

thick compress of linen, or a sponge of considerable size, properly fastened.

OVER-DISTENTION OF THE SKIN.—The skin of the abdomen, in the latter months of pregnancy, will sometimes become cracked and sore. In this case nothing is more effectual than the frequent use of warm oil by friction; to which a little camphor may be added to give it somewhat of a medicated appearance.

FALSE PAINS, resembling those attendant on actual labour, are apt to come on at a late period of pregnancy, often occasioning unnecessary alarm. Confinement in a horizontal position; bleeding, if of a full habit; laxative medicines if costive, and giving small and frequent doses of some opiate until the patient finds ease, will, in such cases, be necessary.

CHAP. VIII.

CONVULSIONS.

CONVULSIONS may take place either during pregnancy or labour. These are of different kinds, requiring opposite treatment. One species is a consequence of great exhaustion from a tedious labour, excessive fatigue, and profuse hemorrhage; which makes its attack without much previous warning, and generally alternates with faintings, or great depression of strength, and debility: the muscles about the face and chest are chiefly affected, and the pulse is small, frequent, and compressible, the face pale, the eyes sunk, the extremities cold. The fits succeed each other rapidly, and very soon terminate in a fatal syncope.* In all cases of this nature, the first object should be directed towards restraining the hemorrhage if present, or preventing any kind of exertion, thus husbanding the remaining strength, or recruiting it by cordials. In conjunction with ether and camphor, opiates will be of considerable service. Delivery is usually necessary.

The other species of convulsions, which are those of an hysterical nature, are more common during gestation than during parturition. In this case it may only be necessary to add to what has been already said relative to hysterics (p. 390.), that if they do not speedily yield to antispasmodics, bleeding had better be resorted to: should this fail, the woman, if possible, should be delivered.

Puerperal convulsions seldom happen before the sixth month, but may occur at any time between this period and the completion of labour. They may arise as the first symptom of labour, or after delivery. This species of convulsion depends on the state of the uterus, and has been remarked to occur more frequently during the first pregnancy than in any subsequent one, particularly where the woman is unmarried.

To prevent the occurrence of puerperal convulsions, as they are

* It was this species of convulsion, apparently, that destroyed Her Royal Highness the Princess Charlotte of Wales.

in every instance to be considered highly dangerous, particularly at an advanced period of pregnancy, it is advisable in women of robust and plethoric habits to bleed frequently during the progress of pregnancy, by abstracting a sufficient quantity of blood at different periods; taking care, at the same time, and particularly near the termination of pregnancy, to keep the body open by cooling purgatives. In women of an unstable constitution, all exciting causes should be carefully avoided, and the habit be strengthened as much as possible, and by that means rendered less susceptible of disagreeable impressions.

CHAP. IX.

ABORTION, &c.

EVERY pregnant woman is more or less in danger of abortion. This should be guarded against with the greatest care, as it not only weakens the constitution but renders the woman liable to the same misfortune afterwards.* Abortion may happen at any period of pregnancy, but it is most common in the second or third month. Sometimes, however, it happens in the fourth or fifth. If it happens within the first month, it is usually called a false conception; if after the seventh month, the child may often be kept alive by proper care.

The common causes of abortion are, the death of the child; weakness or relaxation of the mother; great evacuations; violent exercise; raising great weights; reaching too high; jumping, or stepping from an eminence; vomiting; coughing; convulsions; fits; blows on the belly; falls; fevers; disagreeable smells; excess of blood; indolence; high living, or the contrary; violent passions or affections of the mind, as fear, grief, &c.

The signs of approaching abortion are, pain in the loins, or about the bottom of the belly; a dull heavy pain in the inside of the thighs; a slight degree of coldness, or shivering; sickness; palpitation of the heart; the breasts become flat and soft; the belly falls; and there is a discharge of blood or watery humours from the womb.

To prevent abortion, we would advise women of a weak or relaxed habit to use solid food, avoiding great quantities of tea, and other weak and watery liquors; to rise early and go soon to bed; to shun damp houses; to take frequent exercise in the open air, but to avoid fatigue; and never to go abroad in damp foggy weather, if they can help it. Women of a full habit ought to use a spare diet, avoiding strong liquors, and every thing that may tend to heat the body, or increase the quantity of blood. Their diet should be of an opening nature, consisting principally of vegetable substances. Every woman with child ought to be kept cheerful and

* Every mother who procures an abortion does it at the hazard of her life; yet there are not a few who run this risk merely to prevent the trouble of bearing and bringing up children. It is surely a most unnatural crime, and cannot, even in the most abandoned, be viewed without horror; but in the decent matron, it is still more unpardonable.