An Account of Some of the Most Important Diseases Peculiar to Women

Gooch Robert
THIS VOLUME

IS AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED BY ITS AUTHOR

TO

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AND FELLOW OF THE COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS;

FOR SIXTEEN YEARS HIS CONSTANT FRIEND,
   AND ON TOO MANY OCCASIONS
   HIS MUCH VALUED PHYSICIAN;
A MAN, WHO, TO THE CULTIVATION OF MODERN SCIENCES, ADDS
   THE SIMPLICITY OF ANCIENT MANNERS;
WHOSE EMINENT REPUTATION AND RARE BENEVOLENCE OF HEART
HAVE LONG SHED A GRATEFUL LUSTRE OVER A PROFESSION
   WHICH LOOKS UP TO HIM WITH
   A MINGLED FEELING OF
   RESPECT, CONFIDENCE, AND REGARD.
PREFACE.

I was formerly Physician to the two Lying-in Hospitals of Westminster and London, and Lecturer on Midwifery at St. Bartholomew's Hospital, and I have for many years been extensively employed in the practice of Obstetric Medicine; thus I have had the best opportunities of acquiring a practical knowledge of this branch of our profession, and the strongest motives for collecting and arranging it into a shape suitable for communication. I do not say this in a tone of exultation, for I have little reason; on the contrary, the thought of the opportunities I have enjoyed is always accompanied with the painful reflection, how imperfectly I have used them: this has depended partly on not knowing their full value when I first came into possession of them, but chiefly on a long course of ill health; and I write this preface principally to persuade those who come after me, to turn their great opportunities to a good account. If I knew a young man placed in such a station, in whose eminence, founded on his professional utility, I felt interest, I would say to him, remember that your station is one which can be enjoyed only by a very few; do not consider it as one of lucrative conspicuousness, but as a trust which Providence has confided to you, and which you will neglect unless you do your utmost to improve your branch of medicine. He who has the care of a Lying-in Hospital, is a Lecturer on Midwifery, and is resorted to by the
public as an obstetrical Physician, has opportunities of acquiring knowledge in, and extending the bounds of, obstetric medicine, which no other physician, surgeon, or general practitioner can possess, whatever may be his talents. Your task will go on prosperously, the sooner you have ceased to read, and begun to observe and think: do not, however, attempt to dispense with reading, but dispatch it as speedily as is consistent with accuracy. Keep a note-book, read the most esteemed original writers on the most important subjects of your art, and while reading them note down briefly those points which you wish to remember, so as to have no occasion ever to look into the book again; provided you get the points of the work, the more briefly you do it the better; if you are skilful at this, you will find that a page will hold a pamphlet; and that twenty pages will often hold a bulky volume; if you read German, read Richter’s Bibliothek Chirurgische, for he is the greatest master of the art of condensed analysis. Thus your manuscript volume will become a Bibliotheca of your branch of medicine, and you will never afterwards have occasion to consult the books themselves. There are some writers whom it would be wrong to abandon thus; master-minds, whom we return to again and again, not merely for the knowledge which they contain, but to observe how their minds worked, and the older we grow the fonder we become of them; such, in England, are Harvey on Physiology, and Sydenham on Medicine; but few such minds appear in any branch of knowledge; and with most of them, when you have squeezed out the juice, you may safely throw away the rind. Having thus made yourself acquainted with what was known by the most experienced writers on the most important subjects of your art, you are prepared to undertake the more difficult task of observing and reflecting for yourself: watch cases attentively, and take notes of
their important particulars; not of every case, but only of the most important; and not lengthy notes, containing a diffuse description of unimportant trifles; which from the time which they occupy will soon cease to be written, and if written, are sure never to be read; but a short description of the leading circumstances, with an equally short mention of the reflections which they suggest. Make yourself perfect in the art of examining dead bodies: accustom your hand to open them, and your eye to detect with accuracy morbid appearances. In putting down this important part of a case, come at once to the essential morbid appearances; have a head for parts examined which were found healthy: thus you will dispatch these in one line, unlike some who take up three-fourths of their report with the description of parts in which no morbid appearances were found. Five years industriously spent in the way which I have advised, provided you have a mind adapted to investigation, will make you more competent to advise and act in the difficulties and diseases of your branch of the profession than most persons you come in contact with, and than many a man far older than yourself; and after ten years so employed you will find yourself in possession of materials in a state fit to be produced, of various degrees of value; some of them “little articles of intellectual traffic with your neighbours, and some things worthy to be deposited among the general stores of human knowledge.”* As you grow older, you will gradually fabricate with greater facility materials of greater value, and thus you will go on improving till you arrive at that age when the mind, satiated by action, longs for repose. But from this “idea of the good Physician and his rewarde,” I must drop several fathoms down to speak of my own humble volume.

* Mr. Abernethy’s first Lecture at the College of Surgeons.*
When I came to see diseases on a large scale, I was naturally led to compare what I saw of them in nature with the way in which they are represented in books; to contrast the country which I was myself exploring with the best maps of it. In so doing it appeared to me that these maps were very defective in their representation, even of the most important places; some being laid down imperfectly, others inaccurately, some both the one and the other, and other important districts not laid down at all. Of many of the most important subjects, there is no account whatever, excepting what is to be found in compendiums and systems, and here they are delineated so briefly, and often so obscurely and inaccurately, that it is utterly impossible for the young practitioner to acquire a clear and competent knowledge of them; such a one as instruction might supply him with antecedent to experience. Take any one of the great questions in obstetrical medicine and surgery, and turn to the account given of it in these sources of information; and I defy the student, however attentively and thoughtfully he may read, to carry away with him any but partial and confused notions. At least, the most important subjects deserve to be represented on a larger scale, with copiousness, precision, and that selection of materials—that separation of the wheat from the chaff, which none but an experienced writer is equal to, and which no compiler can effect. Accounts of every difficulty in labour, and every disease of women, in the unimpregnated, the pregnant, and the puerperal states, and every disease of infancy and childhood; accounts of all these subjects on such a scale would be more than any man could write, and I might almost add, read; but the great questions at any rate ought to be thus delineated. Dr. C. M. Clarke has supplied the deficiency in one class of the diseases of the unimpregnated state; hence I
have not touched on any of these, excepting only polypus of the uterus; and I should not even on that, if I had not some additions to make of practical importance, especially the account of polypus of the neck or lip of the uterus, in which the usual diagnostic sign, the stalk being encircled by the orifice of the uterus, is no guide, and when trusted to, leads the practitioner into error, as I have repeatedly witnessed; when this polypus grows with a very thick neck it sometimes puzzles the most experienced practitioners. But what Dr. C. M. Clarke has done for one class of diseases, requires to be done for others; or what would be better, for the select or most important subjects throughout obstetric medicine. Such accounts I have attempted to give of the peritoneal fevers of lying-in women, of the disorders of the mind in lying-in women, of the mode of distinguishing pregnancy from the diseases which resemble it, of polypus of the uterus; the account of the irritable uterus, I consider as a new map of a district which had not been laid down before, and like all new maps, an imperfect one. The other papers have a more partial object. When an author attempts to execute his own view of a subject, he is the last person in the world to judge whether he has succeeded or failed; when he has finished his task it is impossible for him to see it from the same point of view, and in the same light, as the public will; and as he himself would if he could forget its thoughts and phrases, and read it with a fresh and impartial mind. He may show it to a judicious and well-informed friend; but this is a poor thermometer of public opinion: the only one is publication, and to this I must trust the fate of my volume.

As my plan was in most cases to give a full account of each subject, and to include in it every thing which I thought interesting or important about it, I have necessarily had to include many particulars already
well known; but even these I have not related from books, but from my own personal experience; even in the most common-place parts I claim to be more than a compiler. The chapter on the art of distinguishing pregnancy from the diseases which resemble it, does not contain any point which was not already known, yet I know no books from which I could have compiled it, unless I had had ample experience in cases of doubtful pregnancy: the materials are drawn from my own observation, arranged and cemented by my own reflection; this is a very different process to compilation. If the object of the student is to learn only what has been said on a subject, the pursuit of knowledge is an easy task; but if his object is to learn what is true on a subject, the pursuit of knowledge is the task of a life.

If the profession should approve of this volume, and Providence should prolong my life, I may probably (as I possess materials) attempt similar accounts of other Diseases of Women and Children.
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