ON THE ABOLITION OF CRANIOTOMY FROM OBSTETRIC PRACTICE.

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In this paper the author shows that craniotomy is resorted to in British practice about once in every 340 labours. The whole number of births in England and Wales exceeds 600,000 per annum; and if we apply the proportion of 1 in 340 to these figures, we get a total of about 1800 cases of craniotomy per annum. This is as though every year all the children born in London during rather more than one week were sacrificed; or as though all the children produced during the year in such a county as Westmoreland were born dead. The mortality to the mother from this operation is nearly 1 in 5, in British practice, which would give in England and Wales a maternal mortality of between 300 and 400 per annum. Craniotomy is performed about twice as often in British as in French practice, and four times as often in this country as it is in Germany. It is an obvious fact that every improvement which has ever been made in obstetrics has tended to restrict and diminish the cases and conditions in which the performance of craniotomy has been resorted to. It is the author's object to show that, with the proper and scientific use of all the means at our command, it may be laid down as a general rule, that craniotomy should not be performed in the case of a living fœtus after the period of vability has been reached. It is certain that, up to the present time, the measures which are the alternatives of craniotomy have never been carried out in practice to their full and legitimate extent. *Turning* was the first great obstetric operation which checked the voluntary destruction of the fœtus during labour. The objections to turning which some obstetrists entertain depend on an almost superstitious fear of the uterus—a fear mainly owing to ignorance of the nature of the organ, and of the laws under which it acts. The dread of introducing the hand into the uterus has prevailed almost universally. But, apart from the danger of infection, the hand of the accoucheur, properly guided, can do no more harm in the uterus than any portion of the fœtus of equal bulk. Restrictions of the most absurd kind have been laid upon the operation, and it has come to be almost limited to arm presentations and cases of placenta prævia. On the continent, turning is the recognised practice in cases of difficulty, where the head is above the brim, beyond the reach of the forceps, when the os uteri is in such a state as to admit the hand, and when no serious distortion of the pelvis exists. The operation of turning in cases of modern pelvic deformity was practised by Denman and others, but it was dealt with rather as an exception than a rule of practice until the matter was taken up by Dr. Simpson. No unprejudiced person can read Dr. Simpson's papers on this subject without coming to the conclusion that turning may be performed in cases of moderate pelvic distortion at the full term, with comparative safety to the mother, and with a reasonable chance of safety to the child. It is also shown to be applicable to cases of greater deformity, in combination with the induction of premature delivery. Nothing has ever occurred in the history of turning which has so strongly tended to enlarge its usefulness as the introduction of anæsthesia into obstetric practice. Under chloroform, we can turn with comparative ease in cases of excessive sensibility of the os uteri and vagina, in arm cases in which the waters have been long expelled, and the uterus has closed upon the fœtus with spasmodic force. It renders turning practicable in cases of convulsions or maniacal excitement, and in all instances it makes the uterus comparatively quiescent, and thus averts the dangers depending on contraction and resistance during the operation. Turning is performed nearly three times as often in France and Germany as it is in this country. After turning ing, the next great step in opposition to craniotomy was the discovery of the *forceps*. Before the time of Chamberlain, whenever turning was impracticable,

there was no resource in cases of difficulty except in craniotomy. But it may fairly be questioned whether the whole powers of this instrument have ever been fairly brought out, especially in this, the country in which it was produced. If we examine our standard works, we find more pains taken to show when this instrument is not to be used, than when it may be. The cases in which the forceps may be used are those of moderate disproportion or distortion, whether the arrest is at the brim, in the cavity, or at the outlet of the pelvis; cases of arrest from failure of the labour pains, without any morbid condition of the parturient canal; cases of convulsions in which the os uteri is dilated, and the head sufficiently low to be within reach of the instrument; cases of occipito-posterior presentation, not otherwise admitting of rectification, and face presentations; cases of accidental hemorrhage; and cases of rupture of the uterus, in which no great recession of the head has taken place. It should also be used at a comparatively early period in many of the cases which, if not assisted, run on to impaction from swelling of the fœtal head and tumefaction on the soft parts of the mother. The outlet and middle straits of the pelvis are the limits within which the short forceps should be used; at the brim, the long forceps is the proper instrument. The forceps is used more than twice as often in France and Germany as it is in this country. The last, and it may be truly said the greatest, opponent of craniotomy is the *induction of premature labour*. The largest single source of craniotomy is deformity of the pelvis. Now, it may be asserted, without the possibility of contradiction, that in this great mass of cases, it would be right and practicable at once and for ever to abolish craniotomy in the case of the living and viable fœtus. In all cases of suspected deformity, an examination should be made in the early or middle months of pregnancy, and the proper treatment of such cases should be the induction of abortion or of premature delivery. In cases of excessive distortion, where it would be altogether impossible for a viable fœtus to pass, abortion should be induced before the time of quickening. It would be quite impossible for intercourse and impregnation to take place in any case in which it would not also be possible to induce abortion with safety to the mother. In the very considerable number of cases of moderate distortion in which the diminished capacity impedes delivery at the full term, but would allow of the passage of a child at the seventh or eighth month with a chance of living, the induction of premature labour is the only justifiable practice. Besides the great operation of turning, the forceps, and the induction of premature labour, there are other means by which, in special cases, the necessity for craniotomy may be superseded. One of the most simple is the rectification of occipito-posterior presentations. When the occiput descends towards the sacrum in the third and fourth positions, instead of turning towards the right or left acetabula, great difficulty is produced, particularly in first labours, or when the head is large. Recorded cases of craniotomy show that the want of this rectification, which is generally possible with the hand, the lever, or the forceps, often leads to perforation. Cases of hydrocephalus in the fœtus are amongst the most difficult to deal with in an attempt to abolish craniotomy; but here we have the proposal of Dr. Simpson to tap the hydrocephalic head, and in this way reduce it, so as to allow of delivery without the destruction of the fœtus. In actual occlusion or insuperable rigidity of the os uteri, incision is a safer and better practice than craniotomy. While it is the object of the present paper to advocate the abolition of craniotomy in the case of the living and viable fœtus, there is undoubtedly a class of cases in which perforation may be practised beneficially,—namely, in labours where the child has died during the course of parturition. No woman should be allowed to remain in difficult labour after the death of the child has been satisfactorily ascertained. Considering, then, the various means at our disposal in the way of preventing the necessity for craniotomy, the author unhesitatingly expresses his conviction that, as a rule of practice, craniotomy in the case of the living and viable fœtus should be abolished; and he believes that if all the resources of obstetrics in the way of prevention, management, and alternative treatment were properly wielded, the necessity for the operation would not arise.—*Lancet, Feb.* 12, 1859, *p.* 161.