Obstetrics in China in the 13th Century.*

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THE medical literature of China stretches back a long way. As regards obstetric medicine one might say that there have been in China three periods.

(*a*) *The Legendary.* The only work coming down to us from this period is the Neiching 內經, and although this is attributed to the Emperor Huang Ti, B.C. 2697, it is pretty certain that it did not appear in book form till about the beginning of the Han dynasty and it was not till A.D. 620 that explanatory notes were written for it by Wang Ping.

(*b*) *Period of Observation.* During the Han dynasty there were several able physicians, but the only one who seems to have specially touched obstetrics and gynæcology was Hua To 華佗. Clinical case histories were carefully studied. From the Han dynasty down to the Sung dynasty there is apparently a blank period as regards obstetrics and gynæcology, similar to the Dark Ages in Europe, and speculation appears to have run riot, resulting in the mixing of astrology and alchemy with the work already done in obstetrics and gynæcology.

(*c*) *Period of Book Production.* With the advent of the Sung period, monographs begin to appear on medical subjects. No doubt this is partially due to the improvement in the materials which were available for use. The Neiching in its earliest form was probably written on slips of bamboo. It was not until paper of fair quality and cheapness had appeared that any considerable output of book production was possible. The earliest monograph on obstetrics is the Ch'an Yü Pao Ch'ing Chi 產育寶 集

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(circa 1250 A.D.) and on gynæcology the Fu Jen Liang Fang 婦人良方 (A.D. 1566), but the last named is probably a reprint of an earlier work.

The first encyclopædia which has a definite section on diseases of women and obstetrics is the Ch'ao Shih Chu Ping Yüan Hou Tsung Lün 巢氏諸病源候總論 (circa 589 A.D.). It is difficult to say exactly what originals are still extant. The originals of the two first named are extant in writing in the Imperial Collection of four libraries in Peking 欽定四庫全書. All books had to be sent in writing to the Emperor, and it is probable that the majority of the originals will be found in the Imperial Collection. First editions of Ming and Ch'ing books printed with wood blocks still exist for at least some of these works; and a beautiful copy of Ch'ien Chin Yao Fang 千金要方 (Ming period) is to be found in the Library of the White Cloud Temple outside Peking.

Taking the earliest of these monographs on obstetrics we find that its name is Ch'an Yü Pao Ch'ing Chi 產育寶慶集 (Diseases of Pregnancy and the Puerperium). Its editor, Mr. Chi Chih Chün refers in the preface to the Neiching and discusses the possibility of over-term pregnancies and their meaning. He states that, being grieved about the lack of knowledge of obstetrics, he one day happened on a work written by three scholars of the Sung dynasty. Greatly taken with its contents he begged the owner, His Excellency Yang Shih Piao, to allow it to be reprinted. The permission was granted and with the aid of others he combined it with other works on the care and treatment of women in the puerperium. His conclusion reads as follows:

> "It is my sincere hope that hereafter with the help of this book, each man can act as a physician, every family can prescribe, mid-wives commit no mistake, and both mother and child will be safe."

The work itself consists of two parts. The first volume includes 21 discussions, 34 prescriptions and 16 comments. The second part consists of a discussion of the puerperium, with prescriptions for use in menstruation, pregnancy and certain women's diseases. Fragments from a few of the discussions are of interest.

The first discussion is on the question: *When the mother has fever, why does the fœtus die in utero?* The writer attributes this to the severity of the fever and declares that it is necessary to reheat the fœtus before it is expelled. As in the Ta Sheng P'ien, the triple indication as to prognosis is given. A livid tongue in the mother means the death of the fœtus; a livid face and red

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tongue the death of the fœtus alone; whilst livid lips with profuse salivation mean the death of both mother and child. But the subsequent comment says rightly that it is better to improve the general health of the mother and so secure expulsion than to try to reheat the fœtus. The prescription given in the original work for the reheating and expulsion of the fœtus is as follows :—

Prescription for expulsion of foetus.

℞	Cinnamomum	桂心	
	Cryptotaenia	當歸	
	Paeony root	芍藥	
	Liquorice (dried over flame)	甘草炙	
	Ginger rhizome	乾薑炮	
	Rehmannia	生地	a.a. 1 oz. 各一兩
	Black soy beans (fried & peeled)	黑豆炒去皮	2 oz. 二兩
	Aconite (fried & peeled)	附子炮去皮臍	0.5 oz. 半兩

M. Ft. pulv.

When the stomach is empty, take 2/10 ounce with warm wine.

The second discussion is : *What is the cause of difficult labour?* The writer says :— "There is a mass of tissue of a certain definite shape called the fœtal pillow (placenta?). When the child is going to be delivered the ruptured fœtal pillow together with clotted and unhealthy blood wraps up the child. Breech and transverse presentations also cause difficulty and this can be overcome by the following medicine."

Prescription for breech & transverse presentations.

℞	Musk	麝香	0.1 oz. 一錢
	Heated & powdered salt	鹽豉	1 oz. 一兩

Mix and powder. 0.1 oz. taken with wine.

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The editor adds that this is not the whole truth. If the mother "sits on hay" too early, i.e. tries straining before the proper time, the child is not given time to rotate into the proper position. The old Chinese works all have the idea that the normal posture of the child during pregnancy is breech and that this only changes to vertex at the commencement of labour. If the hand appears first it is to be needled to make it withdraw, and if the foot appears it is to be rubbed with salt. Another prescription for transverse and breech presentations and difficult labour is the following:

Prescription for difficult labours.

℞ Soot 百草霜

Angelica 香白芷 equal parts 各等分

Take 0.2 oz.

The powder is evenly mixed with equal parts of good vinegar, and the urine of an unmarried boy, then mix with 0.04 or 0.05 四分或五分 hot soup. One dose usually is enough. If not, repeat.

The cause of retention of the placenta and membranes is said to be due to engorgement with blood, and the result is that they cannot come out, owing to the distension. The membranes may fill up the whole abdomen, causing much pain and dyspnœa. In the minds of all the old obstetricians there is the idea of "air" (vital spirits) which may be lost with the blood. Loss of vitality in this way (hæmorrhage) may cause faintness. Thirst after labour and a dullness below the heart are attributed to improper food, especially wheat flour, though depression on the part of the mother and dry hot weather are also allowed to be causes.

In discussion 6 we meet the question:— *What is the cause of chills and fever after labour?* Here the Yin and Yang come in; if there is too much Yin she will have chills, if too much Yang, fever. If the internal organs are injured by the strain of labour, and the unhealthy blood stagnates in the lungs she will have fever; if in the spleen, chills. This is often misdiagnosed as malaria.

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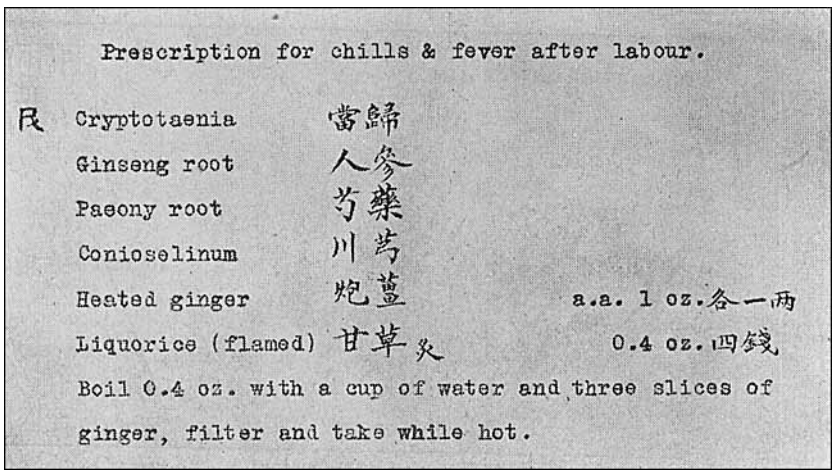
For these ills we have the following prescription :—


Prescription for chills & fever after labour.

℞ Cryptotaenia 當歸
Ginseng root 人參
Paeony root 芍藥
Conioselinum 川芎
Heated ginger 炮薑 a.a. 1 oz.各一兩
Liquorice (flamed) 甘草炙 0.4 oz.四錢
Boil 0.4 oz. with a cup of water and three slices of ginger, filter and take while hot.

Discussion 8 is as follows :— *Why does a woman after labour see devils?* And the writer answers it in the following way. "The heart is the centre of the circulation. The heart is much weakened due to loss of blood during labour. Thus the circulation is slowed and the heart is affected, and the patient has discomfort and anxiety in this organ. She sees devils and talks at random."

Inability to speak after labour is the subject of the next discussion, and it is attributed to the fact that the heart has seven holes (vessels) and three "hairs" (valves). The vessels are obstructed because the blood circulation is weak and the blood tends to engorge the heart. When these vessels are obstructed the mind loses its serenity. The heart is connected with the tongue and when the heart is obstructed, the tongue naturally becomes stiff and she is unable to speak.

Apparently *dysentery after labour* was by no means unknown, as one discussion is devoted to it. Its cause is attributed to cold getting in through the intestinal membranes. Heat, mind and moisture are further causes.

Relaxation of the joints is recognized as a cause of *post-partum ache,* but is attributed to stagnation of blood. *Post-partum constipation* is attributed to loss of blood causing a lack of water in the

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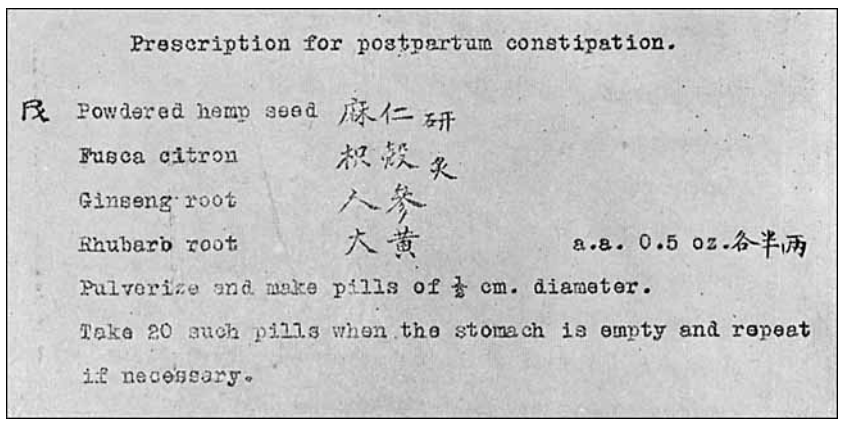
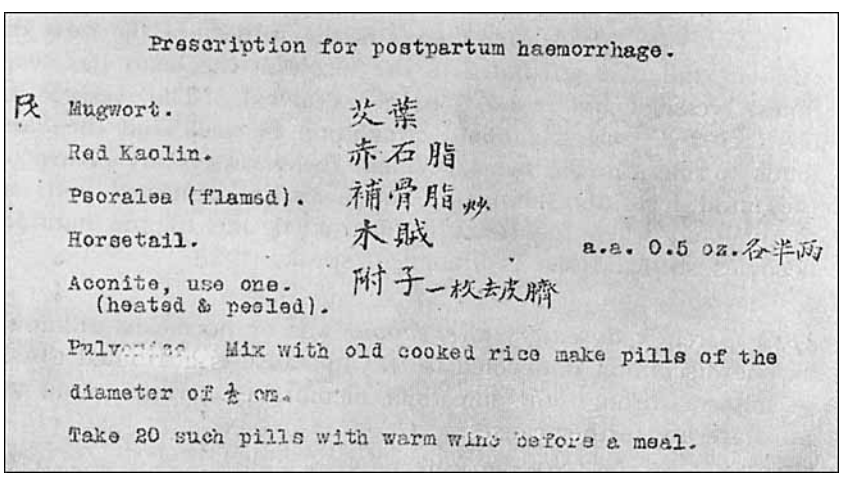
gastro-intestinal tract. For this condition the following medicine is prescribed :—



Prescription for postpartum constipation.

℞ Powdered hemp seed 麻仁研
Fusca citron 枳殼炙
Ginseng root 人參
Rhubarb root 大黃 a.a. 0.5 oz.各半兩
Pulverize and make pills of 壹 cm. diameter.
Take 20 such pills when the stomach is empty and repeat if necessary.

Discussions 13 and 14 are taken up with *post-partum hæmorrhage and post-partum distension*. The former is said to be due to injury to the blood vessels brought about by overwork on the part of the mother and indulgence in too much salt and sour things. If there is distension in the lower abdomen, the liver circulation is injured and the case is very hard to treat. The prescription for the arrest of this hæmorrhage is as follows :—



Prescription for postpartum haemorrhage.

℞ Mugwort. 艾葉
Red Kaolin. 赤石脂
Psoralea (flamed). 補骨脂炒
Horsetail. 木賊 a.a. 0.5 oz.各半兩
Aconite, use one. (heated & peeled). 附子一枚去皮臍
Pulverize. Mix with old cooked rice make pills of the diameter of 壹 cm.
Take 20 such pills with warm wine before a meal.

A later commentator prefers Conioselinum powder for this trouble.

With regard to the *post-partum distension*, the writer says that

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after labour unhealthy blood circulates in the body. If it goes to the spleen you get distension, if to the stomach, vomiting.

Discussion 15 must be given in full, as it shows what an erroneous idea the writer had of the anatomy of the circulation. The question is: *After labour, what causes the darkening of the skin around the mouth and nose and bleeding from the nose?* The answer is that the condition is due to the weakening and fever which occur after labour. The portal circulation is considered as the sea reservoir for all arteries and veins in the body. The portal circulation is thought to originate from the nose. It spreads upward, laterally divides at the centre of the forehead, internally circulates downwards along each side, passes out around the dimple of each cheek and finally draws from each side to the philtrum, so that the two branches cross the middle of the upper lip, and then circulate downwards along the opposite sides respectively. After labour, the breath is weakened and the circulation is disturbed. The air inspired and the blood in the vessels, losing their respective normal directions, are carried to other organs in a confused condition and the return circulation is blocked. In consequence of this the skin around mouth and nose is darkened and the blood coming from the nose has a dark colour. This trouble is incurable.

Panting after labour is looked upon as a very serious matter. The breath is supposed to have lost its direction, and to be confined in the lungs. The writer believes that the blood circulates in the blood vessels, and the inspired air circulates along the external surface of the blood vessels. Naturally, if much bleeding has taken place, the blood vessels are exhausted and do not assist the air circulation. The name of the condition is "Single Yang without Yin."

In Discussion 17 *Tetanus* is apparently described. Its symptoms are soreness about the eyes, paralysis and muscular spasm of the mouth and tonic spasm of the muscles of the lower part of the back (? opisthotonus). It is said to be due to rising after labour before the fifth day, damage during sexual intercourse within the month, disturbance of the brain due to anger or injury of the internal organs due to impatience. The case is said to be incurable, and due to personal carelessness.

In Discussion 18 possibly *embolism* is described. It is called cardiac pain, and is said to be a mortal disease permitting the patient to live only from morning to evening or from evening to

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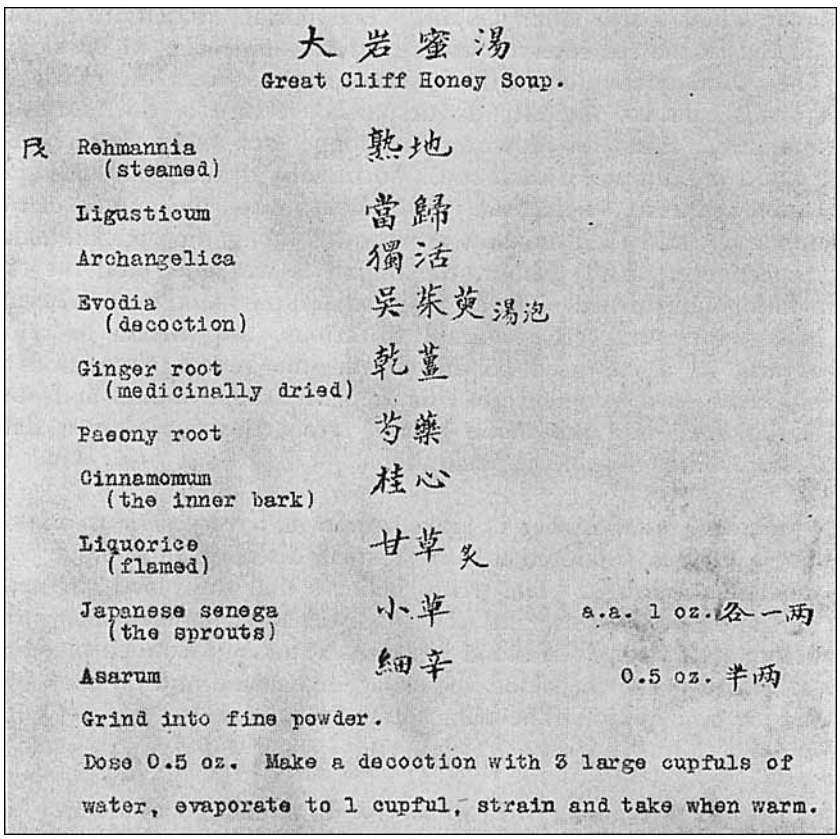
morning. It is judged to be a heart affection. Owing to weakness the latent coolness of which the heart has a stock is released. This causes blood coagulation, interferes with the circulation of the inspired air which fastens on the external surface of the blood vessels round the heart, and causes the pain. The remedy is "Great Cliff Honey Soup" made as follows:—



大岩蜜湯
Great Cliff Honey Soup.

戊 Rehmannia (steamed)	熟地	
Ligusticum	當歸	
Archangelica	獨活	
Evodia (decoction)	吳茱萸湯泡	
Ginger root (medicinally dried)	乾薑	
Paeony root	芍藥	
Cinnamomum (the inner bark)	桂心	
Liquorice (flamed)	甘草炙	
Japanese senega (the sprouts)	小草	a.a. 1 oz.各一兩
Asarum	細辛	0.5 oz. 半兩

Grind into fine powder.

Dose 0.5 oz. Make a decoction with 3 large cupfuls of water, evaporate to 1 cupful, strain and take when warm.

The original prescription comes from Sun Szu Miao's Therapeutics (孫思邈 A.D. 608-927 (Tang dynasty).

Enough has been given to show the general trend of these discussions. When we come to the general consideration of the puerperium we find considerable common sense mixed up with magic. Here are the directions in *preparation for labour*:—

During the last days of pregnancy wine must be sparingly

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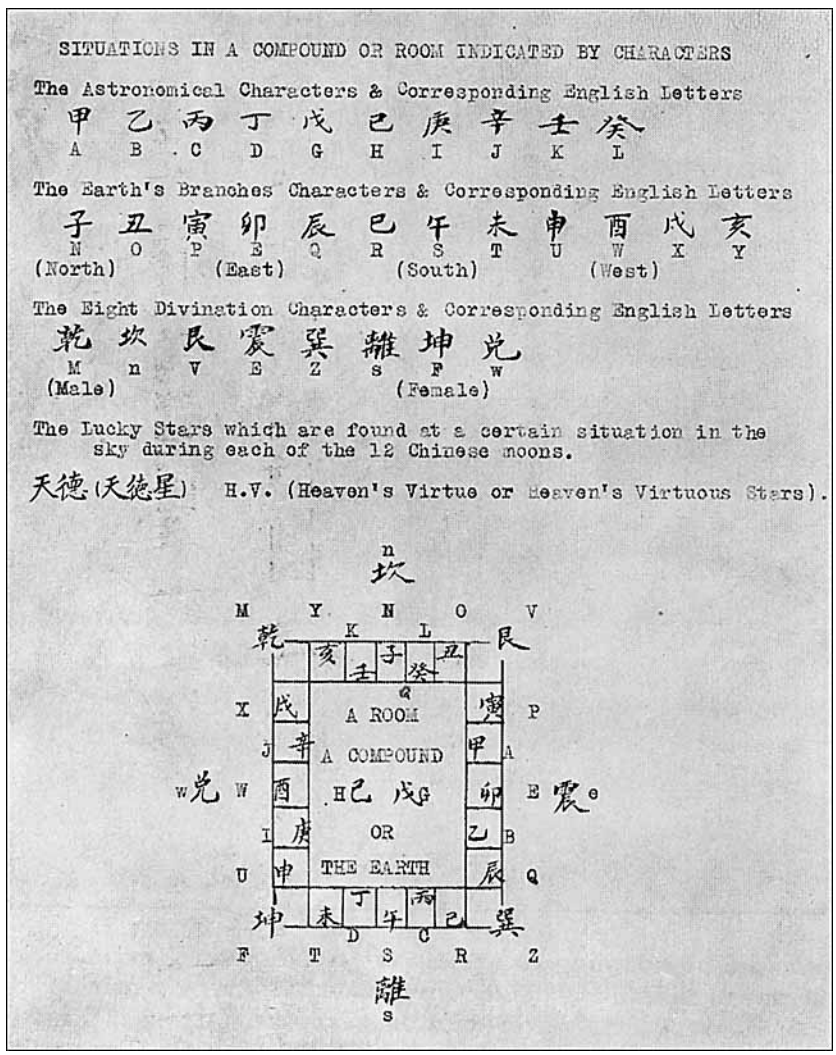
taken. A lonely and quiet room must be chosen for labour and puerperium, but its situation in the compound must correspond with the direction given for the "moon" of confinement in the diagram given below. On the day of delivery a "place borrowing charm" (借地法) must be pasted on the north wall of the room. A lucky birth is to be obtained by choosing the proper situation in the room for the labour bed, burying the placenta in the appropriate place and cleansing and perfuming as necessary before labour.



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Quiet is to be maintained during labour and the door shut. An old and kind midwife is to be chosen and two careful and experienced housemaids. Let the latter hold up the parturient woman, but do not allow them to disturb and frighten her. Keep the room free of visitors who are not her close relatives and those

DIRECTIONS ON SETTING LABOR BEDDING AND BURYING PLACENTA DURING EACH OF THE 12 CHINESE MOONS

	Lucky Situation for Setting Labor Bedding	Lucky Situation for Burying Placenta	Situation under the H.V. Stars also Lucky for Burying Placenta
1st Moon	C 丙	K 壬	D 丁
2nd Moon	A 甲	I 庚	F 坤
3rd Moon	K 壬	C 丙	K 壬
4th Moon	I 庚	A 甲	J 辛
5th Moon	C 丙	K 壬	M 乾
6th Moon	A 甲	I 庚	A 甲
7th Moon	I 庚	C 丙	L 癸
8th Moon	K 壬	A 甲	V 艮
9th Moon	C 丙	K 壬	C 丙
10th Moon	A 甲	I 庚	B 乙
11th Moon	K 壬	C 丙	Z 巽
12th Moon	I 庚	A 甲	I 庚

Note:- This table is similar to a table which is titled "Directions through Peace and Holy Grace" (太平聖惠方). But in the latter the "Earth's Branches Characters" are used in denoting the lucky situations while in the former the Astronomical Characters are used.

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who are in mourning or unclean are to be specially excluded lest a case of difficult labour be precipitated. When in pain by the movement of the child in the womb hold her up and if possible, let her walk, or if impossible let her stand for a while. The turning

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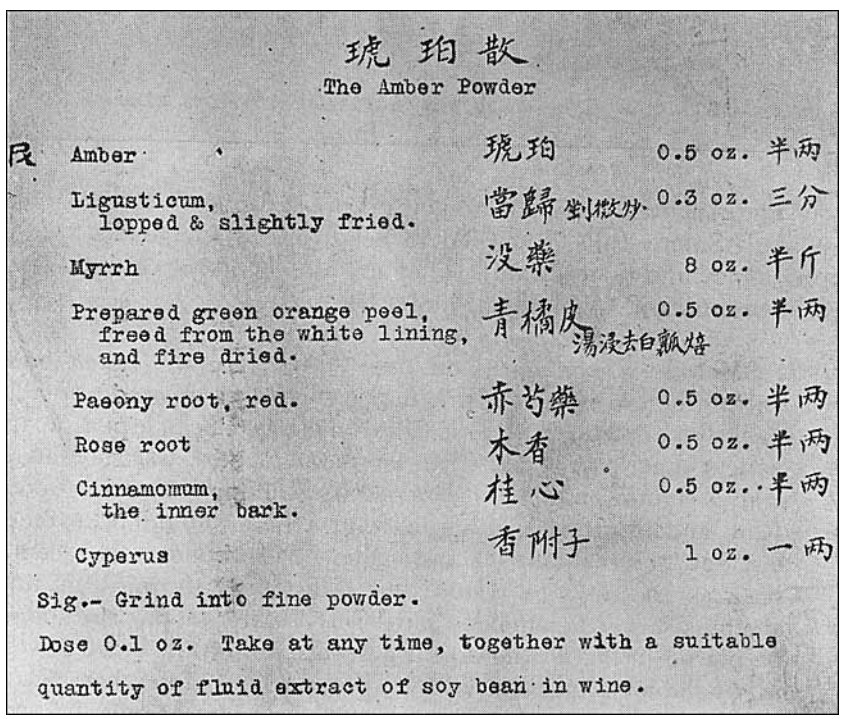
of the child causes the pains of labour and a smarting of the eyes. Give her a dose of Amber powder (see below) and let her stand or walk till she can do so no longer. Then help her to deliver on the straw mat. Ask her to make gentle effort. If the pain is unbearable let her take one spoonful of white honey together with a suitable quantity of freshly drawn well water. If delivery still tarries she is to have a raw egg. Gentle pains in the early part of labour are named false pains. The patient must endure all of them. She may take some soft food such as congee. She should be kept free from hunger and thirst; otherwise she will be weakened during labour.



琥珀散
The Amber Powder

Amber	琥珀	0.5 oz.	半兩
Ligusticum, lopped & slightly fried.	當歸 劉微炒	0.3 oz.	三分
Myrrh	沒藥	8 oz.	半斤
Prepared green orange peel, freed from the white lining, and fire dried.	青橘皮 湯浸去白瓤焙	0.5 oz.	半兩
Paeony root, red.	赤芍藥	0.5 oz.	半兩
Rose root	木香	0.5 oz.	半兩
Cinnamomum, the inner bark.	桂心	0.5 oz.	半兩
Cyperus	香附子	1 oz.	一兩

Sig.- Grind into fine powder.

Dose 0.1 oz. Take at any time, together with a suitable quantity of fluid extract of soy bean in wine.

"Amber Powder" is said to be effective in driving off the vapid blood remaining after labour and releasing the puerperal pains caused by congestion.

Boy's urine and vinegar seem to be regarded as soverign remedies, and the latter is often used by sprinkling the liquid on hot brick or stone so that the vapour may be inhaled by the patient. If birth is delayed the following prescription may be given.

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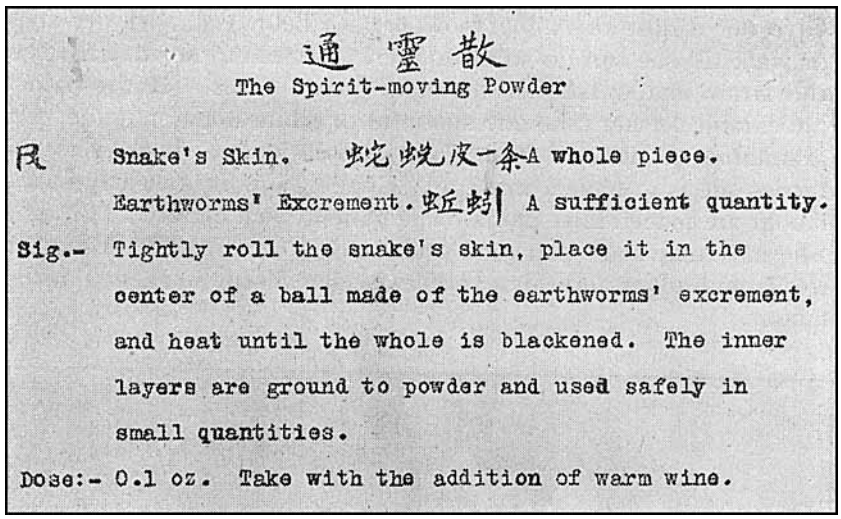

通靈散
The Spirit-moving Powder

℞ Snake's Skin. 蛻蛇皮一条 A whole piece.
Earthworms' Excrement. 蚯蚓 A sufficient quantity.
Sig.- Tightly roll the snake's skin, place it in the center of a ball made of the earthworms' excrement, and heat until the whole is blackened. The inner layers are ground to powder and used safely in small quantities.
Dose:- 0.1 oz. Take with the addition of warm wine.

The Ancients believed in shotgun prescriptions. One of these is the "Safety Pills" believed to be a remedy for 36 diseases of pregnancy and puerperium. They are also good for cold, diseases of menstruation, hemiplegia, limbache.

> Melt in warm wine and take before meals. Taken daily during the last month of pregnancy this was supposed to render the pains of labour unnoticeable. During the puerperium the patient must not be caused to laugh frequently, but she should take a certain amount of exercise by walking about her room. Raw and hard food, draughts and a bath should be avoided lest she get rheumatism and pains in the bones. In general it takes 100 days to restore her health and during this time she must never be offended purposely. After labour she should be placed in bed in the dorsal position, not on the side. Every night she must be attended by a nurse who will flex her legs as required and within the first seven days she is only to have congee. After this period the congee may be strengthened by the addition of decoction of mutton and yellow hens' meat. Red meat is not allowed.

Then follows a disquisition on *menstruation*. The circulation of blood is named Yin and that of inspired air is named Yang. Disagreement between the two causes disturbances of menstruation. If the Yin is more powerful than the Yang you have a decrease of menstruation due to the hindering of the circulation by frigidity in the uterus. If the Yang is more

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保安丸
SAFETY PILLS

Effect:- They are a remedy for 35 diseases of pregnancy and puerperium. They are also good for cold, diseases of menstruation, hemiplegia, limb-ache, etc.

Ex.-- Indian Bread, red, peeled 赤茯苓 去皮
Paeony (the bark of root) 牡丹皮
Paeony root, white 白芍藥 各三分 a.a. 0.03 oz.
Evodia 吳茱萸
Aquilaria 沈香 各一分 a.a. 0.01 oz.
Ginseng (remove the tops) 人參 去蘆
Angelica, washed, sliced, & fire dried. 當歸 洗切焙
Cinnamomum (remove the outer bark) 桂 去皮
Achryanthes bidentata, prepared. 牛膝 酒浸
Angelica 香白芷
Rose root 木香
Nothosmyrnium japonicum (remove the head) 藁本 去蘆
Ephedra (remove the roots and nodes) 麻黃 去根節
Aconite (soak in water, peel, and remove the stem scars) 附子 泡去皮臍
Conioselinum (the Szechüan product) 川芎
Asarum, selected 細辛 揀淨
Ocimum, the leaves of 蘭香葉
Liquorice, coarsely powdered and boiled 甘草 剉炙
Rock Salt, ignited 寒水石 燒
Siler (remove the top) 防風 去蘆
Platycodon (remove the top) 桔梗 去蘆
Cast Skin of Cicadas (remove the legs & wings) a.a. 0.5 oz. 蟬殼 去足翅令中用
Cast Skin of Horse-cicadas (large specimens), decocted & sun dried. 馬鳴退
Rehmannia, raw and dried 生乾地黃 一兩 1 oz.

Sig.- Grind to fine powder. Decoct with honey to pilular consistence. Make pills of the size of a small bullet.

Dose:- One pill every day.

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powerful you have menstruation increased because of the fast flow of hot blood. If the Yin overbalances the Yang the menstrual flow will come too soon. If the reverse is the case it will be delayed. And if these troubles are allowed to go on you will get anæmia, asthenia, atrophy and sterility. Then follows a number of prescriptions for the regulation of the menses in which Angelica polymorpha, Rehmannia glutinosa, and Paconia albiflora frequently occur. Fossil bone, which has a high calcium content, appears in a prescription for menorrhagia and here is a prescription for dysmenorrhœa.



靈寶散

THE MIRACULOUS POWDER

戾	Cloves	丁香	
	Rose root	木香	
	Olibanum	乳香	a. a. 0.15 oz. 各一錢半
	Angelica	當歸	
	Corydalis	延胡索	
	Paeony root	白芍藥	a. a. 0.5 oz. 各半兩

Sig. - Grind to fine powder.
Dose. - 0.1 oz. Take with warm wine just before a meal.

One section is devoted to *Sterility* and the preface runs thus :— This is the prescription which Mr. Fan Lo-ch'ien, the prefect of Chin Ch'eng (金城太守范鑲謙) presented to the Emperor with a document in which he said "As I have well proved this prescription, I take the liberty of stating that if conception does not take place within 40 days after administration, you may kill my family and let the whole nation know this fault." The medicine is known as "Conception Pills."

After seven days of administration, both Yin and Yang would show the evidence of pregnancy. In this case, the administration is allowed to last to the 12th day and then stopped. Prefect Fan said in this document: "My wife, 26 years old, was first found in sterility and then favoured with pregnancy after taking this preparation. Mr. Yü-wen, the former Junior Guardian of the Heir Apparent, also found his wife, Li-shih, 39 years old, in sterility and administered the remainder of my medicine to her. She became pregnant within 13 days of administration. It has been occasionally ad-

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螽斯丸

CONCEPTION PILLS.

Aconite, raw, peeled, with cicatrix removed.	附子 生取去臍	
Indian bread, with the black layer of bark removed.	白茯苓 去黑皮	
Vincetoxicum.	白薇	
Pinellia, washed 7 times.	半夏 湯洗七次	
Eucommia, with the coarse layer of bark removed.	杜仲 去粗皮	
Cinnamomum, the inner bark of.	桂心	
Hystucua.	秦艽	
Magnolia, with the outer bark removed.	厚朴 去粗皮	a.a. 0.3 oz. 各三錢
Siler.	防風	
Ginger, freshly dried.	生乾薑	
Achryanthes.	牛膝	
Adenophora.	沙參	a.a. 0.2 oz. 各二錢
Asarum, peeled.	細辛 去苗	0.5 oz. 半兩
Ginseng root.	人參	0.4 oz. 四錢

Sig.—Grind to fine powder. Decoct with honey.
Make pills of the size of a small soy-bean.

Dose:—50 pills every day. If menstrual discharge occurs, do not despair but increase the daily doses.

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ministered by different persons and has produced the same result. It is, therefore, named the Conception Pills. It must be known as a public prescription. But when a wife is left alone at home, she is not allowed to administer this preparation."

The seasons were judged to have great *influence* on the *course of pregnancy* and in closing this paper an example may be given.

"Every year during the 10th Moon the Universal circulation of Yin takes place whilst the circulation of Yang (Earth air) has not been ended and the circulation of winter air begins. At this time, sometimes plants and insects may grow out of season, so that from time to time thick mists occur, causing human sickness with difficulty of breathing, gastric pains and coughs due to the continued circulation of Yang (the summer atmosphere)." Pregnant females are specially likely to die suddenly or miscarry. In general, remedies for intrauterine disturbance are not influenced by the planet Jupiter. But this certainly has an unlucky influence during the 10th Moon of the Yin Year (寅年) or Shen Year (或申年) during which thick mist occurs from time to time so as to cause the diseases of pregnancy. Certain remedies are prescribed by the author to remedy this tendency, the one for dysentery during pregnancy being as follows:—

Prescription for Dysentery during Pregnancy

戊	Red Kaolin.	赤石脂	0.6 oz. 六錢
	Ginger root, dried.	乾薑	0.4 oz. 四錢
	Glutinous rice, (roasted to yellow).	糯米一合炒黃	0.1 pint.

Grind to powder. Divide into two doses.

Decoct each dose with two cupfuls of water.

Evaporate to one cupful.

Take when warm before a meal.

(The Kaolin treatment for bowel troubles is, therefore, not a new one.)

It may be considered that many of these methods of treatment are quite irrational, but Professor Bernard Read points out that there is more of design and purpose in these prescriptions than

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would at first appear on the surface. Probably the key to the majority of the treatments is bound up in the doctrines of "signatures," "sympathy" and "temperature." The first named accounts, for instance, for the popularity of the mandrake in many of these prescriptions; whilst the shotgun prescriptions contain much which is inserted in order to balance the question of temperature. It must also be remembered that we are still very ignorant about some of these drugs, such as Eucommia and Angelica, and the last named is undoubtedly a uterine stimulant of considerable power. Further study may prove of value, and may add new substances to our armamentarium. Finally, acknowledgement of valuable assistance is due to Mr. C. T. Feng, Assistant in the Department of Pharmacology, and to Mr. C. C. Li, Secretary to the Department of Obstetrics and Gynæcology, Peking Union Medical College.

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