

(1742 - 1821)

**SAMUEL BARD, THE AUTHOR OF THE FIRST TEXTBOOK ON
OBSTETRICS PUBLISHED IN AMERICA**

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**A
COMPENDIUM
OF THE THEORY AND PRACTICE
OF
MIDWIFERY
CONTAINING
PRACTICAL INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE MANAGEMENT OF
WOMEN
DURING PREGNANCY, IN LABOUR AND IN CHILDBED
CALCULATED
TO CORRECT THE ERRORS AND TO IMPROVE THE PRACTICE, OF
MIDWIVES
AS WELL AS TO SERVE AS AN INTRODUCTION TO THE
STUDY OF THIS ART,
FOR
STUDENTS AND YOUNG PRACTITIONERS.
BY SAMUEL BARD, M.D.
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So appears the title of the first work on obstetrics written in America and published in 1807. (Fig. 1.) At a glance, it may seem strange that this small book could survive the burden of such a title page, but a look into its interior reveals not only much fine obstetric thought but depicts in a splendid manner a good deal of the life and time of its notable author. Furthermore, it will always remain an important landmark in the obstetric annals of America.

The copy which rests upon my desk is one of the "second edition enlarged" and we may believe the inscription on the flyleaf which tells of its purchase in 1817 by Asabel Thompson, M.D., for \$1.10.

It will be a pleasant duty for obstetricians to familiarize themselves with something of the content and author of this book. The gems to be found within its pages are numerous and brilliant, and the present task will be to select a proper few to demonstrate the excellence of the whole.

The soundness of the author's experience is well shown in the introduction, when he writes "there is some reason to believe there is greater safety in this branch of medicine from modest unassuming ignorance, than from a meddling presumption which frequently ac-

companies a little learning." Lest the reader expect too much of the author's effort, he recommends the works of European writers, especially White of Manchester, Denman of London, and Baudeloque of Paris. Bard further states that he had been solicited by his friends in this new edition to include a chapter on the use of instruments. His mature reflection, however, decided against this, and he states that he wishes in the present work to "teach the progress and management of natural labour . . . and I will venture to assert that the better

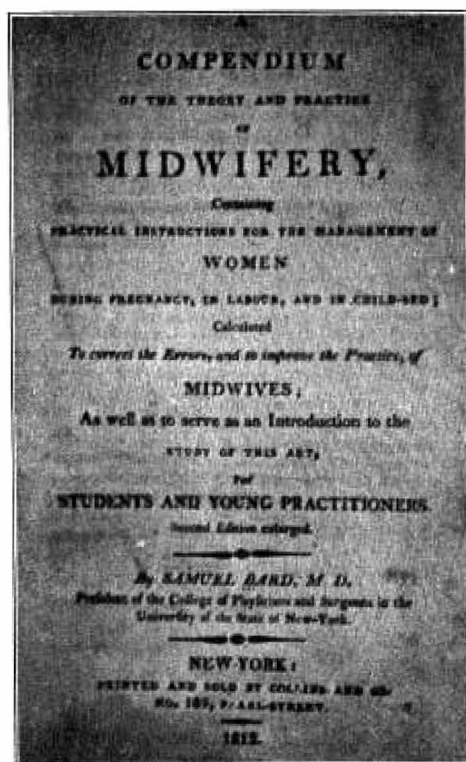


Fig. 1.

the rules here laid down are understood, and the more steadily they are practiced; the less frequently will the necessity of applying to instruments occur."

In the absence of present-day diagnostic refinements for the detection of preeclampsia and preeclamptic states, Bard writes of convulsions that "they are frequently preceded by a very irritable and fretful state of mind, approaching to delirium, and by a restlessness and unaccountable uneasiness of body; by some degree of blindness, and the appearance of motes dancing before the eyes; by a swimming or violent pain of the head, especially on stooping down, by a flushed

countenance, a staring and protruded eye, swelling of the veins of the neck, and throbbing of the arteries in the head; and sometimes by a cramp, or violent pain in the stomach, which is always a dangerous symptom."

Although pelvimetry as we know it was not taught or practiced in Bard's day,³ still pelvic deformities were recognized, and he gives excellent directions for estimating the diagonal conjugate diameter and for recognizing contractions not only of the superior but also those of the inferior strait.



Fig. 2.—Samuel Bard.

Prolonged vaginal examination and manipulation during labor, a practice still indulged in by ignorant practitioners, was properly scored. "What terms shall I use," he writes, "to condemn as it deserves, the abominable practice of boring, scooping, and stretching the soft parts of the mother, under the preposterous idea of making room for the child to pass? It is impossible to censure this idle, indiscreet and dangerous practice too severely." Later on, this practice is again referred to, "It sometimes happens that the internal orifice of the womb is found remarkably thick and rigid, especially in women advanced in life; in such cases all the advice already given respecting

patience, quiet, delation and a cool regimen, and all the cautions respecting improper interference of the midwife, in attempts to stretch and dilate the parts are more particularly necessary, on account of the importance of the part itself, its extreme sensibility, and the great danger of inflaming it. . . .”

Bard's sound conception of contracted pelves and their relation to successful labor is seen in his discussion of rickets. He writes, "Nor is it only by injuring the shape of the bones, that mismanagement in childhood unfits women for easy childbearing, but by preventing firmness and vigour in general, and occasioning a weak feeble and irritable habit. A sedentary life and luxurious education, are the chief causes of all the evils which women suffer during pregnancy and labour. Keep children therefore out of doors, in constant exercise; allow them a full but plain and simple diet; and when grown up to young women, let them live more agreeably to nature, let them avoid late hours and crowded rooms, indulgence in soft beds, and luxurious diet; let them walk, ride and dance." If sounder doctrines than these exist in the present Year of Grace, I am unfamiliar with them.

Examples of obstetric erudition abound in this small book of Samuel Bard, and the reader will not be disappointed in a careful perusal of his work.

The author of America's first work on obstetrics was an illustrious son of an illustrious father, Dr. John Bard, who is known to us as a famous New York physician, an intimate of Franklin and Washington and the first observer in the New World to report a case of extrauterine pregnancy. Ford has given us a pen portrait of him in his recent *Washington and His Associates*. He writes, "Dr. John Bard, the fashionable doctor of his day, who attended Washington through the severe illness which laid him up for six weeks early in his administration, habitually wore a cocked hat and a scarlet coat, his hands resting upon a massive cane as he drove about in a pony phaeton."

Samuel Bard was born in Philadelphia, April 1, 1742. Four years later the family removed to New York City, where his father had been urged to establish himself by Benjamin Franklin. Here, after attending grammar school, Samuel Bard entered King's College at fourteen years. While still pursuing his classical studies, his attention was turned to medical subjects, and he also studied with his father.

At the completion of his collegiate course, it was decided that he should go to Edinburgh for his degree. At that time, the two great centers of medical learning were Leyden and Edinburgh, and in the latter place Cullen and his associates were rapidly placing the school in the foremost position. In September, 1761, Bard embarked from New York only to be captured three weeks later by a French privateer. England and France were then at war, and as a prisoner of war

he was confined five months in a castle at Bayonne. Fortunately, his father's friend, Franklin, was residing in London and was able to obtain his release.

He at once proceeded to London where, at the recommendation of Fothergill, he went to St. Thomas' Hospital as assistant to Alexander Russell. After six months, he left for Edinburgh and placed himself under the galaxy of talent that then flourished in that city. Robertson, the historian, was at the head of the university and Rutherford, Whyte, the two Munros, Cullen, Hope, Ferguson, Gregory and Blair were among its teachers. Cullen particularly delighted young Bard, who declared he could "listen to him for three hours instead of one."

It is interesting to read a record of a medical student's activities at that time. Samuel Bard in a letter has preserved for us such a document. "My day in general," he writes, "is thus spent; from seven to half after ten I am present employed in the mathematics, which will soon however be changed for professional reading and the examination of my notes; then dress and am by eleven at College, attending Professor Ferguson until twelve; from that hour until one at the hospital, from one till two with Dr. Cullen, from two to three I allow to dinner, from three to four with Munro in anatomy, from four to five or half an hour after I generally spend at my flute and taking tea either at a friend's room or with a friend in my own; after this I retire to my study and spend from that time until eleven o'clock in correcting my notes and in general reading." Another letter which surely gratified his father reads, "Last week, the judges for the annual medal given by the professor of botany of this University, examined the hortus siccus of the candidates and I have the pleasure to acquaint you decided in my favor."

Samuel Bard graduated from Edinburgh in 1765, after having defended and published his thesis "*de viribus opii.*" From Edinburgh he went to London, remaining ten months before embarking for his native land.

One or two facts concerning medical education are pertinent. Bard's education abroad had cost his father over one thousand pounds, and although there were said to be about 3,500 physicians all told in the American Colonies at that time, probably less than 400 had medical degrees. Samuel Bard therefore received what was, for that time, a luxurious education.

Morgan, Shippen and their associates in Philadelphia had from the first interested Samuel Bard. While a student in Europe, he had written to his father concerning the establishment of a medical school in New York. Within a year after his return, an organization was effected and united to King's College. His associates were Clossy, Jones, Middleton, Smith and Tennant. Bard himself was chosen to the chair of Theory and Practice of Physic. He was then in his

twenty-eighth year. Medical degrees were first conferred by this school in 1769.

When the trustees of Columbia College annexed the faculty of physic to that institution in 1792, Dr. Bard was continued as Professor of the Theory and Practice of Medicine and was appointed dean of the faculty. The establishment of the City Library and the New York Dispensary was chiefly due to his efforts.

In 1795, Bard took David Hosack into partnership and three years later he relinquished his practice in New York and removed to Hyde Park, New Jersey. His retirement could not be said to be complete, however, for at various times he resumed for short periods his practice in the city, especially when Hosack was absent from town. Soon after Dr. Bard became a resident in the country, his love of agricultural pursuits led him to form a county society devoted to those interests and he was elected its first president. At a later date, when Colonel Humphreys became interested in the introduction of merino sheep into the United States, Bard entered into that speculation and even published a book, *The Shepherd's Guide*, dealing with the difficulties of sheep raising. Shortly after retiring into the country, Samuel Bard contemplated the publication of a treatise on obstetrics. His reputation as an accoucheur had been preeminent, and it was a subject which interested him perhaps more than any other branch of medicine. In the year 1807 appeared the first of the five editions of this work. Other subjects which were well served from his pen were "Yellow Fever," in the Transactions of the College of Physicians in Philadelphia, and "Medical Education," New York, 1819. As evidence of his interest in community life, he practically founded the Church of St. James at Hyde Park in 1811. In 1816, Princeton College conferred upon him the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws. Dr. Bard was a profoundly religious individual, and his letters, many of which survive, show much evidence of this part of his character. Samuel Bard died on the twenty-fifth of May, 1821, at the age of seventy-nine. His death occurred within twenty-four hours of that of his wife, with whom he had lived fifty-six years. In a brief survey of the life of Samuel Bard, one is impressed with its great usefulness. In whatever field his interest turned, this interest was deep and thorough, and he was not satisfied until he actually contributed to the welfare of that pursuit.

Among his notable medical contributions should be mentioned his essay on "Diphtheria in skin, mucous membrane and larynx," the importance of which publication has been emphasized by Dr. Abraham Jacobi. His experiments in horticulture and his contributions to that subject are noteworthy. In the field of obstetrics, however, he will always be remembered not alone because of his authorship of the first book

in America on that subject, but because that publication was a greatly influential and noteworthy undertaking.

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