

THE  
Medical and Physical Journal.

---

---

VOL. V.]      JANUARY, 1801.      [NO. XXIII.

---

---

To Dr. B A T T Y.

DEAR SIR,

AS you did me the favour to make a drawing of the subject of the following case, and was present at the operation, I request you will insert the annexed account of it in your very useful Journal; and though it may not give rise to many new ideas on our mode of treating such cases, it will shew to what an uncommon extent such diseases may arrive at without being particularly detrimental to the constitution, independent of the pain and distress arising from their weight. I am,

DEAR SIR,

Your obliged humble servant,  
RICHARD SIMMONS.

---

*Case of an extraordinary Enlargement of the Clitoris. By*  
RICHARD SIMMONS, *Member of the Royal College of Surgeons, Surgeon to the British Lying-in Hospital, Brownlow Street, &c. &c.*

[ With a Plate. ]

ON the 28th of Feb. 1800, Catharine Talbot, a healthy looking woman, about thirty years of age, was placed under my care, in the Parochial Infirmary of St. Martin in the Fields, where she had been admitted on account of her inability to follow her usual occupation, which was that of working in the brick fields, and other laborious employments, from a swelling of great magnitude, as she described it, hanging from her body; and which, upon examination, I found to be the *clitoris* enlarged to a most enormous size, gradually increasing in bulk from its stem at the pubis. The circumference of the largest part measured fourteen inches, the circumference of the stem five inches, and the length of the tumor nine inches. Its general appearance was smooth and fleshy, and its upper surface covered with cuticle, and not redder than the skin in general; round the bottom of the tumor, and all its under

B

surface,

surface, it was very unequal, being made up of a cluster of swellings of a globular form, of different sizes, from those of large grapes to the smallest; the colour of these were redder, somewhat transparent and shining, but not inflamed or painful to the touch. When the tumor was held up, a detached lobe from the right side hung lower than the rest, having the same globular appearances at its most depending part. The nymphæ and labia on both sides, especially near the perineum, appeared as if taking on the same uncommon action with the clitoris, and felt more tender; which might arise from the weight and pressure of the tumor, as they were not much enlarged.

The most singular circumstance was, that her general health was not at all affected, her appetite was good, and she menstruated regularly; nor did this enormous mass produce any pain except from its weight, which gave her an uneasy sensation at the scrobiculus cordis, which was always relieved by suspending the tumor, but which she was either in general too careless to attend to, or the necessary support too inconvenient to her to apply constantly.

The account she gave of it was, that the part (clitoris) began to enlarge about four years ago, and without any apparent cause; and that it went on gradually increasing in size for near three years, and that during the last year it had enlarged very rapidly. On questioning her very particularly, she confessed having had a slight venereal complaint when she was about twenty years of age, but has not the least doubt of her having been perfectly cured of it, having suffered no interruption to her health in any way till the commencement of the swelling.

It will readily be granted that this was no common case; its extraordinary size and singular appearance necessarily rendered it an object of curiosity, and I occasionally took several of my medical friends to examine it; many of whom had seen instances of enlarged and diseased nymphæ and clitoris, but never any thing like the present. I saw no chance of relieving the poor woman without an operation; and she being also well convinced of her constantly remaining a burthen to herself and the world without its extirpation, she readily agreed to any plan I might propose.

I determined therefore on using the knife, and requested Dr. Batty, Mr. Ford, Mr. Blair, and Mr. Morris, to favour me with their attendance on the 26th of March, when the operation was performed in the following manner:—A circular incision was made round the base of the swelling near the pubis, beginning at the inferior part on the right side, and ending on the opposite side, and afterwards continuing the dissection till the whole was removed. It was necessary to take up one ves-



fel on each side; the three vessels of the clitoris were not materially enlarged, and were included in one ligature. The parts were dressed superficially, and thirty drops of laudanum given her. I saw her again in the evening, and the laudanum was repeated; she slept pretty well during the night, and was tolerably free from pain. On the 27th, some pain, tension and inflammation of the labia came on, accompanied with fever; she took the saline mixture during the day, and at night the opiate was repeated. She discharged her urine freely. On the 28th, the tension and pain were increased; and not having had a stool since the operation, she took a laxative medicine, which had effect. On the 29th, the dressings were removed, having been loosened by a beginning suppuration; she passed the day rather better. On the 30th, the discharge from the sore was considerably increased, and the pain and tension diminished; one of the ligatures came away. From this time the sore continued to discharge freely for a few days, when both the other ligatures came off, the patient feeling extremely happy at the thoughts of having got rid of a disagreeable load, and with the prospect of the sore speedily healing; nor were her expectations disappointed, it gradually lessened in size, and, by the 21st of April, was completely healed, the labia, &c. assuming their natural appearance. She was discharged the Infirmary before the end of the month.

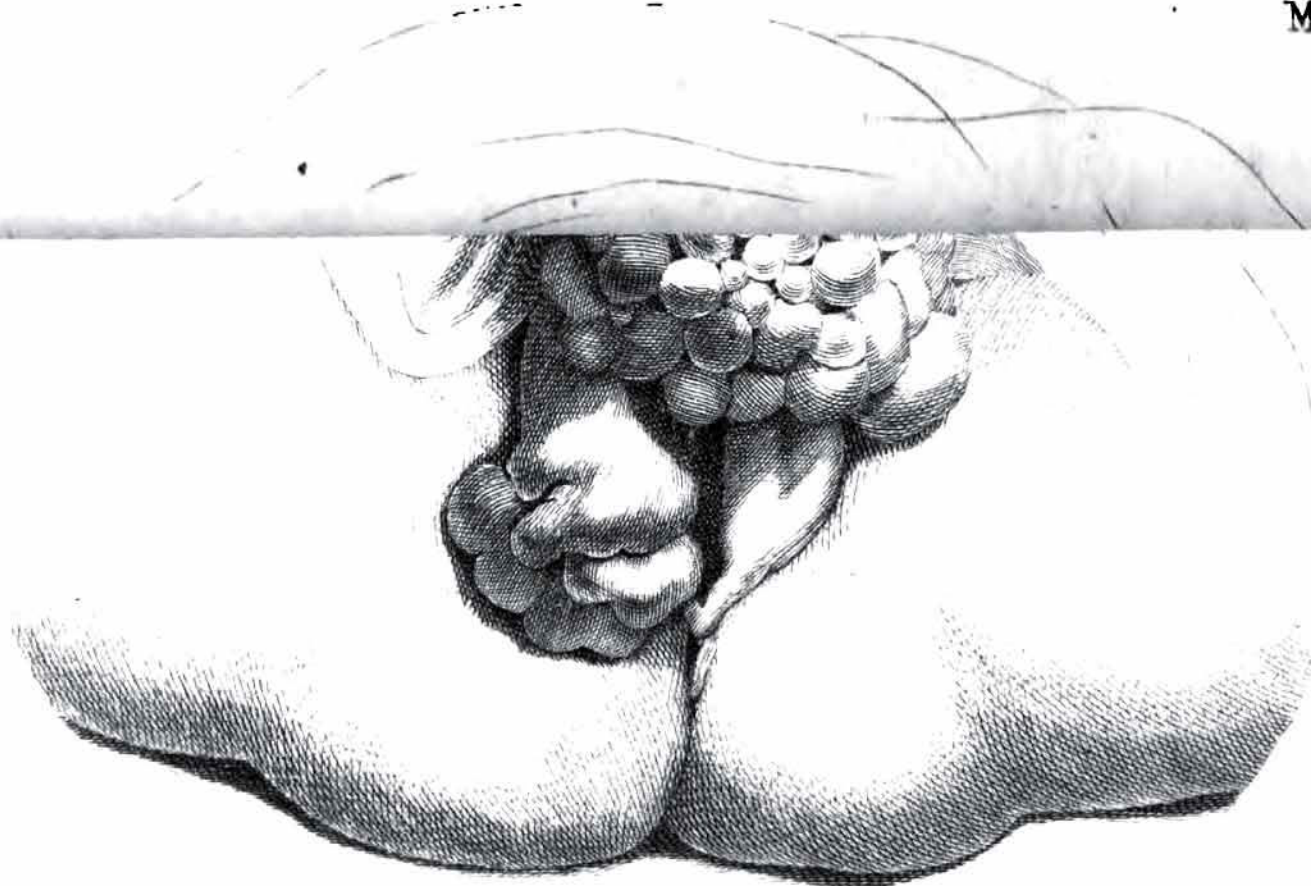
It must have occurred to those who have extensive practice in midwifery, to have observed children born with a peculiar conformation of the clitoris; instances where it has appeared considerably elongated, and covered with a large præputium, have given rise to mistakes of the sex of an infant, or have rendered it a doubt to which the child belonged. Specimens of this sort are to be seen in all anatomical collections, as well as examples of extraordinary enlargements of it in adults. And histories of such cases are to be met with in Riolanus, Bartholine, Schurigius, and others, some of whom believe the part endowed with a similar power to the penis in men. It would be of importance to discover whether any artificial means, or excess of venery, was capable of increasing its size; in the case above related I could not discover that at any period of its enlargement it had the power of erection, or was converted to any improper purpose.

It appears that an enlarged clitoris is almost endemial in some countries, particularly Egypt and Darfur, where the excision of it is very commonly practised, and the operation is performed a little before the period of puberty, or at about the age of eight or nine years. This custom is mentioned by Strabo, and also by Albucasis, in his 7th chapter, who observes,

that every parent knows when a child has these parts longer than ordinary, and cut and burn them off while girls are very young. De Graaf was also acquainted with this, and gives his approbation of the operation as highly necessary as well as decent, "*Estque hujus partis chirurgia orientalibus tam necessaria quam decora.*" And Mr. Brown, our countryman, the celebrated traveller into Africa, tells us, that thirteen or fourteen young females underwent the operation in a house where he was. It was performed by a woman, and some of them complained much of the pain both at and after it. They were prevented from locomotion, but permitted to eat meat; the parts were washed every twelve hours with warm water, which profuse suppuration rendered necessary; at the end of eight days the greater part were in a condition to walk, and liberated from their confinement; three or four of them remained under restraint till the thirteenth day. The reflection that naturally arises from this fact is, that there is no hazard in performing the operation at a very early period; and the success attending the extirpation of the prodigious one in the case I have related, is a sufficient evidence of the safety of an operation at a more advanced stage of the disease,

EXPLANATION of the PLATE.

Fig. 1. The upper side of the tumor.      Fig. 2. The under part.  
The weight of the tumor after extirpation was twenty-eight ounces.



*Engraved by W. Skelton*

*Printed for R. Phillips, N<sup>o</sup> 71, S<sup>t</sup>. Paul's Church Yard.*