The mesmerists were hostile to ether and chloroform. They claimed that mesmerism was safer as an anesthetic agent. The advocates of mesmerism kept alive the interest in the subject and helped pave the way for the acceptance of chemical anesthetics. 89 references.

F. A. M.


John Snow was the “alpha” of physician anesthetists. Snow is remembered by some members of the medical profession for his investigations of cholera. His first medical paper, which he read in 1841, was on the subject of asphyxia and the resuscitation of stillborn children. Snow’s monograph on ether was published in September, 1847. In the monograph he first published his observations on the stages or degrees of anesthesia. He divided the signs into four well known stages which are still recognized. In 1858, in his book on anesthesia, he described a fifth stage, intercostal paralysis. Snow developed anesthetic apparatus and was positive in his opinion as to the desirability of administering anesthetics by exact methods. He warned of the dangers of chloroform. The acceptance by Queen Victoria of chloroform analgesia assured its continued use in obstetrics. Snow made important observations on the use of chloroform and repeatedly warned of its dangers. After his death, his monograph, “On Chloroform and Other Anaesthetics: Their Action and Administration,” was published. Snow searched for the perfect anesthetic, investigating many possibilities. Of the substances he tried, amylene seemed to come closest to his ideal. He administered it clinically in 238 cases but discontinued its use after the death of two of the patients. Modern anesthesia owes a debt to John Snow who was an indefatigable worker, a scientist of no mean ability and a searcher for the ultimate truths. 43 references.

F. A. M.


Before the era of modern anesthesia, attempts were made to relieve the suffering of childbirth. The ideal agent for the relief of such pain has not been found. The advisability of complete analgesia and amnesia during labor has been questioned. Early efforts to relieve the pain of childbirth were met with opposition. Sir James Y. Simpson is credited with the introduction of modern anesthesia in obstetrical practice. He first used ether for childbirth on January 19, 1847, and on November 8 of the same year he used chloroform for the first time in an obstetrical case. John Snow administered chloroform to Queen Victoria for the birth of her eighth child. In the United States there was a long delay in the application of anesthesia for obstetrical purposes after it was used for surgical cases; however, a case was reported in April, 1847, in which letheon had been used in a case of labor. The principle American champion of the use of ether in childbirth was Walter Channing. Augustus Kinsley Gardner administered chloroform for the first time in this country for a normal delivery in February, 1848.

Nitrous oxide was introduced into obstetrical practice by Kikovitsch of Petrograd in 1880 and by Wiencek of Dresden in 1881. Nitrous oxide and oxygen were used by J. Clarence Webster of Chicago in 1909. Seopolamine hydrobromide and morphine sulfate were introduced by von Steinbüchel in