

# A History of the Art of Midwifery:

## A LECTURE

DELIVERED AT THE

COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS AND SURGEONS,

NOVEMBER 11TH, 1851,

INTRODUCTORY TO A COURSE OF PRIVATE INSTRUCTION

ON

# OPERATIVE MIDWIFERY;

SHOWING THE

PAST INEFFICIENCY AND PRESENT NATURAL INCAPACITY  
OF FEMALES IN THE PRACTICE OF OBSTETRICS.

BY

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To the man who, more than any other, has exalted the character of American Obstetrics; whose name is known wherever the art is scientifically practised; whose talents adorn his profession; whose approval is success, and whose friendship is one of the prizes given to excellence, to,

JOHN W. FRANCIS, M.D., LL.D.,

Ex-President of the New-York Academy of Medicine, formerly Professor of Midwifery in the University of New-York, &c., &c.,

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Respectfully dedicated by the

AUTHOR.



## INTRODUCTORY.

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Within the last few years, an attempt has been made to interest the public in favor of a scheme for the education of females, and their subsequent employment as practitioners of medicine. More particularly their special adaptation by sex, nature, and moral perceptions and endowments, for the office of assistant in the perils of child-bed have been urged, as if its advocates supposed this to be the only argument of any weight that they could adduce. I do not intend to deny the statement upon which this claim is founded, viz., woman's superiority to man in gentleness, patience, and sympathy. Millions of times have thanks to God been uttered by poor sufferers, for kind, compassionate woman! They allowedly surpass sterner, less self-sacrificing man in these heaven-born attributes; but it is precisely upon that ground that I deny the deductions from these admitted facts. Woman has too much kindness of heart, sympathy and sensibility, to properly fill this important post. Granted that all women do not possess such acute perceptions, she is then denaturalised; she is not a woman in all that makes a woman lovable and valuable. I have known many professed midwives—I have seen the portraits of many more, most celebrated in their calling, and their lineaments all betray—not the sensitive heart alive to human woes, throbbing in sympathy—but cold, hard, calculating, mercenary. Contact with the world; the cares and trials of a life de-



voted not to science, but to the acquisition of money—it is this that transforms the nature, thus rendering repulsive what is by birth so amiable and lovely.

But this is not all; woman wants certain attributes essential to practice the healing art—not quickness of perception, nor brilliancy of intellect—I am willing to allow her to equal men in these characteristics—but she lacks strength of mind, correct judgment, coolness in difficulty, courage in danger. Woman is rash, impulsive, easily swayed by circumstances and by importunity; and by yielding to the feelings of her breast, rather than the commands of her intellect. These peculiarities of character, inborn and unchangeable, have always been recognised. In the oldest times of which we have any record, it was always the habit for the woman to lean upon the man. Whenever the case appeared difficult, in Ancient Rome or Greece, the attending midwife always procured the assistance of the physicians. At the present day, in France, where the midwife is educated at the public expense, and where they are as well instructed as in any other country in the world, the midwife is forbidden by law to perform any obstetrical instrumental operation herself, but is obliged to send for a physician. The mere existence of this public law proves conclusively to my mind the general opinion in regard to the sex in this particular.

These few remarks are not intended in any manner as an argument against the education of women as attendants in labor, but simply to preface the lecture here published. Arguments can only follow a knowledge of the facts, and I have thought it well to show these fairly and clearly, that all may see what was done by women and what by men; that it may be plainly noted, that dur-



ing the many centuries when the practice of midwifery was in female hands, literally, no improvement was made: and to contrast with this, the advance, since the *accoucheur* has changed conservatism for progress.

The lecture was written without any anticipation of its subsequent publication, and with a far different design from that which is now expected to be attained by its circulation. Were it to be re-constructed, it might perhaps be better adapted for its present purpose. If, however, something be wanted in execution, it may perhaps be counterbalanced by its more evident sincerity; for composed with another object in view, it cannot be accused of being written with the intention of making out a case, and by warping and distorting facts, to benefit a theory.

By the advice of distinguished professional friends, it is now published, an index alike of the past, and a guide to the future.

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