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Introductory Lecture to the Course of Obstetrics and Diseases of Women and Children, in Jefferson Medical College of Philadelphia, for the Session of 1840-41.

Robert M. Huston, MD

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INTRODUCTORY LECTURE

TO THE

COURSE OF OBSTETRICS

AND

DISEASES OF WOMEN AND CHILDREN,

IN

JEFFERSON MEDICAL COLLEGE

OF PHILADELPHIA,

FOR THE SESSION OF 1840-41,

BY R. M. HUSTON, M. D.,


Published by the Members of the Class.

Philadelphia:

PRINTED BY WILLIAM F. GEDDES,
112 Chestnut Street,
1840.
Philadelphia, November 13th, 1840.

Professor R. M. Huston:

Dear Sir,—At a meeting of the Medical Class of the Jefferson College, held yesterday evening in the anatomical theatre, Mr. J. A. Chilton, of Va., having been called to the chair, we, the undersigned, members of the Class, were appointed a Committee to solicit of you a copy of your very able and instructive Introductory Lecture for publication.

In the discharge of this very agreeable duty, permit us to add our wishes to those of the other members of the class, that you will comply with their request, believing, as we do, that your Lecture is most eminently calculated to encourage, gratify, and enlighten the mind of the students.

With sentiments of the highest regard, we subscribe ourselves

Yours, most obediently,

J. A. CHILTON, of Va.
CHAS. A. HARDING, Me.
A. A. HOWELL, N. J.
J. E. ELLIS, Va.
WELLINGTON BIRD, Pa.
W. J. SMITH, Geo.
J. B. BALL, Va.

Committee.

Philadelphia, November 14th, 1840.

Gentlemen:

The Introductory Lecture, of which you request a copy for publication, was prepared without the least expectation that it would ever be used for any other than the particular purpose for which it was written. It has therefore appeared to me that the subjects which are discussed in it, and the manner in which they are presented, are not well suited for publication. Nevertheless, I am deeply sensible of the honor done me by the members of the Class in the proceedings you have conveyed to me, and shall cheerfully yield my own judgment to what I am assured is their unanimous request.

For the very kind and complimentary manner in which you, gentlemen, have performed the task assigned you by those whom you represent, I beg you will accept of my grateful thanks.

With great respect, I am, your friend, &c.

R. M. HUSTON.

To Messrs. John A. Chilton,
Charles A. Harding,
A. A. Howell,
J. E. Ellis,
Wellingtont Bird,
W. J. Smith,
J. B. Ball.

Committee of the Class of Jefferson Med. Col.
Gentlemen:

Whilst long established custom demands of a lecturer that his course of instruction shall be preceded by an introductory address, it allows him the greatest latitude in the selection of the topics of which it shall be composed. Sometimes it serves the agreeable purpose of introducing himself to those who are to join him in the investigation of science, and with whom he is about to form an acquaintance which time and circumstances may ripen into lasting friendship. Occasionally, too, as in the present instance, it affords him the opportunity of greeting the return of some, to whom he is indebted for many kind and courteous attentions during a previous session.

Those of the latter class, who were present at the close of last winter's course, remember too well the feelings with which we parted, to render it necessary for me now to express how great is the gratification I experience on addressing them again. But, pleasant as it is to speak of ourselves, and of reminiscences which are dear to the human heart, we must not lose sight of the important object of your attendance here, nor the shortness of the time within which we must discuss the many deeply interesting subjects, which it is your duty and your desire to understand.

History teaches us, that from a very early period, the healing art has been divided into various branches, constituting separate objects of pursuit. How this arrangement was effected in the first instance, it is perhaps scarcely necessary now to inquire. The offspring of accident, probably, in the beginning, it has been recognised by time, until it has come to be regarded as legitimate. In fact, reason and experience show, that from the shortness of man's life, and the boundlessness of science, it is neces-
sary for those who would arrive at eminence that they shall cir-
cumscribe the objects of their attention. In the language of Dr.
Johnson: “Those who attain any excellence, commonly spend
life in one pursuit; for excellence is not often obtained upon
easier terms.”

Ignorant of the means employed in modern times for recording
and diffusing information, mankind were restricted, in the earlier
periods of society, to tradition and direct oral communications.
Taught by every day’s experience how liable knowledge is to be
lost or deteriorated by this imperfect mode of transmitting it
from one generation to the next, the plan seems to have been
erly adopted of perpetuating trades or occupations in the fami-
lies of those by whom they were followed. This, it must be ad-
mitted, was in the then existing state of things, the most effectual
way of accumulating facts, and rendering knowledge useful; for
beside enlarging the sphere of individual observation, family in-
terest and pride were enlisted in the service of collecting and
preserving whatever of useful was known, and all that accident
or reason might suggest.

That the office of midwife constituted a separate calling at a
very early date, we have the highest authority for declaring.
We are expressly told by Moses that a midwife was in attend-
ance upon Rachel, at the birth of Benjamin; and also with Ta-
mar, at the time of her delivery of the twins, Pharez and Zarah.
In both instances, it may be remarked, the midwives are not
spoken of as ordinary attendants, merely discharging the ob-
ligations of good neighborship, but as performing active profes-
sional duties, although the record affords us no very flattering
evidence of their competency for the task they assumed. As an
art, therefore, we may speak of midwifery as among the first
that were practised: as a science, it claims no great antiquity.
Long regarded as a female occupation, it received but little at-
tention from those best qualified to cultivate it, until it came, like
the other departments of our profession, to be considered as a
legitimate branch of philosophy. Why it did not sooner claim
the attention of the wise and benevolent, admits of various ex-
planations.

By some eminent writers, the mildness of the climate in which
our race began, and the simple and unenervating habits to which they were addicted, by opposing no obstacles to the healthful performance of the various functions of the body, are thought to be sufficient reasons for the neglect to cultivate a kind of knowledge, the necessity for the exercise of which they were not accustomed to witness. Moreover, it was decreed to our first mother, that in sorrow she should bring forth children. The absolute terms of this law, and its daily fulfilment in the anguish of all who became mothers, perhaps contributed in no small degree to postpone all attempts to avoid or even ameliorate the pangs of childbirth, from a conviction that they were inevitable. The instinctive modesty of the sex, too, created an almost insurmountable barrier to man's presence, and to all attempts at investigation. We find, accordingly, that for a long time, as I have already remarked, among the Hebrews and Egyptians, the practice of midwifery was altogether confined to females. There is little doubt, in fact, that this continued to be the universal custom, until the passage of the celebrated Athenian law, by which women and slaves were prohibited from practising physic in any of its branches, of which this seems to have been regarded as one.

But the severity of this law, and its repugnance to the modest feelings of the softer sex, soon procured its repeal, and obstetrical practice was again entrusted to females, with no other restriction than that of being free born—a restriction which indicated the opinion entertained, at the time, both of the honor and the responsibility of the calling.

Under the circumstances to which we have referred, it is scarcely to be expected that many facts would be collected, or any extensive inquiries instituted, proper for the establishment of sound principles or methodical treatment. We infer, therefore, that at the time when obstetrical practice was confined to female hands, no regular or systematic treatment was adopted or pursued; but if any such had existence, the period is now too distant, and the channels through which all our information is derived too imperfect, to afford us any satisfactory intelligence on the subject.

It is in the writings of Hippocrates that we find the first attempt at any thing like a regular treatise on this important branch
of medical science; hence it is, that with great justice he has been called "the father of Midwifery, as well as of Medicine."

It cannot be pretended, however, that Hippocrates had very correct notions of the mechanism of labor, and consequently, many of his rules are exceedingly erroneous. The very palpable blunders, contained in his writings on this subject, forbid the belief that he ever could have been present at many deliveries. In his observations on the diseases of females, more experience and better judgment are displayed. These seem indeed to have claimed a large share of his attention, inasmuch as it is said that he prescribed more medicines for their cure than for all other complaints.

Of the writings of Hippocrates generally, it has always been admitted that they display great accuracy of observation, and very clear descriptions of the phenomena of disease, with much acuteness in prognosis and diagnosis, as well as in the selection of his curative means; and these characteristics are especially to be observed in the chapters just referred to.

But anatomy, in his time, was little cultivated; whereas, for the proper management of labors, especially when preternatural, an intimate acquaintance with the structure of the pelvis and the organs which it contains, is so essentially necessary that no observation of cases, however numerous, can at all supply the deficiency. Hippocrates, however, had not even experience as the basis of his knowledge. The egregious blunders, which I have said are contained in his obstetrical writings, leave no room to doubt that his information on the subject must have been derived chiefly from ignorant midwives, and not from his own observation; and yet so great was the influence of every thing which emanated from his great mind, in this as well as the other departments of our profession, that his authority extended down even to so late as the sixteenth century; and his theory of generation, with some modifications, may still be regarded as the prevalent doctrine of the day.

It is true, that within the period mentioned, there were numerous writers on obstetrics,—some of whom gained great celebrity, and others, to whom we are indebted for valuable improvements. Some of these are entitled to a passing notice.
The writings of Aristotle on midwifery, though long celebrated, are obnoxious to even severer criticism than those of Hippocrates. Notwithstanding he was in the order of time a little later, he seems to have profited nothing by that circumstance. The favorite pupil and successor of Plato, he studied midwifery only as a branch of general philosophy. Regarding his labors in this point of view, and recollecting that he possessed none of the advantages of a practitioner of the art, we shall perhaps find less reason to laugh at his absurdities than to be surprised at his attainments.

Even the renowned Celsus, who lived so lately as the time of Tiberius, and whose attention was more exclusively devoted to medicine, was content to copy the obstetrical precepts of the great father, almost "without note or comment." But Moschion, his contemporary, pursued the study much more in the spirit of true philosophy. And yet, while the trumpet of fame is constantly sounding the names of Aristotle and Celsus in our ears, how few among us of the present day have ever heard the name of Moschion! To him we are indebted for many excellent precepts in our art, founded on the relation of the fetus to the structure of the pelvis. He it was who first pointed out the propriety, in certain cases, of turning the fetus in utero—for which he laid down very comprehensive rules, as well as for the management of footling cases, when occurring spontaneously. This certainly was a great step in the progress of improvement. Turning the fetus in utero, for the purpose of hastening delivery, or of effecting a more favorable position, remains to be one of our most valuable resources.

Still, however, the great importance of a thorough knowledge of the anatomical structure and physiological actions of the maternal organs, appears to have been in a great measure overlooked.

Parturition, in the most restricted sense of the term, is a mechanical process, accomplished by the action of vital organs. In order, therefore, rightly to understand the phenomena that occur, it is necessary not only to possess a correct knowledge of the mechanical relations of the pelvis and fetus, but also of the nature and action of the organs which supply the requisite force; and
these should be considered both in their normal and abnormal condition. To this knowledge, neither Moschion nor Celsus, nor any who preceded them, had the least pretension.

In the works of Rufus, an Ephesian, who lived during the reign of the Emperor Trajan, is to be found the first attempt to supply this great deficiency. To him we are indebted for the first regular description of the uterus and its appendages. It is likewise alleged by very high authority, that he pointed out the fallopian tubes, notwithstanding the honor of their discovery was claimed long since his time by Galen. With the mass of the profession, however, Fallopius is supposed to have made this discovery in consequence of their being called by his name; whereas the only credit to which he is entitled arises from his having very well described them, and assigned them their proper functions.

In the long space of time intervening from Hippocrates to Rufus, comprising about 600 years, many individuals must have pursued obstetrics as a business, and doubtless many facts and useful suggestions were gleaned from their daily observation, calculated to modify and improve the practice; but no one seems to have undertaken the important task of collecting and arranging these in a manner fitted for general use. The honor and the labor of doing this, according to Le Clerc, was left for the accomplished Aetius, fully a century later. Aetius, (or Ætius, as he is sometimes called,) not merely collected and arranged that which others had contributed, but he made so many and great additions to the stock of knowledge as to entitle midwifery to the character of a science, which it cannot by any means be said to have deserved, anterior to the appearance of his extensive works on the diseases and management of women.

Among other things, he described, with greater accuracy and minuteness, the organs subservient to generation, and the peculiar disturbances of the female system accompanying pregnancy. He likewise wrote very extensively on difficult labors, and pointed out, with much judgment, most of the obstacles to delivery which we recognise at the present time, peculiar either to the mother or child. Ignorance, however, of the great modern instrument for supplying mechanical assistance, the forceps, confined him, in extreme cases, to turning and the crotchet.
In his directions, for practising the first of these operations, are contained very proper cautions; but in reference to the latter, we cannot doubt that recourse was often had to that terrible instrument in cases such as are now found to be altogether manageable by less fatal means. Nevertheless, it must be conceded, that the great outline of the science was drawn by Aetius. The walls of the temple were erected by him—the finishing, and adaptation of every part to useful purposes, has been the work of after ages and of many hands.

The time of Aetius, therefore, must be regarded as a most important era in our science. Since then, its growth has kept pace with its kindred sciences; and if time and the occasion permitted, it would be an instructive and not uninteresting task to follow up its progress, commencing at the epoch to which I have referred, and to point out those whose labors have contributed most to bring it to its present high perfection. A very few examples, however, must suffice.

It is remarkable, that the last of the old Greek writers on medicine is believed to have been the first male practitioner who devoted himself exclusively to the practice and cultivation of obstetrics. I allude now to Paul, of Egina. According to Le Clerc, Paul lived in the fourth century; but Dr. Friend, with greater probability, places him in the seventh century.

From the circumstance of Paul's devoting himself altogether to the practice of Obstetrics, it is fair to conclude that it was not unusual, even at that early day, to solicit the aid of our sex.

Smellie has certainly underrated the writings of Paul, in maintaining that they are mainly to be praised for the elegance with which they are written. By classing feet presentations with those of the head as natural, he undoubtedly contributed greatly to dispel the unfounded apprehensions which had existed in regard to such labors, from Hippocrates downwards, and which were fruitful of bad consequences, by inducing attempts in all cases to bring down the fetal head. But his example alone, in devoting himself wholly to our calling, was valuable in declaring its importance, and pointing out the true mode of its successful cultivation. "He sought excellence by spending life in one pursuit."
From the time of Paul until after the discovery of the art of printing, we find but little in our history that is worthy of remark. Even Avicenna and Albucasis, who wrote largely on obstetrics, have left us slight evidence for believing that they knew more than those who preceded them.

We are especially struck with the ignorance manifested by Avicenna, in classing all the presentations of the head as natural and proper, and regarding those of the lower extremities as dangerous and to be corrected. The reverse of this we know to be very often true.

From these glaring errors, it is evident that Avicenna never could have practised obstetrics to any great extent, or a mind so discriminating as his would have arrived at better conclusions, in matters so plain and demonstrable.

After this, medicine, which had been so well cultivated in the East, began to decline, and was not revived until about the fifteenth century—a long night of darkness, dispelled at last by the noble discovery to which we have already alluded.

From the moment that the art of printing became known, the bonds, which may be said to have enchained the human mind, were rent, and science and knowledge of every kind, received a new and powerful impulse, the force of which we are not even yet able fully to appreciate. Europe was soon in a blaze of light. The English, and French, and Germans, all began to produce writers on medicine; and obstetrics, in particular, received its full share of attention. At first, the writings of the ancients were translated and generally read; and the scarcely less celebrated works of the Arabians, in particular those of Rhazes, Avicenna, and Albucasis, were the principal texts, if not the absolute authorities to which they referred.

But this condition of pupilage was of short duration; and Europe was not long in repaying to those from whom she had borrowed, with an hundred fold interest.

Without stopping to inquire into the merits of the various aspirants for fame who sprung forth at that notable period, Ambrose Paré, among the moderns, was undoubtedly the first who made any considerable improvements in our science. This celebrated improver in medicine and surgery, as he has been very properly
styled, exploded the absurd practice which had prevailed, of tossing and shaking the mother, in order to change the position of the child, and, in lieu thereof, turned and delivered by the feet; this was his practice, indeed, in all preternatural cases.

But, it was not merely in the particular changes which he introduced, in the management of women, that he benefited the science—it was in the strong common sense manner in which he treated all the subjects of medical science that particularly claimed his attention; and more especially, in resorting to the bed-side for his facts, and deducing his conclusions from what he saw, instead of relying exclusively upon authorities as guides for his practice, however ancient or universally acknowledged. In this respect, his example is deserving the imitation of all who aspire to honor or usefulness in our profession.

Certainly, I would not counsel any man to discard the opinions and the testimony of the eminent and experienced who have preceded him, until by proper examination and an experience equally good, he has proved them to be erroneous. In medicine, however, a wholesome—a reasonable scepticism, is useful and proper. Science, ours especially, is progressive. New facts are continually being added; and from these, new deductions are legitimately to be drawn. In the language of a late elegant writer:—

"we willingly submit to the authority and attestations of the dead; but when it would triumph over all the improvements and experience of the living, it is no longer submission, but slavery."

It was during the time of Pare, that the Hospitals of Paris, especially the Hôtel Dieu, began to contribute so largely to the advancement of surgery and midwifery. Poor patients being freely admitted into these institutions, a large number of cases was thus brought together, and very extensive opportunities afforded for the cultivation of these branches of medical science.

The advantages which were thus gained for the improvement of obstetrics, together with the progress of polite literature, so far obtained an ascendancy over ignorance and prejudice, as to cause male practitioners to be called upon in all difficult labors, in the most refined city of the world. And it is worthy to be remarked, that every where, at the present day, obstetrical science flourishes just in proportion as the other arts and sciences are
prized,—the most cultivated and refined societies, being those in
which male practitioners are the most commonly employed.

The recent attempt of an individual to cast odium upon this
custom, by animadverting on what he is pleased to term "the
scandalous practice of employing men in the business of midwifery,"* has had no other effect than to secure for him the contempt of all
who deem him worthy of so much notice. Substituting idle gossip
for facts, and unworthy prejudices for arguments, his contempti­
ble production has met, at the threshold of public opinion, with
the merited fate of all anonymous libellers. That the hardy old­
fashioned Queen of George III. should have been delivered safely
of all her children, without the aid of a male practitioner, and
that therefore all the women in Christendom ought to bear chil­
dren in the same way, may be a very sapient argument with that
writer, but it must sound very like nonsense to every one else.
In that respect at least, her Majesty's grand-daughter followed
not her example; nor is her other grand-daughter, the present
Queen of Great Britain, likely to be influenced by such argu­
ments, since the court Journals have already announced that three
distinguished practitioners are engaged to attend in her approach­
ing confinement. Even in Paris, where females are educated for
the business, and which boasts of a Lachapelle and a Boivin, the
sagacious mind of Napoleon could discover abler hands and safer
councils among our sex, to which to entrust the partner of his
throne and the heir of his glory. The mind of that man must be
disordered indeed, which can imagine that a lewd thought might
be excited during the pains and perils of child-birth!

The honor of effecting the change in the policy of the great
Parisian Hospitals, by which midwifery cases were admitted into
its wards, has been claimed for Clement, a distinguished practi­
tioner of our art in that city, a little subsequent to the time of
Paré; but a candid examination of the historical evidence in the
case, must satisfy any one that the credit is due to the command­
ing influence of the great Surgeon.

* "Observations on the impropriety of men being employed in the business of Mid­
To Clement, probably, must be ascribed the honor of having been the first physician who practiced obstetrics in that great city, in the private walks of life.

The admission of parturient cases into the large Hospitals, and the employment of physicians in the business of midwifery in private life, opened at once the widest field for observation; nor was the world long without reaping the rich harvest which it produced. I refer now especially to the work of Mauriceau—a work so rich in matter, so methodical, and altogether so judicious, as scarcely to have been improved upon since. In fact, the precepts of this great Obstetrician, being based upon a proper consideration of the parts concerned in parturition, their structure and functions, enlightened withal by the very extensive experience of the author, still continue to exert no inconsiderable influence over the minds of our older practitioners. This great work was published at Paris in the year 1668. It commences with a description of the pelvis and softer parts of the female concerned in generation and delivery; next, a distinct and comprehensive account of the diseases of pregnancy; and concludes with a sketch of the most common diseases of women and children.

Here, then, was an elaborate work, covering the broad ground of obstetrical science.

Having arrived at this point, it may be well perhaps for us to pause a moment in our march, and examine how much was accomplished, and what still remained for future inquiry and improvement.

We have seen that the shape, structure, and general peculiarities of the pelvis, and also the fetal head, and the relation of the one to the other, were pretty well understood. The softer parts, likewise, which are subservient to generation, were anatomically described, and their appropriate functions pointed out. The mechanical difficulties which occur, in consequence of disproportion in size between the pelvis and fetal head, preventing the ready transmission of the latter, were not unknown. But the means of overcoming these difficulties, consistently with the preservation of the lives of both mother and offspring, were very partially known. In the first place, the mechanism of labor, as it is now
termed, was not well understood. It was generally supposed that the head passed through the pelvis in whatever position it presented at the upper strait, without those turns which it is known to make, at its different stages of progression. Nor did the practitioners of that time comprehend the effect of the different positions of the head at the brim of the pelvis, and the importance, in many instances, of judiciously interposing at an early period of the labor, so as to cause the head to present in the most favorable manner. Uterine inertia was treated with copious draughts of the most diffusible stimuli. When these failed, or where mechanical difficulties occurred, recourse was had to turning, the fillet, or the crotchet. Of the fruits of such a practice, I shall have frequent occasions to speak, in the progress of our course. It is astonishing that Mauriceau, whose writings give evidence of his having treated most of the varieties of obstructed parturition, should have spent so much time and attention in contriving different forms of the fillet, as a mechanical means of overcoming these obstacles, without thinking of a material that would retain the form which his reason must have dictated to be necessary; or, in other words, without devising something like the forceps. The difficulty of passing the fillet, and the impossi­bility of applying the requisite force in the proper line of direction, necessarily resulted in frequent failures. Turning, and the crotchet, were then the only alternatives. The first was hazardous to the child; and when the waters were drained off, emi­nently dangerous to the mother;—and the latter was certain death, at least to the child. The invention of the forceps, there­fore, which is calculated to preserve the lives of both, while it enables us to surmount most of the difficulties that occur, depend­ing upon inertia, mechanical obstruction, or any of those accidents which call for hasty delivery, must be regarded as a most important event.

It was during the time that Mauriceau was so nobly and success­fully engaged at Paris, in advancing our science, that his cotemporaries, the Chamberlains of London, invented this instrument. Few discoveries of equal importance to humanity, have ever been made; and it is perhaps the only one, that instead
of honoring the inventors, has connected their names with the most mortifying and dishonorable recollections.

The elder Chamberlain and his three sons were largely engaged in the practice of obstetrics, and by keeping their invention a profound secret, it is said they nearly monopolized the business of the great city in which they resided. The first, nay, the only intimation, it is affirmed, which the profession received from them of the existence of anything of the kind, was contained in a note appended to a translation of the work of Mauriceau into English, by one of the sons, in which the boast is made, that they possessed a much better method of extraction than any of those mentioned by the Author. Brilliant, therefore, as was the invention, all credit is lost to them, in the narrow policy and sordid motives by which it was concealed. Nor was either the public or the profession further enlightened in regard to the instrument, until about half a century afterward; until, in fact, the secret was purchased of the Chamberlain family by Dr. Edmund Chapman, an able and benevolent teacher of obstetrics at the time in London. Unlike the inventors, this excellent man immediately published a description of it, with directions for its proper application.

The difference in conduct, by which these individuals are marked on the page of history, ought to caution all who are inclined to lend an ear to the suggestions of an unworthy spirit. How many have made shipwreck of a good reputation, through the “auri sacra fames!”

A knowledge of the forceps, by enabling well instructed obstetricians to deliver women under great difficulties, without destroying the child, inspired confidence in human skill, and opened the way for a more general employment of physicians in that capacity; and thus contributed, in a yet more enlarged manner, to the improvement of the science.

The eighteenth century is distinguished on the page of history for vast and important events in the condition of the world. In the midst of the revolutions that were going on in science and the arts, it was impossible that ours could remain stationary. Stimulated by the celebrity of Mauriceau, a number of writers on
midwifery appeared nearly simultaneously in England, France, and Holland. Although the productions of many of these were so overloaded with obsolete and absurd notions as to consign them early to the tomb of oblivion, there were others whose sterling merits preserved them from that fate. We have notable examples of this in Henry Daventer of Holland, and La Motte of Normandy, who published—the former in 1771, and the latter in 1715.

Daventer was the first to point out the axis of the pelvis, and the importance of attending to it in the management of labor; and he is said to have been the first to propose rupturing the membranes, to excite uterine contraction in flooding cases. These are now cardinal objects in obstetrical science. The work of La Motte, too, contains much sound and practical matter, and may yet be referred to with advantage by those who desire to enter profoundly into the consideration of the important subjects of which it treats. Beside those already named, Hildanus, Heister, Friend, and Boerhaave, all contributed largely to the building up of our science. And still more recently, Smellie, Osborn, Hunter, Levret, Puzos, Baudeloque, Hamilton, and Denman, labored with equal zeal and success. From the rich treasures which they have supplied, we shall draw largely during our winter's investigations. Nor are we less indebted to many living authors for valuable contributions on nearly every subject embraced within the range of our department. To the labors of these, we shall have occasion continually to advert, when treating of the subjects on which they have respectively written: and these references will not be the least interesting part of our course.

It is our good fortune to live, gentlemen, in an age which is unparalleled for the wide and rapid extension of every department of human knowledge. All the arts and sciences are now cultivated to an extent unknown at any former period. Nor in the revolutions which are going on around us, has the broad field of medicine been suffered to lie an uncultivated and barren waste. Certainly at no former time has the science presented an aspect so interesting as at the present moment. Many of its cultivators are distinguished for bold inquiry and profound observation, and
discoveries and improvements are the daily fruits of their labors. Chemistry, natural philosophy, mechanics, all the arts and kindred sciences, are aiding to accelerate its progress. The press teems with matter. Essays, full of learning and deep investigation, on nearly every important subject, pour in upon us from the various quarters of the globe, almost too rapidly to admit of being read.

But every faithful picture presents its dark shades, as well as its beautifully colored figures; and this is also true in the present instance. Many of the statements which are daily submitted to our notice, have no better foundation than weak credulity or base imposture. Of the so called systems and theories which are pompously set forth to challenge our acceptance, not a few may be denounced as wild vagaries or groundless hypotheses; and while we are continually receiving, from all quarters, valuable additions to our stock of knowledge, we are deluged through the same channels with much that is calculated to mislead the young, and confound the inexperienced.

In the short period usually allotted to the acquiring of a medical education, at least in this country, it is not to be supposed that a student can enter profoundly into the several branches; still less can it be expected of him to wade through the ponderous tomes and endless periodicals which emanate from the press, and select whatever is useful to be known, and reject that which is not. This task requires more time and attention than he can devote to any single subject, as well as a degree of experience and knowledge which can only be attained by riper years and personal observation. To his preceptors, therefore, the student must look for the means of supplying this deficiency; and especially to those to whom is assigned the important duty of giving public instruction on the several branches deemed essential to qualify candidates for professional usefulness.

The branch which it is my duty to teach, allow me to say, lacks none of the interest possessed by the other divisions of our science. In improvement, it has kept pace with the rest—in importance, it holds equal rank with any. Entertaining this high estimate of it, it is my purpose, in the ensuing course, to press strongly on your minds the deep necessity of thoroughly com-
prehending its principles; and to enable you to do so, I shall ne-
glect no means, within my power, of explaining and illustrating
the material facts which constitute its elements, so that you may
understand and appreciate their importance.

Beside obstetrics, our course will embrace the consideration of
the more important diseases of females and of infants during the
month, both of which comprise subjects of the greatest interest.
The lesions of the female organs, embraced within our range
of study, are among the gravest that occur. Often concealed
until concealment becomes impossible, the medical adviser is too
frequently called only in time to witness ravages which he can-
not stay, and to dispel the delusive hopes of a confiding patient.
Under more favorable circumstances, however, delicate as is the
structure of these organs, the disorders to which they are liable
are not less amenable to the resources of our art, than those of
other important parts. It is especially in this department of our
science that the labors of recent observers have most enlarged
our knowledge.

The extensive sympathetic derangements incident to preg-
nancy are sometimes exceedingly severe, and very seriously
affect the health and comfort of the female, and that indepen-
dently of any appreciable change of structure in the suffering or-
gans. These cases, in various degrees of severity, being of daily
occurrence, are frequent objects of the physician’s care, and
therefore constitute proper subjects for our consideration. One
class of these, of which the uterus is the undoubted seat, are es-
pecially entitled to our most serious attention;—I mean the mental
influences dependent on the irritations of that organ from gestation.
The severer cases, in which reason is entirely subverted, alarm
at once the friends of the sufferer, and therefore receive the
prompt assistance of our art; but it is the slighter, rather than the
graver forms of these affections, that claim our sympathy and
regard.

That man is but partially instructed in the business of his pro-
fection, who looks upon the practice of medicine as an art by
which certain physical agents are brought to act upon the purely
physical aberrations of the human frame, and is neglectful of those
physico-moral influences that modify, and occasionally disorder 
the functions of every vital organ, and the not less remarkable 
reaction of organic disease upon the mental energy and moral 
responsibility of the individual.

Of the many causes of uneasiness and family disquiet which 
tend to embitter the current of domestic life, the most difficult of 
comprehension to common observers, as well as of correction, 
are those irregularities of temper and behaviour that result from 
the derangements of the uterine function.

To yield to all the follies of a morbid appetite—all the requisits 
of an habitual self-indulgence—would be a silly and very 
culpable weakness on the part of those on whom devolves the duty 
of administering advice and exercising control; but unquestion-
ably much unhappiness in domestic life occasionally originates 
from the incapacity of those immediately interested to appreciate rightly the physico-moral failings of the suffering female. The 
irritability of temper, the unreasonable demands, the vitiated ap-
petite, and various troublesome affections very commonly ob-
served during gestation, and occasionally during temporary de-
rangements of the menstrual function, are but rarely viewed by the 
young and inexperienced as the evidences of disease. Too fre-
quently, on the contrary, they are looked upon as mere indul-
gences of self-will, and a vicious disposition. The present, how-
ever, is not the time for enlarging further upon this interesting 
subject. The sympathetic disturbances—the functional derange-
ments which occur—will be fully explained when we come to 
consider the conditions of the organs from which they result.

Finally, gentlemen, I will beg leave to observe, in concluding 
these remarks, that ours is a branch, so far at least as relates to 
obstetrics, which possesses a great advantage over many other 
objects of study, in being, to a considerable extent, of a demon-
strative character. This enables a teacher to address the un-
derstandings of his pupils through the eye, as well as the ear. 
Deeply sensible of the importance of this, I have employed much 
of the interval that has elapsed since the termination of the last 
session, in providing every thing necessary for convenient illus-
tration. Circumstances have enabled me to make many valuable
additions to the obstetrical department of the college museum; and some rare articles, which could not be obtained in this country, I have ordered from Europe. I have likewise had the assistance of competent artists in preparing a series of enlarged drawings, for exhibiting to the eye clear views of the various presentations, and the operations necessary in their management.

With such important aids, it will be in my power, I trust, to render the ensuing course both instructive and agreeable.