

The Midwife.

Biblical Obstetrics.

There are four cases of labour recorded in the Bible, two were twin pregnancies, and two ended fatally.

The first record, to be found in Genesis xxv., presents some curious points of interest. Rebekah was childless for twenty years after marriage; when she became pregnant the vigour and the number of the movements of the child seem to have caused her surprise, and the text tells us that she "went to enquire of the Lord," and there learnt that the twins would have great and unequal destinies. The first came out "red all over, like an hairy garment." Apparently very little time elapsed between the birth of the two boys, for Jacob took hold of the heel of Esau, the firstborn. Isaac, their father, was sixty years of age at this time.

The second account is in Genesis xxxv., 17. In the midst of the sorrowful journeying of Jacob and his sons, Rachel was taken in labour. "And it came to pass when she was in hard labour, that the midwife said unto her, 'Fear not, thou shalt have this son also.'" One observer has advanced that this was a breech labour since the sex is spoken of so assuredly before birth. The mother was evidently more concerned for her child than for herself. The tragedy was that she had him such a brief time. "As her soul was in departing, she called his name Benoni, *i.e.*, son of my sorrow," but his father called him Benjamin. Perhaps he did not wish to be reminded of those dark days. Had the mother become exhausted with the difficult labour, or overwrought with the anxieties of her husband, the family quarrels, and the moving from place to place? No details are given us.

The second twin labour was that of Tamar: "When she travailed, the one put out his hand. The midwife bound upon his hand a scarlet thread, saying 'This came out first.' And it came to pass as he drew back his hand, behold, his brother came out!" Such is the simple, dramatic language of the narrative. It certainly was an unusual complication to have the hand of the second child presenting with the first. The midwife does not seem to have been at all perturbed by the presentation; she possibly had discovered it was either a vertex or breech.

The story of the birth of Ichabod, told in

I Samuel iv., is full of pathos; the wife of Phinehas, son of Eli, overwhelmed with the defeat of the Israelites by the Philistines, the capture of the Ark, the death of her husband and father-in-law, came on in labour prematurely. Even the news of the birth of a son did not rouse her; her one absorbing thought was "The glory is departed from Israel." She died dewailing the downfall of her people.

In Exodus i. we read a lively account of two Hebrew midwives, Shiprah and Puah, whose names deserve to be remembered by the profession, for they were plucky women, and showed a ready wit in defending themselves. The King of Egypt bade them destroy every male Hebrew child; they "feared God" and did not carry out his command; when Pharaoh remonstrated with them they pleaded in their defence that the children were "born before arrival." Every district midwife is familiar with the "lively" women that are "delivered ere the midwives came in unto them."

One of the very earliest references to child-birth is to be found in Job iii., 16, where Job wishes he had never existed, that he had been as an hidden, untimely birth, as infants which never saw light. There is no direct case of miscarriage recorded, but in Ecclesiastes vi., 3, and in Psalm lviii., 8, the expression "an untimely birth" is again used. In the account of the dispute between the women before Solomon as to the ownership of the living child, no mention is made of a midwife being present at the births; apparently it was not unusual to "arise" on the third day (I. Kings, iii., 21), and the one who overlaid her child arose in the night after her delivery and exchanged the children.

The old doom of women, "In sorrow thou shalt bring forth children," is as yet little lightened, but it is, happily, true that "she no more remembereth the anguish for joy that a man is born into the world."

M. O. H.

Rigor Mortis in Utero.

Miss A. H. Holford, Matron of St. Helen's (Maternity) Hospital, Dunedin, New Zealand, reports the following interesting case in *Kai Tiaki*. She writes:—

In view of the discussions which have recently appeared in the medical journals concerning "rigor mortis in utero" it is interest-

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)