

The Midwife.

THREATENED ABORTION.

A lecture on Threatened Abortion was given by Lady Barrett, M.D., M.S., at the College of Ambulance, Vere Street, W., on May 12th, under the auspices of the National Association for the Prevention of Infant Mortality.

Lady Barrett said that the loss of child life through abortion or miscarriage was very serious. It was generally brought about by one of three things, disease, poison, or accident.

Once a healthy normal pregnancy was fully established, it was not easy to upset it. In the highly nervous, though a shock, great or small, might apparently bring this condition about, there was usually some pre-disposing cause behind it. Statistics for 1914 showed that out of 878,000 pregnancies, 175,000 aborted. These figures probably did not include many in the early weeks which were not recognised.

These statistics revealed a corresponding amount of ill-health in the mothers, which ought to be attended to and cured.

When the National Insurance Act came into force, the officials were disconcerted at the large proportion of women who came upon the funds, and at first it was supposed that, as a class, they were greater malingerers than men; but, on investigation, the cases were found to be genuine ill-health, many women for the first time being able to obtain medical attention. The state of things thus brought to light showed the enormous need for greater ante-natal care.

If for any reason the close interlocking, interwoven attachment between the mother and foetus lessens, the uterus comes to regard the latter as a foreign body and finally expels it.

Imperfect fertility in either parent, syphilis, kidney disease, diabetes and lead poisoning were amongst the causes which brought about this condition. As regards the last-named, it was not so generally known that not only may the poison act through the mother, but also through the father. Then, again, the condition might be brought about by disease of any of the membranes, or by some accident, blow or kick, by lifting a heavy weight, or by severe coughing, retching, vomiting, or even straining at stool. Another cause might be displacement of the uterus, either backwards or forwards, which would cause strain when it attempts to rise out of the pelvis.

Endometritis produces an unnatural condition in the union between mother and child. Adhesions grow and become dragged upon causing contractions of the uterus, with threatened abortion.

Any poison in the mother's blood acts on the foetus, and the womb tends to empty itself.

Of drugs, ergot and quinine were used to

produce abortion, though, if the mother were healthy, they might produce no effect.

In Russia, where the peasants ate rye bread, abortion among women is common, ergot being a product of rye.

Lead in any form was liable to bring about abortion, and though steps had been taken to prevent the sale of lead pills to women, they had come to know that diachylon plaster was made from this mineral, and it was a practice among some to make the plaster into pills. Then, again, the specific fevers were another source of danger, especially small-pox and pneumonia; also the toxæmias of pregnancy and severe heart or lung trouble.

The suckling of a child, when the mother was again pregnant, would stimulate the uterus and cause it to contract.

The commonest causes of abortion were—in the early months, endometritis and displacement of the uterus; and, in the later months, syphilis and Bright's disease.

The sign of threatened abortion was hæmorrhage—which might be very slight. If the condition went on to dilation, rupture of membranes, and the ovum presenting, the condition was inevitable.

If abortion occurred after the second month, there was more hæmorrhage than in earlier stages. If there was pain in the early months, it was generally no greater than painful menstruation.

In the early months, there was hæmorrhage without pain; and in the later months, pain without hæmorrhage.

Lady Barrett emphasised the importance of the rule of the Central Midwives Board, which requires midwives to advise that medical aid should be summoned in cases of hæmorrhage, however slight.

Though this might appear arbitrary, it was essential that a correct diagnosis of the condition should be made, as otherwise suitable treatment would not be possible, and it was not the easiest thing in the world to account for a miscarriage. For example, a displacement could be righted, if taken in time; and syphilis or lead poisoning could be treated.

A midwife's curriculum of training did not qualify her to understand these conditions. It would be realized that the treatment would not always be the same. The lecturer said that though it was good to avert threatened abortion, it was better still to avoid the threatening of abortion, and a midwife's duty to her patient began on the day when the latter engaged with her.

Any undue discomfort should have medical advice, and the ante-natal clinics were doing splendid work in this direction.

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