

The Midwife.

The Dangers of Parturition in Elderly Primiparæ.

The question as to whether an elderly primipara incurs any extra danger in childbed on account of her age, says the *Lancet*, is one which has been much debated by obstetric writers from the very earliest times. Our contemporary continues: It has recently been submitted for our consideration by a medical correspondent. It would seem only natural that the greater rigidity of the soft parts which is supposed to exist in the older woman, and the partial ankylosis of the coccyx which may also be present, undoubtedly would increase the difficulty and the duration of the labour. Among the older writers—for example, Puzos, Smellie, Deventer, and Mauriceau—this view of the matter was generally accepted, and it was regarded as a true explanation of the assumed increased difficulty of parturition in women beyond their first youth until it was challenged by Madame Lachapelle. Her clinical experience did not tally with the current teaching on this matter, and as she pointed out, while it was quite true that difficult and prolonged labours occurred not infrequently in elderly women, she did not think that they occurred relatively more frequently in them than in women of a younger age. Her view of the matter found support from Cazeaux and Depaul; but, on the other hand, it was opposed as incorrect by Dubois, Wigand, Michaelis, and Naegele. In an endeavour to settle the question an appeal was made to statistics, and papers were published by various writers in favour of one or other side of the question. The figures collected by Cohnstein and Ahlfeld, and quoted by Varnier, seemed to show that not only was labour in elderly primiparæ attended with increased danger to the mothers and the children, but the duration of the labour was increased considerably and the frequency of bad tears of the soft parts was much greater. The supporters of Madame Lachapelle's view pointed out, however, that these conclusions did not settle the matter, since the investigators had not taken sufficient care to compare precisely similar facts, and in a considerable number of their cases there was either a contracted pelvis present or the labour was a complicated one. But statistics collected with greater care, so as to eliminate such errors, tended to confirm the views of those who maintained that with an increase of age is associated

an increase of danger, and there seems no doubt that such a conclusion represents the truth of the matter. On the suggestion of the late Professor Varnier, his pupil Dubé carried out an investigation on the subject, taking care to include in his tables only cases of perfectly normal labour. His figures show that while in the great majority of the labours there is no difference in the average duration at all at the various ages, yet in the small minority of the cases in which labour is unduly prolonged the number of elderly primiparæ exceeds that of young primiparæ by some 10 per cent.; and the prolongation of the labour affects both the first and the second stage. If the frequency with which the labours required artificial termination with the forceps is considered, there is a more striking difference. Thus, while among the young primiparæ the forceps rate was only 1.6 per cent., it rose to no less than 25 per cent. among the elderly primiparæ. These figures are the more instructive since in every other respect the labours were normal, the children were of average size, and there was no evidence of any undue rigidity of the bony outlet of the pelvis. The explanation, therefore, of the increased length of the labours in the minority would seem to lie partly in some extra rigidity of the soft parts and partly in some failure of the contractile power of the uterine muscle possibly associated, as Varnier suggested, with the presence of minute fibroid nodules in the uterine walls not recognisable by ordinary palpation. Not only is there then in a small percentage of elderly primiparæ a somewhat excessive prolongation of labour and an increased need for delivery by forceps, but this is associated with a definite increase in the foetal mortality, since in Dubé's cases it amounted to 5 per cent. in the elderly primiparæ as contrasted with a foetal mortality of only 1.32 per cent. among the young primiparæ.

A year ago the London County Council gave notice by public advertisement that under Sub-Section 2 of Section 1 of the Midwives' Act no woman, unless a certified midwife, may practice as such. As, however, infringements of the rule still continue to occur, and convictions to be recorded, it is proposed to again draw attention by means of public advertisement to the provisions of this sub-section, and to the number of persons who have been convicted of infringing it.

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