

Caton demonstrates that women, obstetricians, social theorists, and preachers (among others) have been reading significance into labor pains for at least two centuries. The author himself is an obstetrical anesthesiologist, trained to alleviate the pain of childbirth, and spurred to undertake this book by his surprise that “many women did not want my help.” His historical account is naturally shaded by his professional assumptions (as he freely acknowledges), but it is also informed and enlivened by his technical and scientific understanding of anesthesia.

Ether was first used in childbirth in 1847. In 1853, Dr. John Snow (of epidemiologic fame for tracing a London cholera epidemic to a contaminated well) administered it to Queen Victoria during labor. Later, her daughter was given chloroform during her labor, prompting the queen to utter the sentence that gives the book its title. Caton dis-



cusses the reception of ether and chloroform among physicians and patients, tracing the changing social interpretation of pain and the strands of medical doubt (in the mother, ether caused nausea, chloroform caused liver damage—and no one knew their effects on the infant). He moves on to scopolamine, the notorious “twilight sleep” of the early 20th century, and argues that educated, affluent American women demanded it as their due and their emancipation. In his account, the profession has responded to the wishes of pregnant women, adjusting medical practice as the patients’ attitudes shifted. Natural childbirth and Lamaze simply continue this trend.

The book’s foremost strength is its intelligent combination of the science of pain relief—which remains one of the great gifts of modern medicine—with a rich matrix of social history. Caton touches on the medical inter-

pretation of pain, the position of women in society, and the emergence of science as a driving force in medical change. If his perspective remains that of an anesthesiologist, convinced that most fully informed women will choose medication, his intriguing story nonetheless helps us understand childbirth, pain, and pain control.

—Perri Klass

***THE MEN THEY WILL BECOME:
The Nature and Nurture of
Male Character.***

By Eli Newberger

Perseus Books. 288 pp. \$25

Another book on the subject of boys being boys, this one from the pediatrician who testified against Louise Woodward, the British nanny found guilty by a Massachusetts jury of shaking her infant charge to death. The founder of the Child Protection and Family Violence Unit at Children’s Hospital in Boston, Newberger rejects the argument, advanced by Judith Rich Harris last year in her controversial *Nurture Assumption*, that peers play a defining role in development. We are born with traits but not character, he says. Character is learned, primarily from one’s parents, and as it develops it becomes “a resource for shaping the part of temperament that is malleable.” When character is badly shaped, Newberger looks to the parents first. Parents who, for instance, dislike having an innately shy, inhibited child may “drive him into being an aggressively disobedient child.” The author rejects genetic determinism except insofar as he believes males are hard-wired to pursue power and must learn self-control.

Newberger concludes his anecdotal analysis by championing the wisdom of “all the great moral philosophers from Aristotle to Bernard Shaw,” to wit: the “pathway to character” is “to renounce some of the satisfactions which men normally crave.” In place of caveman power plays, he recommends “reciprocity in marriage, parenthood, work or play.” And to those adages he appends the Socratic oath. With self-knowledge “comes the possibility of fulfillment, and of character that will continue to be strengthened by choosing to do right, and, after failure, to do better the next time.”

You knew this, of course, but there’s no harm in hearing it again.

—A. J. Hewat