CASE REPORT

BIRTH-PLUG STOPPAGE IN THOROUGHBRED FOALS.

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Anamnesis: A thoroughbred colt, by Makena out of Miss Mercia, was born during the night of 16/9/46. By next morning the foal became uncomfortable through meconium being retained. A dose of 4 tablespoonfuls of liq. paraffin was given, as well as an enema of liq. paraffin. A certain amount of meconium was removed with digital manipulation. The discomfort increased, the foal being in great pain and rolling. Enemas; etc., had no effect.

Examination: At about 3 p.m. I examined the foal. It was very exhausted, lying down, breathing rapid and shallow, and it was taking no interest in its surroundings. The anus was swollen and bled easily. The plug could only just be felt with the tip of the index finger and it was noticed that the pelvic bones were so close that it was realised that the plug could never pass in toto. Enemas were given with warm water and oil to try and soften it. It was, however, noticed that every time the plug was pushed away from the pelvic inlet considerable relief was given. I decided to concentrate on keeping the foal alive rather than to worry unduly about the plug.

The foal was picked up and held to the mare and allowed to suckle. After a good feed the colicky pains commenced again and another enema was given and the foal allowed to lie down. The stable was darkened and the foal allowed to sleep as long as it would, i.e. from 1 - 2 hours as a rule. It usually awoke with colic, was given an enema, held up to drink, given an enema and allowed to sleep again. This treatment was continued right through the night.

On 18/9/46 I examined the foal again. It was bigger, had filled out, was strong and took an interest in its surroundings. The procedure of feed, sleep, enema, feed, etc., was followed. At 10 a.m. it became necessary to exclude the possibility of congenital occlusion or bowel twist. 3 oz. castor oil in mare's milk and port wine were given, but the feeding, sleeping routine was continued. Between 12 noon and 2 p.m. the foal went into violent colic, throwing itself around, groaning and lying on its back. The attack was alleviated a little by giving mare's milk, chlorodyne and port wine. After 2 p.m. it was noticed that small drops of castor oil and soft yellow faeces were adhering to the tube after an anema. Evacuation of the colon was then undertaken by passing a foal stomach tube with a lateral opening.
past the plug and a considerable amount of faeces was removed at various intervals, allowing the foal to feed and sleep as well. At 4 p.m. the author had to leave through other appointments, but instructions were left to continue as before, but to use 2% bicarbonate of soda in warm water as the enema agent. This was continued, and at 11 p.m. the foal passed the plug. On 19/9/46 the mare and foal were put into a small paddock in the morning. The foal was healthy and strong as well as playful. The mild diarrhoea cleared up without medication.

*Comment:* Meconium retention in thoroughbred foals has been associated with high mortality within 36 hours of birth. The purpose of this article is to throw some doubt on this supposition. It may be that such mortality is the result of rectal injury from the insertion of instruments, teaspoons, fingernails, and from the desire to interfere too energetically. The permeability of the bowel at this age lends itself very easily to bacterial invasion with consequent peritonitis and death. This is naturally hastened by the continuous interference with the foal, its starvation and hence rapid exhaustion.