

An essay on the epidemic disease of lying-in women, of the years 1787 and 1788 / by John Clarke, licentiate in midwifery, of the Royal College of Physicians, and teacher of midwifery, in London.

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Clarke, John, 1761-1815.
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Publication/Creation

London : Printed for J. Johnson, St. Paul's-Church-Yard, 1788.

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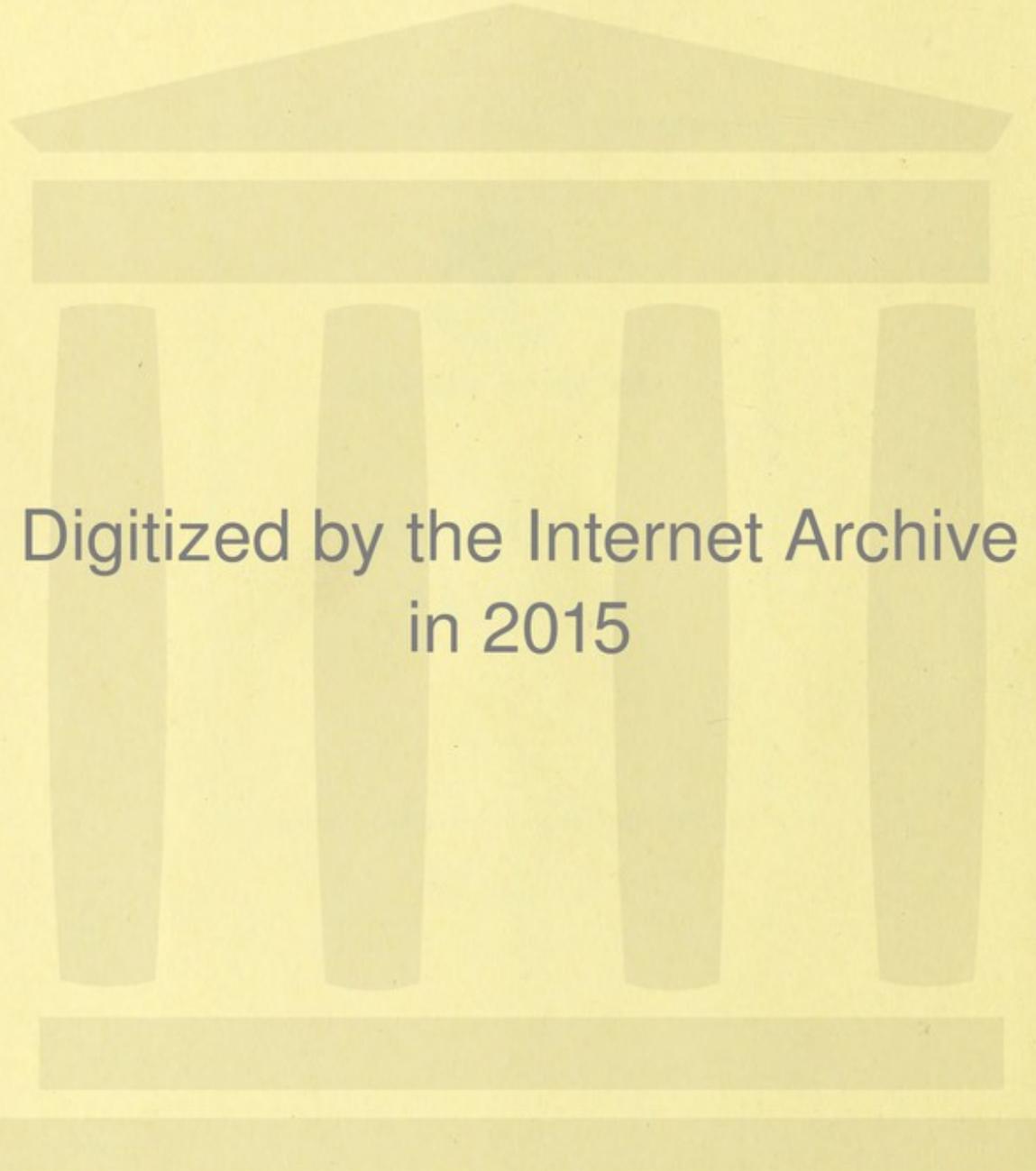
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A N
E S S A Y
ON THE
EPIDEMIC DISEASE
OF
LYING-IN WOMEN,
OF THE
YEARS 1787 AND 1788,

BY

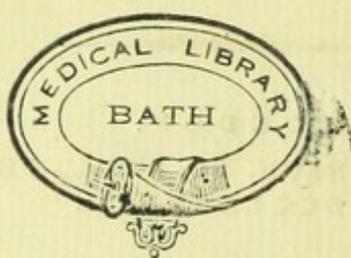
J O H N C L A R K E,

LICENTIATE IN MIDWIFERY, OF THE ROYAL
COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS, AND TEACHER
OF MIDWIFERY, IN LONDON.

ANCEPS HÆREO, QUA MIHI VIA INSISTENDUM EST, UT
ÆGRIS SUBVENIAM. — SYDENHAM.

L O N D O N :
PRINTED FOR J. JOHNSON, ST. PAUL'S-CHURCH-YARD.
M D C C L X X X V I I I .

THE
OF THE
MEDICAL DISASES
OF THE
WOMEN
BY
DOCTOR THOMAS DENHAM
OF BATH
IN TWO VOLUMES
THE FIRST AND SECOND
LONDON
PRINTED BY
RICHARD CLARKE
STATIONER AND PRINTER
TO THE ROYAL
SOCIETY OF PHYSICIANS AND
OF MIDWIVES IN LONDON
AND OF THE
ROYAL COLLEGE OF SURGEONS
IN LONDON
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O B L I G E D F R I E N D A N D S E R V A N T ,

J O H N C L A R K E .

OF WILLIAM O'ROURKE

FRERNAO
DR. THOMAS DE W. M. A. N.

THE FOLLOWING ESSAY IS THE ORIGINAL
AS A SMALL-TOWN OF THE GRATITUDE
AND RESPECT OF THEIR
ENRICHED FRIEND AND SERVANT,
JOHN W. CLARKE

P R E F A C E.

TH E Public has certainly a reasonable claim upon every Author for the explanation of the motives which induced him to write;—and as it may be expected of me, I feel it my duty to mention the reasons which produced the publication of the following pages—a task, which I should not have undertaken to execute, if some more able pen had been employed on the subject, being well aware of the difficulty of treating it with that degree of correctness which the importance of it demands.

The act of parturition in its most natural state, though performed of necessity with very considerable difficulty in the human subject, from the circumstances of the erect posture, as has been so well explained by Dr. Osborn*; and though attended with some danger from the peculiar structure of the placenta, and also from other causes, yet, upon the whole, does not subject women to many serious inconveniencies.—Hence the care of persons in this state has been, till within the last century, almost exclusively confided to midwives, so that as a science midwifery may be considered to be still in its infancy.—Men of education having been rarely consulted, and then only in the extraordinary cases of midwifery, it can hardly be a matter of surprise that so few observations connected with the practice of it are to be found in their works, and that improvement in this branch of medicine should not have kept pace with that of the others.—It is rather wonderful that in so short a space of time as has

* Essay on Laborious Parturition.

8vo. Cadell, London.

elapsed, since the conduct of lying-in women has been intrusted to the care of men of science, so much has been already done, especially when we reflect that on the one hand the progress of the art has been obstructed by the delicacy of women, and on the other opposed by prejudices suggested by interest, and artfully propagated by many practitioners in the other branches of medicine.

But although parturition in its most natural state be not exposed to much danger, yet luxury and an unnatural mode of life have subjected women to difficulties in labor, and diseases consequent to it of such importance, that, notwithstanding all the opposition which has been with such violence exerted, women have at length sacrificed all considerations of false delicacy to the more weighty one of self-preservation.

Many useful observations and much improvement have been made of late years;—but much still remains to be done, and perhaps in no part more than the diseases which arise after Labor,

since it appears that the proportion of those who die during the operation to those who fall sacrifices to complaints afterwards is extremely small.

There has been a great fatality among parturient women in the last few months, not only in London, but also in other parts of the kingdom, which has been, as far as I am able to learn, chiefly owing to the disease, which makes the subject of this essay. It is either a new disease, or at least a new modification of that which has been denominated Puerperal Fever.

Nothing having been hitherto written respecting it, I hope that I need offer no other reason as an apology for the following sheets, than a desire to communicate the result of my own observations in a number of cases which have fallen under my eye in a public charity, for the benefit of those whose opportunities of seeing the disease may have been more contracted than mine, in hopes that from a candid relation of the event of the cases, under all the different modes of treatment which have

been employed, some new light may be thrown upon so fatal a distemper.

If by my labors I should effect this purpose, or should call forth some more able pen in the investigation of the subject, I shall think myself fortunate, and be happy, if by any means I shall have been the instrument of promoting the interests of mankind, or have paved the way towards the alleviation of a disease which has proved so destructive to the female part of our species,

How far I may have contributed to these ends, it must be left to the public to determine, upon whose candor I rely for a kind reception of my endeavours, which however they may fall short of the purpose for which they were exerted, will I hope, at least find favor from their intention.

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In the beginning of the present year, a
series of papers on the subject of female education
was published, which has been taken as a guide
by many of our countrymen.

ON THE
EPIDEMIC DISEASE
OF
LYING-IN WOMEN,
OF THE
YEARS 1787 AND 1788.

TOWARDS the conclusion of the last, and in the beginning of the present year, a Disease has made its appearance among parturient women in London, which has been fatal to a great number of patients.

In many of its symptoms, and through its whole course, it seems to differ materially from any Disease which has been described as attacking women in a parturient state; and notwithstanding that in some respects it is more analogous to the Disease which has been denominated Puerperal Fever than to any other; yet still there is so material a difference in the nature of its attack, in its general progress, and in the manner of its termination, that I think an essential difference will be found to exist between them,

Instead therefore of endeavouring to rank the Disease under any particular class, described by Nosologists, I shall rather confine myself to the result of my own observations and such hints as I have received from others, who have seen patients labouring under it; and shall not trouble my readers with more reasoning on the subject than is necessary, being well satisfied that more advantage is likely to accrue to society at large, and to the cultivation of Medicine, from a faithful, impartial and unpre-

judiced relation of facts, than from any, even the most plausible theory.

It has been usual before the description of any Epidemic Complaint to relate the previous state of the air, as it has been found to affect the thermometer, or barometer :—From this kind of observations however, little light has been hitherto thrown upon the cause, or nature of Epidemics.

That climate, or (which is very analogous to it) a long succession of seasons in any climate, has certain effects upon human bodies, there cannot be much reason to doubt :—Such varieties as depend upon heat, cold, moisture, or dryness being very obvious alterations, or differences in the state of the atmosphere, the effects of such varieties may be readily seen and observed ; but the properties of these states of air, which subject the body to the influence of disease may be, and most probably are, infinitely too subtle for our investigation, and incapable of being

detected by those means from which we judge either of the heat, or weight of the atmosphere. *

For these reasons I shall avoid entering into a very minute and particular account of the constitution of the air. Nevertheless it may not be superfluous barely to observe that the two last winters, although there has been in both some frost, yet in neither has the cold weather been of long duration, on the contrary they have been mild, with frequent rains; neither the last nor the preceding summer were very hot, but in both there was more rain than is customary in this climate at those seasons. Perhaps to some peculiarity in this succession of seasons we are

* *Profecto quicquid nobis de hac omni quaestione scire conceditur, angusta admodum metitur circumscriptio, & laboribus quibuscunque frustra exantlatis, fateamur tandem necesse est cum optimo Sydenhamo——“ Quæ qualisque sit illa aeris dispositio, nos pariter, “ ac complura alia, circa quæ vecors, ac arrogans philosophantium “ turba nugatur, plane ignoramus.” Neque sane virum philosophum dedecet nescire ea fateri quæ nesciat, adhibita modo prius ad res rite perpendendas diligentia: at incognita pro cognitivis habere, eaque incertissima quæ sint, pro certis venditare, id vero dedecet.*

*Sir George Baker's Opuscula Medica,
Octavo, Lond. 1771.*

to attribute the sort of Diseases which have been lately prevalent. Inflammatory Diseases have been extremely unfrequent; or if they have occurred, they have been principally of the erysipelalous kind. Eruptive Diseases, particularly those which are attended with great depression of strength, have attacked great numbers of patients. The ulcerous sore throat, with or without the scarlatina, has prevailed very much both in London, and also in the country at a distance from the capital. Most of the fevers have been of the low, nervous and malignant kind, approaching to that which has been called putrid, and have swept off a very large number of people of both sexes, but especially children and those of more delicate constitutions.

I have been informed likewise that in some situations in the country patients under inoculation have recovered with great difficulty.—Abscesses have formed under the Axilla: large sloughs and ulcers have taken place, and the number of patients who have died, has far exceeded any former proportion.

Having said thus much on the nature of the Diseases, which have been prevalent in the period of this constitution of the air, I shall now proceed to describe the disease under our consideration.—In this description I shall avoid the recital of every individual case, which would only tire the patience of my readers; instead of which I shall, in as clear a manner as I am able, enumerate the symptoms, which characterize the Disease, taking notice of any varieties which occurred in particular patients.

The first case which I met with was in the month of July, 1787, in which I was astonished to observe the rapidity with which it ran its course, and the very extraordinary manner in which the woman was destroyed by it. Since that time I have had an opportunity of seeing a great number of cases of the disease, by which means I have, at least, acquired a more perfect knowledge of the symptoms which attend it.—In the early cases the short duration of the whole complaint hardly gave me time to discover the real nature of it;—but by

an attentive observation of those which I have since seen, whilst the patients were alive, and by the examination of the bodies of many of those who died, I hope that I have derived some practical information, and a better knowledge of the disorder.

The most common time of the attack has been on the second, or third day after delivery:—but in some instances the patient has never recovered from the fatigue of her labor, and in others, though very seldom, she has been seized so late as the eighth day.

It has not occurred to me to see any case in which the Disease began with a shivering fit, as is commonly the case in the puerperal, and most other Fevers. If there was any degree of rigor, it has been so slight as to have escaped the attention of the patient, and the observation of her attendants. Indeed so great a diminution of the sensibility and irritability accompany the whole complaint, that even if a slight rigor should take place the patient might not observe it, or being sensible of it

at the time might not afterwards remember it.

A symptom which I have noticed in many of the women, who have been afflicted with the complaint, has been a refusal to suckle their children. At first I did not consider this as any part of the Disease, and it is possible that it may not:—but as it has occurred so frequently, I would not omit setting it down in the catalogue of symptoms.

There cannot be any doubt that nature intended that all women should give suck to their own children. The custom of employing hireling nurses has been introduced by luxury.—Certain situations of life however, render the office of suckling inconvenient to some, and a regard to the preservation of character impossible to others. If the dislike to suckling had only been observed in patients of these descriptions, it would not have engaged my attention so much; but it has occurred under all circumstances, so as to make it probable, that it is a symptom of

the Disease. Whence it arises, or upon what it depends, it may be very difficult to ascertain, whether it may be that the properties of the milk may be so far changed as to make it unfit for the nourishment of the child,—or whether we ought not rather to consider it as a proof of a slight degree of affection of the brain in the beginning of the complaint, it would be not easy to determine. With regard to the former, I have not from observation been able to detect any alteration in the apparent properties of the fluid, but the quantity of it is certainly in most cases diminished.—In some cases little or none ever is secreted in the breasts, especially where the accession of the disorder is early after delivery: in others, where the disease has begun after the secretion of milk has taken place, it soon disappears, and the breasts become soft and flaccid. It is probable that the secretion of the milk in the gland, and the desire of suckling may be some way connected with each other, and the existence of the one may depend upon the presence of the other in like manner, as the power of secretion in the testicles produces

the passion for propagation; and the passion in its turn affects the disposition for secretion.

Generally at the very outset of this Disease the countenance has a particular appearance, long before we can conceive the absolute strength of the Patient to be exhausted: the visage becomes pale and rather ghastly, and there is the appearance of general relaxation of all the muscles of the face: the lips and the angles of the eyes lose their florid red colour, the cheeks and the rest of the face acquire a cadaverous hue and there is that general cast of features which is so well known in patients, who have been worn out by some long disease: a clammy dew, or moisture commonly appears upon the face, not amounting to sweating: the Pupil of the eyes is usually much dilated, but contracts upon exposure to a strong light: the eyes themselves, in a very short time, lose their lustre and quickness, and acquire a glassy appearance; they seem vacant and are inattentively turned towards any object and not long confined to it, but in a little while wander to some other.

In the course of this complaint the tongue undergoes many changes, nor is the appearance of it by any means uniform in all cases:—most frequently in the beginning it is quite pale, but not dry, and this state of it often continues through the whole progress;—but is more common for it to become dry afterwards and white, and in some instances very rough. When the Disease is in a more malignant form, and has lasted some days, it not unfrequently becomes brown: whenever this happens the surface of the teeth will for the most part be found to be incrusted with a fur of the same colour.

The skin of the rest of the body, like that of the face, is not hard or tense, but frequently appears to the feeling more relaxed than it is found even in a natural state, and is sometimes covered with the same sort of clamminess, which has been mentioned, as observable on the face.

The heat of the patient is seldom increased, either to her own sensations, or those of her attendants: even in those cases where it has appeared to be rather greater to the feeling of others, it has not been complained of, or expressed by the patient herself.

The action of the heart and arteries is affected at a very early period of the disorder, inasmuch that the frequency of the pulse is often the first symptom which is observable in the complaint. In some patients, who before the attack of the Disease were strong and plethoric, the pulse will be found for a few hours more strong than before, but in a short time it will become weak.

In most of the cases which have fallen under my observation, the frequency of the action of the heart and arteries has been increased in a surprising degree, the number of pulsations in a minute being commonly from 110 to 130, in the very beginning of the Disease.

From this circumstance alone I have been often able to detect the attack, when the woman herself has made little or no complaint. As the Disease proceeds, the pulse becomes more frequent and irregular; indeed generally it is so before the destruction of the patient.

The cavity of the abdomen also participates of Disease: sometimes it is affected at the beginning, in other cases not till a more advanced period, when it becomes tender to the touch, and the woman experiences a sense of pain upon the slightest motion, in consequence of the compression made upon the parts contained in the belly, by the muscles which pass over the cavity during their state of contraction. Soon after the pain has commenced, it is generally followed by a great degree of swelling; but in other cases both the one and the other are inconsiderable: and I have even seen some, where although the tumor has been very considerable, the pain has been but slight, which I have commonly accounted for

on the idea of a diminished sensibility making a part of the Disease, especially as it has occurred most in those cases, where the prostration of the muscular strength has been most manifest, and where the pupil of the eyes has been most dilated. When the swelling is in a great degree, the breathing is evidently affected, the respiration becoming short and laborious, which is occasioned partly by the diaphragm encroaching upon the chest, in consequence of the distention of the abdomen, and partly in some instances, as will be seen farther, from an organic affection of the chest itself.

The functions of the primæ viæ are frequently, but not always, disturbed in this Disease. In the beginning they generally go on very well; but in the progress purging, often in an excessive degree, comes on, especially in those cases where the abdomen has been most distended, in some of which the fæces have even been discharged without the consciousness of the patient.

The purging has in several cases appeared on the third or fourth day, seldom sooner, but in some instances later. The state of urine I cannot describe, as it is commonly mixed with some portion of the uterine discharges.

Vomiting not unfrequently attacks the woman about the same time, and sometimes to such a degree, that scarcely any kind or quantity of food, or medicine, will remain upon the stomach.

The brain and nerves seem not to be without their share in the Disease, the energy both of the one and the other being manifestly diminished: hence in an early stage we find the muscular powers very much depressed, and in the more advanced stages, both the sensibility and irritability, with regard to stimuli, impaired: to this last circumstance we ought perhaps to attribute it, that persons who labour under this Disease make so few complaints, often scarcely any, so that practitioners, little conversant with it, would be surprized to observe how soon they will be cut off, having complained hardly at all. Early

in the Disease, if they are asked respecting their sensations, their common answer is that they are very well; or if they make any kind of complaint it is only that they are low, and this seems to continue through almost the whole course of it. I saw one patient, who on the seventh day, at two o'clock in the afternoon, begged to be allowed to get up, (which was not permitted) alledging that she was nearly well, and she died at three the next morning.

Violent delirium very seldom appears in this complaint, but the patient more commonly falls into a low comatose state, wishing not to be disturbed, yet, if roused, will to the last moments give tolerably clear and rational answers to any questions which may be made to her.

The uterine discharges sometimes are suppressed or diminished;—when they are not, they acquire generally a very offensive smell:

It may be expected that I should here give some account of the predisposing and occasional causes of the Disease, and I wish that it were in my power

to throw much light upon this part of the subject, as then if we could not cure, we might at least have some chance of preventing it.

With regard to the former, the observations which I have yet had an opportunity of making have not led me to any thing very conclusive upon that subject.—It has not seemed to invade women of one sort of constitution more than another ;—the strong and the weak, the plethoric and the irritable, appear to have been the subjects of it ;—and married women as well as single, but the latter in much the largest proportion, at least in the cases which I have seen :—It would seem also that the Disease has been more prevalent in hospitals and among the lower classes of women than in private practice, or in the higher walks of life :—yet in both these it has also been found. A previously distressed state of mind probably predisposes to this Disease, which may perhaps be assigned as a reason for the greater frequency of it in hospitals. The women, who are the objects of those charities are, whether single or married, often among the most distressed of our species.—When married they are either such as have been de-

ferted by their husbands, or they are widows; or if single, they are such unfortunate young women as have been not only seduced, but also not unfrequently abandoned by those who have debauched, and should have protected them. Under such complicated misfortunes their minds in the latter part of their pregnancy are wholly employed upon the calamity of their situations; hence the body becomes enervated, and the powers of the system exhausted, so that they both become more liable to the attacks of disease, and less able to withstand it.

It has been observed that the Disease has not been so frequent among the poorer classes of women, who are delivered at their own habitations; but it is to be remembered that their situation is hardly ever so distressed as that of those who are the general objects of charity in hospitals, women without a home, without friends, without husbands, without protection, and without the common necessaries of life before they were admitted; and when they leave the hospitals, often without a prospect of subsistence for themselves and their children in future: nothing

is before them but a miserable looking forward to the consequences of a stained character, poverty and want.

From this difference of situation a great difference will most probably exist, both in the state of their bodies and minds, sufficient to account for the fact, why those should not become the subjects of disease, except in a few rare cases, and why, if an occasional cause be applied, these can hardly escape it.

In conformation of this, I may observe that one woman, whom I knew to die in private practice, was a person whose mother had formerly died in child-bed when she was born. From the time that this patient was delivered her pulse was 120. This was most probably owing to her mind having been much employed upon her own situation previous to, and at the time of her labor.

Another predisponent cause of the Disease, is most probably too great indulgence in improper

kinds of food, and too little attention to regularity in the mode of living towards the conclusion of pregnancy. Moderate exercise is certainly not to be discouraged at this time, but violent exertions, a life of constant hurry and fatigue, an unvaried pursuit of pleasure, broken rest, irregular hours, and other intemperances, as they at least introduce a state of irritability into the habit, cannot but be injurious to the natural order of a labor; and I have frequently heard a gentleman, whose practice is very confined much to the higher orders of women, lament this circumstance in his patients. If this be the case, women in the latter part of their pregnancy ought to pay particular attention to their manner of living, so as at least not to be in a state of disease when they fall into labor.

I was desired to see a patient who had been delivered two days before, and from that time had never been well: her pulse was very frequent, and this was followed by other symptoms above enumerated. She had been employed in violent exercise for two days preceding parturition, and in a state of

great fatigue fell into labor, the consequence of which was the attack of this Disease, of which she died.

In addition to the presence of these predisposing causes, that of the epidemic disposition of the air must likewise be taken into the account; otherwise, under these circumstances, the same Disease would always arise if an occasional cause were applied, which is not the case.

Now the nature of the epidemic constitution, which has lately prevailed, has been a disposition to diseases of debility, as has been remarked above; with such a predisposition it is probable, that if any diseased state should appear in a parturient woman, it would put on that character which the preceding history of this Disease fully justifies.

The occasional cause in most cases would appear to be the act of parturition.

Now although it would appear to be very opposite to the general laws of the animal œconomy, that disease should be the consequence of a natural function; and on this principle therefore we should not expect that a labor would be followed by fever: yet it is to be remembered that every woman is under the influence of a temporary fever during the act of parturition; and there does not appear to be any thing in a parturient state, which can exempt women from being affected by the general causes of disease at that time; and should they become ill, their complaints will most probably partake of the nature of the reigning epidemic.

In those cases, where the attack is not immediately consequent to parturition, it is generally about the third or fourth day. If there had been much previous distention of the breasts, or disturbance in the system from the milk flowing into them, we might have considered these as the occasional causes: but I have observed above, that frequently little or no milk is secreted.

As it has been customary of late years to procure one or two gentle evacuations on the second or third day after delivery, I once thought it probable that this might produce the Disease; but upon using glysters for that purpose I found that no better success followed.

In two cases I have reason to believe, that the foundation of the Disease had been laid by the patient having secretly, and very imprudently taken a considerable quantity of wine and spirits.

But after all I have seen several in which I could not trace any occasional cause, at least after delivery, except the act of parturition was to be esteemed such; and there is some difficulty even in this supposition, because the attack has sometimes been at too great a distance of time from delivery, and one would expect that its effects would be more immediate, if that were the occasional cause of the complaint. It has been suggested to me, that probably sometimes the Disease has really commenced before the act of labor; but on this head I cannot say any thing from my own experience.

Perhaps there is scarcely any Disease, which we are acquainted with, whose consequences are more fatal than this ; as far as I have observed, more than half of those who have been seized with it have fallen sacrifices to its severity. The danger seems to be greater in proportion as the accession is sooner after labor ; since those who have had the Disease, at a later period, have not been attacked with the same severity; the depression of strength has been less considerable, and their chance of recovery has been consequently better.

It has not occurred in my observation to see any recover, in whom the tumefaction of the belly has been in any great degree.

The increase of danger is marked by the increased frequency of the pulse, by its weakness, by its irregularity, which frequently comes on before death, and by the increasing size of the abdomen.

It is also worthy of remark, that those patients are generally in the greatest danger who make the

fewest complaints in the course of the Disease, yet, in whom at the same time the pulse is very frequent, and the swelling of the belly considerable: whether this circumstance arises from some degree of delirium, or that the sensibility is so impaired that the distention, which in other cases, as in the first stages of the puerperal fever, is attended with great pain, conveys no impression to the mind, I cannot determine, but am inclined to the latter opinion, from having often seen these very patients answer all questions made to them very sensibly and rationally.

The rapidity with which this Disease runs through its whole course sometimes is most alarming: I have seen the patient destroyed in thirty-six hours from the first attack, by the mere depression of strength, apparently; many have died on the third day; some however have lingered on in a state of stupid existence for eight days, or more, and then have sunk and died. I have never known the act of dying attended with much struggling or pain, except in those cases in which the tumefaction of

the abdomen has made the respiration very difficult and laborious. The extremities before death generally become cold, the pulse beats weakly and irregularly, the whole body is covered with a clammy moisture, the patient appears careless and indifferent to all external objects, and then dies often without a groan.

It has been a question with some whether this be an infectious complaint or not; the idea has arisen from the greater frequency of it in hospitals, than in private practice, which I have already endeavoured to explain; it is hardly possible to prove that it is not infectious, but it has certainly also, as far as we can judge, arisen as an original Disease in private patients, where there had not been any communication with infected persons, moreover the attendants upon those who have had the Disease have not, as far as my observation has gone, ever received the infection: however my experience on this subject is by much too contracted to speak with any thing like decision on this head.

The extraordinary and rapid destruction in this Disease led me to inquire whether the dissection of such as died in it would throw any new light upon the subject, or point out any rational or probable method of cure: I did not therefore neglect the opportunities which have occurred to me of investigating the appearances in the dead body.—I have opened several in all the stages of the complaint, and at very short periods after death, and the appearances have generally been the following:—In most instances there has been some degree of inflammation in the cavity of the abdomen;—but it has not been confined invariably to any particular part—sometimes the intestines, sometimes the stomach, sometimes the liver, sometimes the investing membrane lining the muscles have been inflamed: but I have never seen any extensive degree of inflammation in any case, and in some I could not say that there was any. The uterus and ovaria I have seen sometimes partake of the inflammation, but not more frequently, or in a greater degree than

other parts. The inside of the uterus, or of the intestines, has not been found to be inflamed in any of those whom I have had an opportunity of examining after death:—yet I have in two cases, which I met with, found an appearance like pus in the cavity of the veins of the uterus.

As the brain has seemed to be affected in many cases soon after the attack, I did not fail to open the head also, but it has always been in a natural state.

I have paid attention to the state of the thorax many times, but in one instance only found any thing unnatural in that cavity:—In that case the right side was covered with the inflammatory crust or exudation on every surface, both of the lungs and of the pleura.

But although the extent of inflammation in the abdomen has been very small, yet the effusion into the cavity has been very considerable in most cases, so that I have absorbed, by means of a sponge, several pints of it. The colour of the fluid is of a

yellowish cast, resembling pus mixed with serum; and swimming in it are little flakes of a solid substance like coagulating lymph. Where the fluid is in considerable quantity the different surfaces of the viscera are covered with the same kind of substance as with a coat, but the parts lying under it are not commonly inflamed. If there be any interstices between different viscera in the cavity, these are frequently filled with large masses of the same, making an accurate cast of the cavity.

The quantity of fluid extravasated, or of this solid substance, seems not to bear any proportion to the degree of inflammation, there being often found a large quantity of both where the redness of any surface has been very inconsiderable, and by no means general.—May not a slight inflammation of any part dispose the whole surface in this Disease, to pour out this matter in a fluid state, which afterwards coagulates upon the different surfaces?—May not the pain felt in the abdomen, in the progress of the complaint, be more owing to the distention

than to the inflammation? The latter supposition would be strengthened by this circumstance, — that upon dissection the intestines are generally found full of air, even immediately after the death of the patient.

My intention has, in the preceding pages, chiefly been directed to giving an accurate description of the Disease. Respecting the treatment of it I am afraid that I cannot offer any thing very satisfactory. The attack is so very insidious and often unperceived, and the fatal termination is so sudden, that the time when medicine could be useful, has most commonly elapsed before it is known that the complaint has existed. If any thing can be effected, with a reasonable hope of success, it must be early in the Disease: at a later period so much mischief has been done to the system or the parts, that little advantage can be expected to be derived from any remedy, especially when the tumefaction of the belly is great.

It will not be necessary that I should enter into a very particular detail of all the remedies which I

have seen employed through this Disease, the success of them having been so uncertain and precarious. It will be sufficient to observe, that each mode of treatment has been adapted to the particular constitution of the different patients, and although under all of them some have recovered, yet the comparative proportion has not been such as to warrant the recommendation of any one in particular.

An emetic has commonly been administered in the first instance, and a laxative to empty the primæ viæ.

Bleeding from the system generally has been tried, but with manifest disadvantage, (although in patients apparently strong and plethoric before) generally lowering the patient, and in some cases perhaps hastening her death a few hours. Bleeding from the skin of the abdomen with leeches, though not producing the same degree of weakness, yet has not tended more to the cure. It has in some instances, for a short time, diminished the pain; but it has not seemed to have any permanent

effects, even though the application of them has been repeated.

Blistering upon the part, though practised very often, has not been attended with better success; some present relief has been obtained from it, but not enough to warrant much expectation from the application of this remedy: in one case, where a repetition of blisters to different parts was proposed, the patient recovered, but a similar conduct pursued in others failed of the desired effect, and destroyed those hopes which had been entertained of their advantage.

A repetition of vomits, on the plan of M. Doucet, has been attended with obvious disadvantage; the agitation of vomiting, adding to the pain of the abdomen, from the necessary pressure made on the contents of the cavity during the operation, and exhausting the powers of the woman already sufficiently weakened.

In the beginning of some cases, where the apparent strength of the patient favoured their exhibition,

relaxants, as James's powder, and other preparations of antimony, have been proposed and exhibited, both simply and combined with cordial medicines and opium, but without any good consequences; in some instances they have produced vomiting and purging, which once brought on, in this complaint, are always with great difficulty restrained.

Opium I have also seen very liberally exhibited in this complaint: its service in diminishing the pain is undoubted and therefore it may be, with this intention, given with advantage.

Most of those medicines having failed which have been employed with a view to the diminution of the inflammation having failed, and the depression of strength at an early period of the Disease being a very urgent symptom, bark, wine, camphor, and other cordials, have been used, and I wish that I could add with more efficacy; but I should observe, that I believe they have commonly been exhibited at too late a period. When the complaint

has continued some days, so much general or local mischief has generally been done, as to put it beyond the power of any medicine to be of much use.

Besides these general plans of treatment, attention has been paid to any urgent symptoms, which have occurred in the course of the Disease, as the vomiting and purging; nothing seems to have restrained the former so much as the exhibition of the saline draughts, in an effervescing state; but I am yet doubtful of the propriety of administering them, from the circumstance of the evolution of a large quantity of fixed air, during the combination of the acid, with the alkali, which must of course add to the distention. Fomentations have been used, and during the time of their application, by relaxing the skin of the belly, they have given a respite from pain, but their effects are not permanent, and they generally leave the patient more relaxed and weakened than before.

If any thing can be done, with a reasonable ground of hope, in the complaint, it must be in the most

early stages, perhaps as soon as any increased frequency of the pulse is observed: the obvious indication, as it appears to me, is to take off the irritability, which can be done by no medicine so efficaciously as by the bark, taken in as considerable doses as the stomach can bear, having first evacuated the stomach and intestines by an emetic and some rhubarb.

The advantage of such a treatment will it is acknowledged be only negatively proved, yet if it should be found, that in cases where the pulse has been very frequent its frequency is diminished, we shall have sufficient encouragement for the trial of it, and if in some instances it should be unnecessarily given, it does not appear that any disagreeable consequences can arise from it; and on the other hand should it succeed in preventing the farther progress of so fatal a disorder, in some cases it will amply compensate us for having administered it where it was not absolutely required in others.

In favor of this plan I have no other facts to advance, except that in the few cases, in which I have had recourse to it, where there was an unnatural frequency of the pulse, with considerable depression of strength and pain in the abdomen, they have been removed, and this Disease has not followed.

Another very obvious thing to be attended to, is to keep the minds of all patients both before, at the time of labour, and afterwards, free from all kinds of anxiety and uneasiness; since, as I have already observed, they seem to have a material influence in subjecting them to the attacks of the Disease.

Thus have I endeavoured to delineate the features of this Disease in the clearest manner that I could; and should the disposition to the epidemic continue, I hope that these sheets will not be useless, if they only answer the purpose of giving a character of the complaint, from which others may be led to

know it, and to form a plan for a more successful treatment than we know at present.

Should any thing interesting occur farther on the subject, which may tend to render the pathology of the Disease more perfect, or the cure less uncertain, I shall be very ready to communicate it. In the mean time I leave this Essay to the consideration and candour of the profession.

THE END.

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