

MIDWIFERY IN GOA.

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Midwifery here is a profession which any woman takes up without suitable training. A woman who attends a few labor cases thinks she knows enough of the practice. Fortunately, such midwives are now falling into disrepute, and qualified practitioners are called in, chiefly by the better classes.

A brief description of the old superstitious practice will be interesting because, notwithstanding its tyranny, the people appear to have resisted its ill effects by reason of their constitutions, which are stronger than ours.

Pregnant women are not allowed to eat, for fear of abortive properties, of the cooked leaves and fruit of *Guilandina moringa* and *Cucurbita melopepo*; the ripe fruit of *anonac*, *Cucumis melo*, *Artocarpus integrifolia*, *Ananasa sativa*, *Anacardium occidentale*, and *plantago* (a species which produces large plantains); the tender shoots of *Andropogon bambus* and *Brassica oleracea gongiloides*.

The following are reputed to produce cold: Vinegar, the fruit of *Cucurbita citrulus*, *Cucumis sativus*, *Eugenia jambulana*, *Punica granatum*, *Garcinea purpurea*, *Averrhoa carambola*, and *Zizyphus jujuba*, and they are accordingly prohibited.

Pregnant women are allowed neither to live in the neighborhood of a confined woman nor to visit her from the third to the eighth day. They are enjoined to wear their dress somewhat tight lest the fœtus should invade the thoracic cavity!

Up to the sixth month of pregnancy, and not later, they may renew the country bangles worn on the wrists. They must not do this later, lest the umbilical cord should twist round the neck or limbs of the child.

Cold baths are prohibited and backaches are treated with conjee (gruel) of *Trigonella fœnum-græcum*.

They must not sit on the doorsteps nor on brooms (made of the midribs of cocoanut leaflets), tether cattle or do similar work; and



during an eclipse they are strictly prohibited from pounding or crushing anything and handling a knife or other cutting instrument, because it is believed that the cutting of the leg of a chicken, for instance, causes the amputation of the corresponding part of the child, and so on.

During the sixth and the eighth months, crossing the limits of the village is supposed to be hurtful.

From the seventh month of pregnancy to three months after the confinement cold water is not to be touched, and at the end of the second or third week of the seventh month two ounces of blood or more are withdrawn by venesection, regardless of the state of their health, and, two days after, a purgative dose of magnesia is given.

The above are about all the hygienic and therapeutic measures taken by the midwives during pregnancy.

When a woman has pains, whether true or false, the midwife, unable to diagnose them, administers an infusion of onions, cumin seed, *Trigonella fœnum-græcum* and the bark of a mango tree (*Mangifera indica*) that has not produced fruit, to decrease them if false or to increase them if true. In the latter case the poor woman is imprisoned in a small, dark, ill-ventilated room, in which, to add to her misery, a number of female friends or neighbors gather and, by way of lightening her pains, recount, in all their details, cases of difficult labors they may have heard of; to make matters worse, some of them turn the small apartment into a smoking room. It may be imagined what an overwhelming depression must get hold of her, particularly if she be a nervous primipara.

When the os dilates so as to admit a couple of fingers the poor woman is seated on a rectangular wooden stool having a large opening in the center under which some cloth or a vessel is placed, and the midwife sits behind her to make the necessary manœuvres: the woman's head is tied with a common rough string across the forehead to prevent vertigo and a towel is coiled round at the level of the xyphoid cartilage to retain the child in the abdominal cavity. It is said that a child, in the absence of this precaution, once laid hold of the mother's heart, which was only released by a quack timely puncturing the child's hand through the cardiac region! The abdomen is rubbed with oil or the yolk of an egg to facilitate the labor, and the former is also applied to the sacral region to relieve the backache. The genital canal is oiled, irrespective of uterine contractions, and oil is also applied, even during a contraction, to the uterine cavity as far as it can be done. No matter what the stage of the labor

may be, expulsive efforts are urged. The perinæum is supported by pressing upon it with a piece of cloth held in the hand, from below upward during contractions, and is oiled during the intervals.

At the end of the second stage a metal vessel is beaten upon to make the child fearless, and the baby is not separated from the mother even if it cries lustily. After this they proceed to extract the placenta (either while the patient is seated or is upon her knees, kept wide apart), the retention of which, whether due to uterine fatigue or not, is appalling to them. Abdominal frictions with the juice of onions are then made, the hair of the confined woman is rubbed on her tongue, worms and the fæcal matter of animals, draughts of wood ashes, or the raw juice of a chicken pounded to a pulp, are given to provoke nausea. Should these means fail to cause the expulsion, the midwife actually catches hold of the cord and keeps tugging at it, and some, more rash than others, introduce the hand and somehow or other extract the placenta, of the integrity of which they can not judge, and so rest satisfied with the feat. The placenta is then buried somewhere in the house.

All this time the newborn child, quite unprotected, either remains on the ground, soiled with blood, or in the hands of some charitable woman. Under the umbilical cord a towel is laid for receiving, from the near relatives of the newborn, presents of money for the midwife; after this ceremony the cord is ligatured, nine inches long, and divided, and the child is handed over to some one; the knife, together with the worn-out broom used for sweeping the room, being placed under the mother's pillow during the puerperium.

Should there be hæmorrhage after the third stage, the only hæmodynamic used is a stimulating fomentation, which sometimes, added to syncope, stops it.

Regardless of the state of the uterus and the pulse, the midwife puts on the binder—a piece of cloth of extraordinary size, about a foot wide and twenty-four feet long, coiled round and round the abdomen—the poor patient standing up with or without support. This operation is repeated every day during the puerperal period. Thick folds of cloth, on which is poured a glass of Lisbon wine (or of country liquor, in the case of primiparæ), are used for receiving the lochial discharge, being renewed only when soaked, no matter what time this takes. The genitals are washed by seating the patient on the aforementioned square stool—whether the lochial discharge is offensive or not—and the perinæum, lacerated or not, is considered of no consequence. With this the parturient is marched off to her bed, generally spread

on the ground, in which she has to sit up, supported or not, for a couple of hours. This posture is warranted by the *sage femmes* to avoid vertigo, syncope and convulsions; if it does not, all other means are tried but the position is not altered. While in the same position a glass of country spirits is served to whet the appetite, followed by a large quantity of coarse rice and curry, regardless of her digestive powers. Naturally she devours it, both on account of the stimulating effects of the liquor and of the long fast. This results in after-pains, which are treated with liberal doses of the same stimulants. It is also abundantly served to all present, whether they like it or not, so that the fumes of the drink pervade the whole house. This is the case especially when the firstborn is a male child.

The child is violently rubbed with a mixture of tamarind pulp, yolk of an egg and rice flour, then with oil, and is finally washed in hot water mixed with Lisbon wine or country liquor, the poor little thing crying piteously all the while. During the inunction various parts of the head and face are, as it were, molded into proper shape—for instance, if the forehead bulges out it is pressed in, if the nose appears flat or short it is elevated or pulled down, and so on. The process of shaping is carried on for a couple of weeks or more, and to it alone is ascribed the regularity of the features. A foot bath in hot oil is given, and pieces of cloth soaked in oil are put on the head for curing any chill. The child is then wrapped in cotton stuffs and given insipid rice conjee or thin gruel, sometimes mixed with castor oil sweetened with jaggery, for two days; then it is put to the mother's breast. A very hard experience for the poor creature at the very outset of life!

In the case of stillborn children an attempt at resuscitation is made by, as it were, breathing life into them, as follows: They are fomented with hot oil and treated with the smoke of country cigars (made by rolling tobacco in dry plantain leaf) held in the mouth by the lighted end, the smoke being blown through the other end *into all the orifices* of the body; or with breath impregnated with garlic, crushed and held in the mouth. If these efforts be fruitless, the midwife has recourse to suction at the meatus urinarius and ostium vaginæ. To conduct or maintain heat, the placenta with the cord intact is placed in a saucepan full of oil and left to boil over a charcoal fire—for many days in the case of prematurely born children and until signs of returning life are manifested in that of stillborn children.

During the remainder of the first day the parturient woman lies down or sits up a while, but she is deprived of rest by the numerous female visitors; from the second day she is at liberty to do either at

pleasure. On the fourth day fish enters into the dietary, as well as cakes made of rice flour and jaggery. Uncooked fish is never to be taken to the lying-in apartment, as it is supposed to be hurtful. The leaf of *Piper biltle*, some of the nut of *Areca catechu*, and extract of *Acacia catechu* with a little lime are given to the lying-in woman, to be chewed, a little of the juice being sometimes given to the child. The umbilical cord, which was secured to the abdomen, is now tied to the groins or to the neck. Strings of black thread are tied round the waist, wrists and neck of the child. Lampblack mixed with oil is applied to the sclerotic conjunctivæ of mother and child and to the latter's navel. On the night of the sixth day the mother sits up, taking the child, without a wink of sleep, and is roused immediately if she happens to dose. The friends and neighbors of either sex, possessed of spirits (alcoholic), make merry in the house, singing to the sound of the *batoque*—a drum made out of a barrel-shaped earthen vessel, having two opposite openings, one about three inches in diameter and the other about twelve, the latter being closed with the distended, dried skin of *lacerta iguana*, which is tightly drawn over and secured to it—to drive away the so-called *sotvee* (tetanus?), highly fatal both to mother and child, and which, it is believed, is carried away by the midwife on the next day.

On the seventh day the patient, changing all her clothes but not the binder, shifts to another apartment prepared for her.

On the eighth day a purgative is given and from the tenth, if the woman is all right, she takes a daily bath. All baths are given in the morning, preceded by massage with cocoanut oil, and followed by the administration of a glass of wine or spirits. Formerly the bath was given from the second day.

During the puerperal period she changes her dress as often as she dreams, the clothes being previously washed, dried and subjected to aromatic vapors from burning incense or flowers of *Lavandula vera*. Those who have no spare clothes wear what they have on, after duly fumigating them.

During the labor, liquor is given but no food except rice conjee, if needed. After-pains are treated with fomentations and carminatives, such as ginger, onions, etc. Any wound in the perinæum is treated by the application of irritants in the second week. Poor people reassume the household duties after the twelfth day and others keep their room, which always remains closed for a month. The binder is used for five weeks, in the case of the birth of a female child, and longer in that of a male.

