## athfinder

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## Coming into the world alive

A history of man's most dangerous adventure A gynecologist's life in the 16th

Century was likely to be hazardous. He was allowed to write texts for midwives, but he had to be careful about where he did his research. In 1522, a Dr. Wertt of Hamburg

decided to observe a birth at firsthand, so he disguised himself as a woman and attended a confinement. A midwife saw through his disguise. An outcry went up: The religiously guarded purity of the delivery room had been defiled by male presence. Dr. Wertt was burned alive. So the midwives continued on their merry way, guided by such rules as that

in the Regimen Sanitatis Salerni: The worms that gnaw the wombe and

never stint, Are kil'd, and purg'd, and driven away

Or they could resort to another sovereign guide, known as the Trotula and credited to a mysterious Dame Trotte.

Dame Trotte was against pampering mothers, though apparently she ignored the taboo on men: "When there is a difficult labour with a dead child, place the patient in

a sheet held at the corners by four strong men. . . . Have them shake the sheet vig-

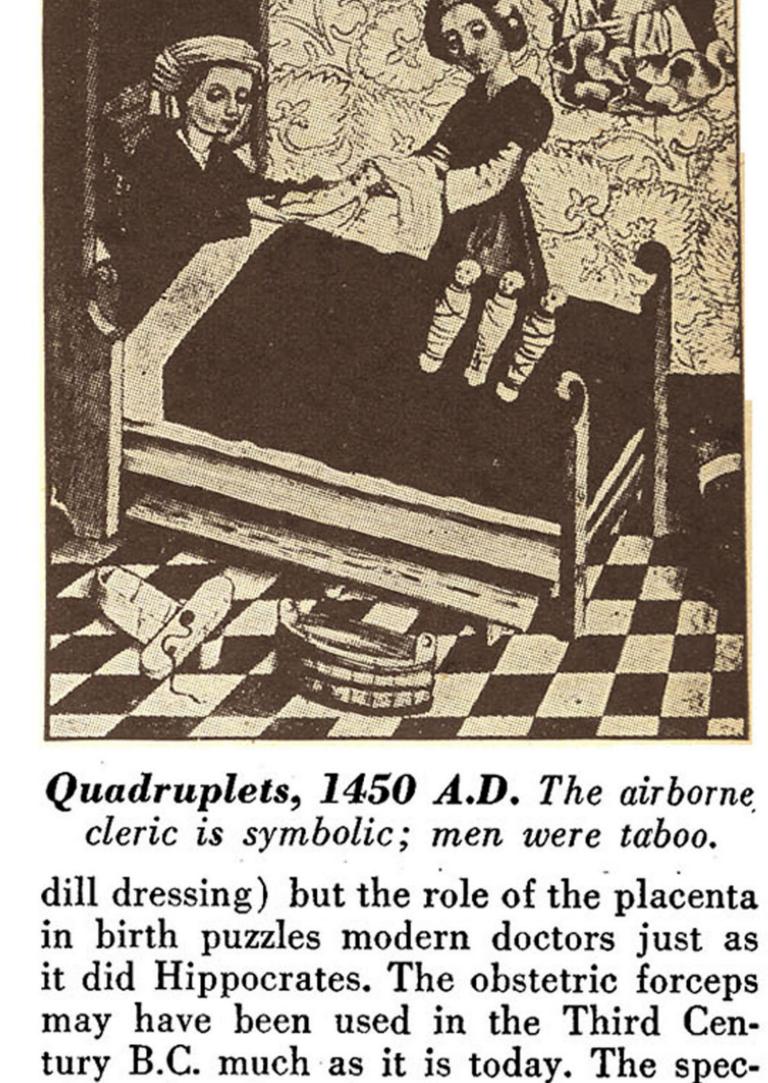
with Mint.

orously . . . and with God's aid she will give birth." There are many equally grisly samples of man's inhumanity to the pregnant and unborn in the 699 pages of Harvey Graham's Eternal Eve (Doubleday: \$10), an exhaustive and fascinating history of gynecology and obstetrics. Graham, under another name, is a noted

ject, ancient and modern. It isn't entirely modern at its best. Today a woman doesn't try to induce

fertility by eating a hyena's eye (with

British surgeon, and he knows his sub-



vented in 79 A.D. or thereabout. Graham's story is one of progress, but it is spiced with little excursions into legends like that of "one Dorothie, an Italian, [who] had twentie children at two births; at the first 9 and the second 11. . . ." Dorothie had to use a sling, tied around her neck, to stand upright. She amounted to nothing, however, alongside the storied Duchess of Haguenau. She had 365 children at one birth, 182 boys, 182 girls, one neuter.

ulum, for obstetric observation, was in-

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