

Correspondence

Anesthesiology and Obstetrics

To the Editor:—It was most kind of Duncan E. Reid, M.D., Chairman of the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, Harvard Medical School, to render "An Obstetrician's View of Anesthesiology" (ANESTHESIOLOGY 26: 377, 1965). In paragraph two of his essay, Professor Reid noted, ". . . the introduction of agents to relieve pain during labor and delivery marked a milestone both in the history of Anesthesiology and of Obstetrics when Sir James Y. Simpson first introduced chloroform."

Knowing your keen interest in the history of anesthesiology, I am surprised you did not point out to Professor Reid that Boston is the home of obstetrical anesthesia. On April 7, 1847, Dr. N. C. Keep administered (successfully) sulphuric ether for childbirth in a case of natural labor. Dr. Walter Channing used Davis's solid forceps to deliver a twenty-three year old primigravida on May 7, 1847. She was Dr. W. E. Townsend's patient and he administered ether anesthesia by sponge.

I believe Dr. Keep became the first Dean of the Harvard Dental School. He also achieved fame in the trial of Professor John W. Webster (Professor of Chemistry, 1827, resigned, 1850) for the murder of Dr. George Parkman (Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes in 1847 became the first Parkman Professor of Anatomy and Physiology, the chair being named in honor of Dr. George Parkman). Dr. Keep identified mineral teeth removed from Dr. Webster's assay furnace as those he had made for Dr. Parkman to wear at the dedication of the new medical school building in Grove Street.

Dr. Walter Channing should be well known to Professor Reid. In 1815 he was appointed lecturer in Obstetrics at Harvard (previous to 1815 there was no official instruction in obstetrics).

In 1818 Dr. Channing became Professor of Obstetrics and Medical Jurisprudence. He held this post until 1854. In May 1847, Professor Channing published a pamphlet on

etherization in childbirth. This was followed by a second enlarged edition in July and a full book in September 1848. In truth, Professor Reid's predecessor (and founder of the department Dr. Reid now directs) would appear to deserve the credit given to another.

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To the Editor:—Had the editorial called for an historical review, of course, I would have been remiss not to recognize Walter Channing's many contributions to obstetrical anesthesia. As one lists his many attainments, one must include also that he was the first Dean of Harvard Medical School and that he founded the Boston Lying-in Hospital nearly 15 years prior to the introduction of anesthesia into obstetrics.

Actually, what I had in mind was to indicate that an obstetrician-surgeon (at that time surgeons were often engaged in obstetrics) had been responsible for developing and instituting a new anesthetic chloroform for use in medicine, surgery and midwifery. Had I intended to relate the subject of anesthesia only to obstetrics it would have been permissible and, indeed, necessary to say that Dr. Simpson was the first to introduce anesthesia—both chloroform and ether—into obstetric practice. In fact, Dr. Channing, who was a close friend of Dr. Simpson, was careful to point out that Simpson was the first to administer ether in obstetrics and states on page 89 of his book *A Treatise on Etherization in Childbirth*, "Professor Simpson, who introduced ether into midwifery practice, says. . . ." In his book Dr. Channing alludes to etherization as being a generic term commonly used at the time and lists several anesthetics under ether: "(a) chloric ether—a solution of chloroform, (b)