

## MIDWIFERY IN THE PHILIPPINES.

Miss Consuelo Gloria, writing in the *American Journal of Nursing*, concerning the introduction of visiting obstetrical nursing in Manila by the American Government, gives an interesting account of the practice of midwifery there. She writes:—

"Midwifery in the Philippines has been in practice since the days of our earliest ancestors, and the same customs are passed on from generation to generation, and are still practiced by most of the poor people, especially in the provinces. Most of the midwives are mean, unclean, and ignorant old women, who have had experience in delivering one or two cases only. There are men also, who act as midwives; I myself saw two of them practicing midwifery. Midwives are paid very poorly, and sometimes get only a chicken or a bunch of bananas for their work. They believe in many superstitions, one of which may interest you a little.

"A pregnant woman's mind always is worried and confused, for it is believed that at nights in nipa houses, the 'asuang' goes under the houses, and tries to eat the fetus in the mother's abdomen. When the 'asuang' is nearest to the pregnant woman, a bird, called 'tic-tic,' announces its coming, by singing many times 'tic-tic,' so that the victim may prepare for her fate. In most houses is found the 'buntot-pagui.' They say that it is used for whipping the 'asuang,' to terrify him. Some people put a lamp under the house, so that they may see the coming of the 'asuang.' When the patient is near to full term, the midwife puts garlic to her axilla, and other folds of the body, for it is thought to be an enemy of the 'asuang,' on account of its characteristic odour. When the pregnant woman goes out to the fields at night, she hangs her hair down, because it is thought that the 'asuang' fears the hair. She is not allowed to eat much rice, for it is believed that this practice makes the abdomen large, and the baby will be born covered with excess vernix caseosa.

"'Asuang' is a Tagalog name, given to an imaginary human being, who is credited with having eaten the liver or body of a human being. This is a very real superstition to many of the old people, and to some of the young people, till a few years ago. The characteristics of the 'asuang' are: (1) It goes without clothes; (2) puts oil in its axilla, as its symbol; (3) It can transform itself into any animal, except the sheep; its custom is to fly at nights watching for pregnant women.

"During labour the midwife puts a very tight binder around the patient's waist, for the purpose of easing her breathing, and to increase the strength of the uterine contractions. She rubs the folds of the patient's body with some cocoanut-oil mixed with crushed garlic, which has been

passed over fire, and gives her as much food as possible; such as 'basa-basa,' a Tagalog word for rice cooked with plenty of water. She examines the patient internally, without any preliminary antiseptic precautions, not even washing her dirty hands.

"In the first stage of a labour, a forcible downward pressure over the fundus is made by the midwife, who, at the same time, utters words calculated to expel the fetus at once, even though it is not yet time for the delivery to take place. This practice, when carried to extremes, often is the cause of bad cases of prolapse of the uterine cervix. The parturient is given a decoction of spices, mainly canela a native plant bark, which is supposed to increase uterine contraction; and her hair is knotted up by the midwife with a handkerchief.

"The child is delivered under a dirty covering, for it is believed if air should come in contact with the internal genitalia it will be crazy.

"If, at the end of five minutes after the child is born, the placenta is not expelled, the midwife pulls the cord, which sometimes breaks, and the placenta remains inside the uterus. I can recall cases in which the mother was dying of the bleeding when we arrived, as a result of this practice.

"During the puerperium, the parturient is told not to drink cold water, but warm water, or some decoction of zarzaparilla. She is not allowed to nurse the baby during the first four days. The midwife gives a douche once daily with a decoction of guava leaves, which is an astringent; but the patient is not allowed to take a bath, until the fortieth day after the delivery, when she is given a full bath of tea made from the leaves of 'sampiloc,' a native tree commonly known throughout the islands. In some towns, leaves of twelve kinds are used in the bath, each variety having its meaning, such as happiness, good fortune, &c. . . . The parturient is allowed to walk around the day following confinement. Many of our patients, delivered in their homes and carefully instructed, are found at the next day's visit to be up and washing the baby's diapers. It is necessary to repeat our instructions again and again, with much patience, and smiles, in order not to antagonise the patients, their friends, and relatives.

"The baby is not allowed to take the colostrum of the mother, but is given instead honey, tied up in a round cloth, shaped in the form of a nipple, which it sucks. When the baby has hiccough, the mother makes a kind of ball of some threads from his diaper. This ball is stuck on its forehead with saliva, and is considered an infallible cure for this affection. In spite of the superstitions and bad practices of the midwives, our work is beginning to be appreciated by these poor women, for many of them, who have had the assistance of the department in one confinement, call us again for their next. When once they have become accustomed to our nursing, they cannot say enough in its praise."

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