
MIDWIFERY PAGE

"My first midwifery case in India"

I was spending a holiday at Khanapur in the Belgaum district with a friend. We had had a very tiring day and were just off for a short walk before dinner. As we left the compound we saw what at first appeared to be a procession, but as it drew nearer we saw it was a patient being carried in a bamboo cot, three feet square, hung on to two poles, carried on the shoulders of six men. They stopped outside the Mission bungalow and a great deal of chattering was going on. Only those who know India, know the noise a number of Indians can make!! We enquired the cause of it all. The patient, who was wrapped up in an old sari looked out. We thought she was an old woman but to our amazement found her to be only thirteen years of age. She was eight months pregnant and had been unable to pass urine for three days. She appeared frightfully ill so we persuaded the husband to let her stay the night in the dispensary. This was a large room at the end of the compound. There were thirteen relations with the patient and they said they would stay. Luckily we had a good petrol lamp and after much difficulty I managed to pass a soft rubber catheter and drew off four pints of urine. (There was no gum elastic catheter or silver one so I was obliged to use a rubber one) The women all sat around and watched, whilst the men sat outside and the women explained every thing that was going on to them. As I did not know a word of Marathi my friend interpreted for me. The patient was greatly relieved and glad to be able to stay where she was. The relations gathered around and salaamed and kissed our feet. They told me I should have a lot of 'poonia' or 'merit' in the next world. We next gave an enema saponis, as her bowels had not been relieved for many days. There was very little result and we had to give several more injections and aperients before she was relieved. The friends now decided to stop until the confinement was over. The patient was unable to pass any urine naturally so I passed a catheter every six hours. We advised her to go into the hospital, but as there was not one nearer than seventeen miles, she would not hear of it. She did not improve and she was very exhausted all the time. She complained of severe pain in her left side, no doubt from pressure on a nerve. She was running a temperature of over F 100° and on the fourth day she said she had passed two worms. We gave her a dose of santalin and calomel and the day after she passed over 50 round worms, an average size of six inches. The relatives then begged us to stop the worms, as they said she would die if they were all expelled. That evening labour started. We had been unable to hear any foetal heart sounds and we were afraid the baby was dead. The next morning the os was only slightly dilated and remained so for 36 hours. The patient was all the time having fairly good pains but no progress was made. We gave hot baths, enema, etc. but without any result. The relations gathered around and wept. The mother-in-law, a very dirty old woman, begged us to remove the baby. The husband's first wife had died in childbirth and she was sure this one was going to die too. This was all said to the patient

and one can imagine the effect on a child of thirteen. As she was very exhausted we gave her a dose of "chloral hydrate." That night we were called up at 12-30. The pains were getting stronger. I examined and found the os nearly fully dilated. We encouraged the little mother to use her pains well, which she did, squatting on the floor and bearing on her hands. In this position all the Indians have their babies. We got her on to a table much to the astonishment of the grandmother. The baby was in the fourth vertex position with the hand extended beside the head. However I was able to deliver a girl of three lbs. without a tear, at 4-30 a.m. (quite a normal size baby for so young a mother.) It was a 'blue baby' and my friend worked away for 20 minutes before it would breathe. Then it started and we had no more trouble with it. The grandmother was blowing vigorously into its ears, nose, and mouth, but when I tried to stop her, my friend said she would continue doing this until all the evil spirits were blown away. The mother's uterus was not contracting well and there was much haemorrhage. At last however it began to contract better and the placenta was expelled half an hour later. We left the mother comfortable. She remained with us for three days and was then taken home in a bullock wagon as there were certain rites to be performed as she had broken caste by staying with us. For several days she continued to pass much mucus and faeces obviously the result of the worms. We made her up a castor oil emulsion and gave to her. Three days afterwards the husband came to see us bringing with him a lovely fowl which he gave to my friend. He said both the mother and baby were doing well. It was a strange sight for the relations to see me bathe the baby in European style. I made a little vest for it from an old pair of stockings as there was nothing to dress the baby in. They do not put any thing on the babies, hence the strong ones live and the weak ones die. My little patient did not want the baby at first and would not so much as look at it, until I put it to her breast, but as soon as she felt it beginning to draw she was delighted and would not let it go. The relations continued to prophesy much 'poonia' for me in the next world. They said they had never seen anything like it before, I could work even if I could not speak. My friend has had several gifts of fowls, eggs and butter, but as for me they assure me that my reward is heaped up in the next world.

C. B.

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