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## LONGINGS OF THE PREGNANT, VIEWED IN LIGHT FROM THE EAST.

BY ALFRED ELA, BOSTON.

SUFFICIENT warrant for taking up this subject is given by the point made in a discussion in 1918 before the Pittsburgh Academy of Medicine,<sup>47</sup> to wit:<sup>39</sup> "It is important that the physician should be versed in obstetrical superstitions in order that he may be in position to deny them and thus assist the patient." Prominent among such superstitions are the longings<sup>40</sup> (cravings, or peculiar yearnings) of pregnant women. From early times<sup>24</sup> these longings have been divided (especially as to abnormal appetites) into (a) the natural and healthy, and (b) the unnatural, revolting or pathological. The latter division seems the only one set out in the textbooks, and apparently it is there treated sufficiently; accordingly, the first class only needs to be considered here. Giles,<sup>23</sup> while ascribing a large portion of the "natural" cravings to superstitious grounds, attempted to account for part as fulfilling some physiological want in food or drink; his opinion, however, can be looked at askance, for he had not yet rid himself of the popular belief that non-satisfaction of longings of that



kind might result in a "longing-mark"<sup>40</sup> or birth-mark; this belief goes further, *viz.*, that if such a mark does not appear, the mark has "fallen on the child,"<sup>24, 26</sup> so that it must be fed with the food longed for, however dangerous and inappropriate to its age. The hazard of inflicting birthmarks was a chief instrument in well-meant pressure on a primipara<sup>2, 3</sup> who declined to have longings, according to her sprightly and detailed account sketched hereinafter; suffice it here to say that she was hounded by her solicitous family to have some longings, till she finally was converted into a firm belief in them and that non-satisfaction of them was followed by birthmarks; so she, after account of her own happy delivery, alleges<sup>1</sup> the following instance in the family of de Buffon, a sceptic thereon, who found his mistake to his sorrow. When the pregnant Mme. de Buffon's cravings were for strawberries, then out of season, he made her (a martyr to an experiment) gaze daily on green ones ripening all too slowly under glass; their child was born with a fine strawberry upon an eyelid, according to a prelate's lively report to Bonaparte, then First Consul and interested in such matters.

While this venerable fallacy of birthmarks or maternal impressions is called "hopeless,"<sup>48</sup> it has been attempted to be explained<sup>45</sup> on the rational ground that the foetus has made the mother sensitive to certain impressions, and



not *vice versa*; but in this (as in other articles<sup>37</sup> on the results of the internal secretions) the verdict runs ahead of the evidence. That mental troubles (such as certain classes of longings) are connected with the endocrine system is extremely probable, but this remains to be worked out.<sup>29</sup> The problem of the physiological part of the origin of longings, cannot now be solved by ascription alone to alterations in the secretions of the alimentary tract due to pregnancy, as was thought a few years ago;<sup>8</sup> but the legal necessity of the woman's keeping control of the part within her power, has (with the decrease in belief in the superstition that injury results from denying longings) become so evident that few or no cases alleging longings are to be found in recent court decisions,<sup>7</sup> though prosecutions, for larceny, etc., by the pregnant, were formerly rather common.<sup>38</sup>

Most of the above, however, with the fine-drawn division into classes<sup>20</sup> by the authors cited and referred to, may be rendered obsolete by the recent investigations into hysteria which may well include all classes of longings among its symptoms. Under the newest definition:<sup>30, 32, 35</sup> "Hysteria is a condition in which symptoms are present which have been produced by suggestion and are curable by psychotherapy," may come the Duchess d'Abrantès' personal experiences<sup>2, 3</sup> which are related so graphically (pleasure and profit being prom-



ised anyone interested who will read the original) that her account, however untechnical in language, might almost serve as a clinical report of a case of "suggestion." Briefly, her first pregnancy had its agonies aggravated by insistent demands of her mother, mother-in-law, and husband that she have some longing, but this she was unable for a long time to evolve. Finally another member of the family joined the chorus, with so many dreadful details of monsters and infants with birthmarks produced by those who had not declared or satisfied longings, that "it would have needed a head stronger than that of a Christian woman carrying her child according to the will of God, not to have surrendered to this line formed by the most true and tender interest."<sup>4</sup> At last she succeeded in achieving a longing for a pineapple, a fruit which she (even in her position in society) had never seen, which then was far more rare than now, and at that date was out of season. She ended by persuading herself that she must either satisfy this new-found desire or die from being unable to eat anything unless this first,<sup>5</sup> and thus brought herself within sight of that starvation which Hurst thinks the real cause of the symptoms hitherto regarded as the toxemias of pregnancy.<sup>31</sup> Fortunately a pineapple was eventually procured, but, being advised not to taste of it till the next day, she caressed it on its stand all night; thereafter being daintily served with it by her



beloved husband, she suddenly acquired such a repugnance to it<sup>6</sup> that neither then nor during the rest of her lifetime was she willing to eat of this fruit, though delighting in pineapple in other forms. Was this unconscious auto-psychotherapy (spontaneous revolt against the suggestion forced upon her), followed by a hysterical survival?<sup>35</sup> This case was of one unusually resistant to pressure made with the best intentions, while similar "suggestion", oftentimes may be malevolent or thoughtless, being made by women who "seem to take peculiar delight in telling all the horrible things they can think of to their pregnant friends,"<sup>40</sup> who are at that time "unduly impressionable." This leads to what is miscalled "autosuggestion"<sup>25</sup> but is really suggestion from environmental pressure. How effective such pressure may become is shown by longings for unwonted food felt, among certain tribes, even by the husbands<sup>43</sup> (and likewise, momentarily, by General Junot, the husband of the Duchess).<sup>5</sup> Such a longing is in strict analogy with the much discussed "couvade," wherein many of the discomfortures of childbirth are suffered by the father who receives most of the care otherwise given to the mother. An article on this subject, based on a clinical case in New York State, has been for two years under way till it was halted because my structure would not hold together—a defect apparently obviated by the new version of hysteria which supplies



the missing keystone to the arch. Autopsychotherapy, on the other hand, seems to be acquired by women in the course of repeated childbirths so that, for instance, a table made up of 300 cases<sup>26</sup> showed that the heavy percentage of married primiparae who manifested longings, evidently as having been taught that this was the proper thing for them to have, steadily decreased almost to the vanishing point after many confinements. This is parallel to the similar cure<sup>46</sup> of paralyzed patients (made by themselves, when perhaps incurable while relying upon the aid of others without giving their own assistance); this cure was through their making instinctive movements largely induced by the buoyancy (physical and mental) found in the swimming bath, of which the therapeutic use in this connection has been lately learned and which has proved of incalculable value.<sup>46</sup>

Which side of the shield bears the true blazon must be adjudged by a more competent investigator. It is hoped that this determination will be incidental to the intensive study of the unique psychic state of pregnant women, the lack of which has already been lamented.<sup>27</sup> Meanwhile, great present interest is excited by the flood of unexpected light thrown upon the subject<sup>9</sup> by a marshaling of material from the East, derived from a civilization unbroken and so far older than ours, and of a people perhaps more acute mentally than are Occidentals. The



material from the East, as thus selected, does not pretend to be scientific, but it is ample in volume because Hindu women evidently have longings much more urgent and universal<sup>12</sup> than are found in the West. These longings are fostered by the seeming necessity of yielding to them, since they are thought to originate,<sup>11</sup> not with the woman herself, but with the child she carries, whose welfare (like that of the community) would be imperilled if its wishes were thwarted. This theory of "two-heartedness,"<sup>11</sup> as it is called, differs utterly from the Greco-Roman doctrine that the child had no separate existence till it was severed from its mother; further researches (regarding the reciprocal interchanges of religious ideas between India and the early Roman Empire) may show this theory as the real source of the Church's doctrines on the sinfulness of abortion; but a discussion of this side issue must be postponed.

While in the West most of the "evidence"<sup>36, 41, 42, 44</sup> is untrustworthy, sporadic and unsystematized, "Hindu schematism allows nothing in nature or the mind, however unimportant or indecent it may seem to a sophisticated Western soul, to pass without formal statement and discussion."<sup>10</sup> The unconscious manifestation of this tendency by the fictionists, as to Dohada or longings, "pervading poetry and fiction all the way from Ceylon to Tibet,"<sup>10</sup>



has in the last-cited article been reduced to form under six rubrics, to wit:<sup>13</sup>

"I. Dohada either directly injures the husband, or impels some act on his part which involves danger or contumely.

"II. Dohada prompts the husband to deeds of heroism, superior skill, wisdom or shrewdness.

"III. Dohada takes the form of pious acts or pious aspirations.

"IV. Dohada is used as an ornamental incident, not influencing the main events of a story.

"V. Dohada is feigned by the woman, in order that she may accomplish some purpose or gratify some desire.

"VI. Dohada is obviated by tricking the woman into the belief that her desire is being fulfilled."

The space available here will not permit giving details under these rubrics except by a few brief comparisons; thus, as to the first rubric, if one had a patient<sup>22</sup> who, like a very vampire, sucked the blood of her sleeping husband, it might be profitable to adduce the case of a king who willingly gave of his blood to gratify a foetus who he knew would finally slay him.<sup>14</sup> If she had a yearning even to eat his flesh,<sup>21, 50</sup> Hindu instances showed the woman satisfied, though she was tricked.<sup>15, 16</sup> Rubric III has many examples<sup>17</sup> which can scarcely be matched

in the less pious West, but which might be paralleled by many a Christian saint having been sanctified *in utero matris*. Under IV, two of the women<sup>18</sup> gratified their longing to roam aloft in an airship, a longing which can be matched by the similar "symbols" in the desire-dreams collected by our psychoanalysts. The whole matter of Dohada is pervaded by evidences of infinite solicitude in pre-natal care (for instance as to diet).<sup>19</sup> Still further afield, in the frequent themes of the Hindu poets<sup>10, 12</sup> that the blossoming and the fruiting of various trees are dependent upon the gratification of their peculiar longings, are even much-needed variants for our poets of Spring.

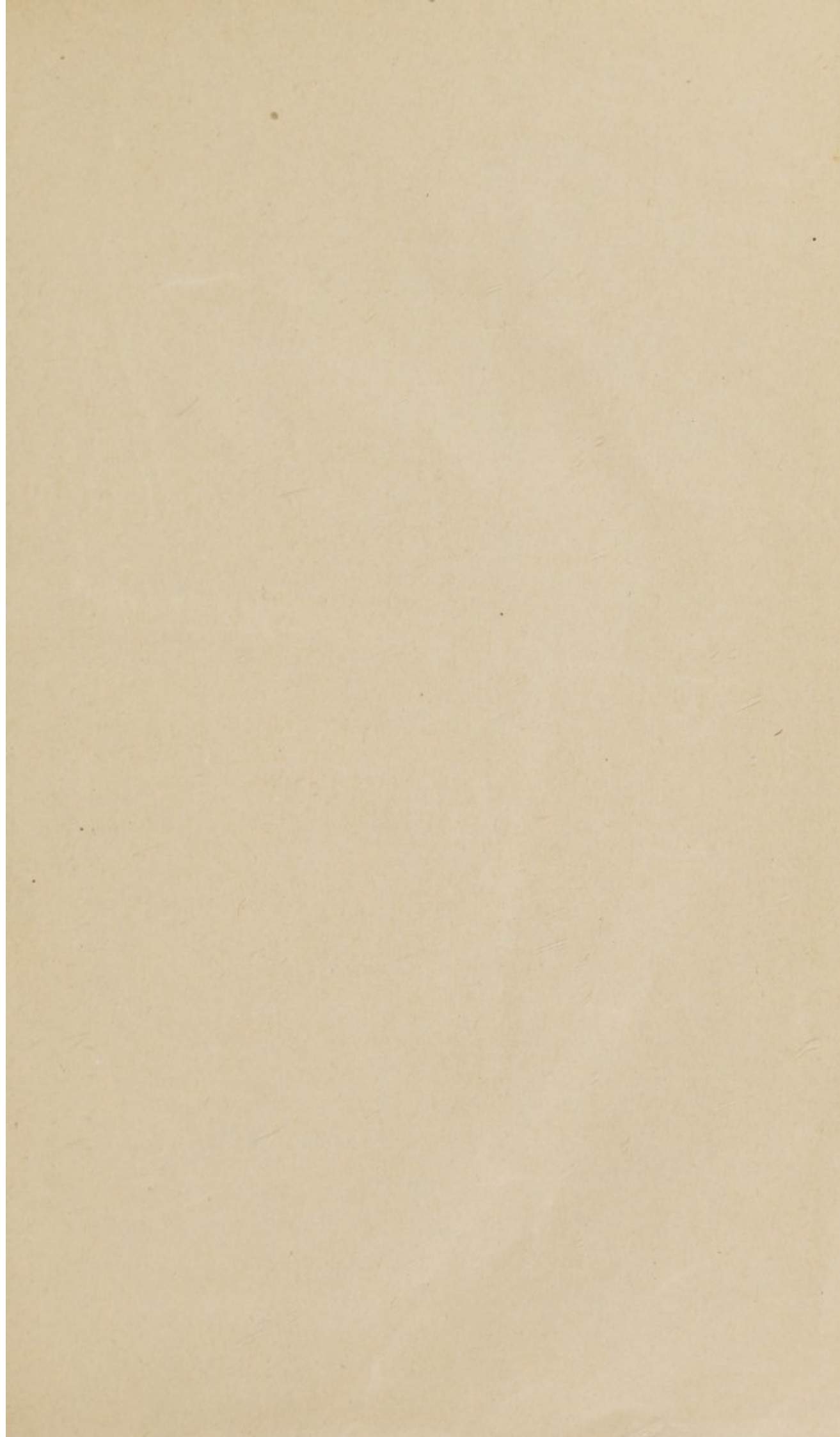
A summary of the present situation may be made by stating that whether the origin of longings is physiological, or hysterical in its new meaning, must await someone's intensive study of the psychic state of pregnant women; meanwhile attention is called to Professor Bloomfield's recent digest of many aspects of the question in the literature of India.

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