by the Parisian obstetrician Paul Portal, which has had no small influence on the practice of the art. In 1659, Willis first gave the name of *febris puerperarum* to puerperal septicemia, while a few years later Peu and Vesou, in their works, contributed much towards the study of this affection.

It cannot be denied that the older masters had certain misty notions regarding scientific facts, and among others our obstetric ancestors believed that they possessed the secret of multiple pregnancy and related with much complacency cases of extraordinary fecundity which to-day appear ludicrous.

Laurent Joubert mentions in his work that the wife of a certain noble, De Beauville by name, having dared to accuse her servant of giving birth to three children at once and of having had intimate relations with her husband (not being able to believe that a single man could be alone sufficient to cause the formation of three embryos), herself shortly after became pregnant and gave birth to nine daughters, which, says the savant Joubert, "should be interpreted as a punishment of God for having slandered an innocent person." The husband, who was absent from home at the time of his wife's confinement, reached the conjugal mansion just in time to prevent the servant from executing the orders of his wife, who, ashamed of her fecundity, had commanded that eight of her daughters be drowned like ordinary kittens.

Paré speaks of an Italian by the name of Dorothea who gave birth to twenty children in two lots, the first consisting of nine, the second of eleven. He mentions the case, which is certainly curious, of the Countess of Flanders, "who by the just permission and vengeance of God, conceived and was delivered of a single litter, as several historians have written, of three hundred and sixty-five children, in other words, as many as there are days in the year, all well formed and living, and each about the size of the fist." This little anecdote is mild when it is stated that a relative to Mathilde, Countess of Holland, was reputed to have given birth

to 1,514 children at one sitting, but it may at once be added that history does not state how many of them survived.

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