

## **Obstetrical researches / by Maurice Onslow.**

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PART I.

ORIGINAL COMMUNICATIONS.

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I.

*Obstetrical Researches.* By MAURICE ONSLOW, M.D.  
No. 1. *S. M.*

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MUCH uncertainty seems to prevail respecting the time at which midwifery began to be practised by men. It is very well known, indeed, that from the earliest periods the occasional aid of Physicians and Surgeons was required by Midwives in doubtful and dangerous cases; but when was it that the race of Practitioners sprung up, now designated by the appellation of *Men-Midwives* or *Accoucheurs*?

I shall not now enter into any consideration of the question, Whether or not the Athenians decreed that no females should be permitted to practise midwifery? nor shall I again detail the so often related pretty story of Agnodice; but advert more immediately to subsequent times,—more directly to what concerns ourselves.

By modern writers, the year 1663 is fixed upon as the period from which we are to date “the first epocha of Surgeons being employed on such occasions.” It was on the 27th of December, in that year, that Madame de la Valiere, the mistress of Louis the Fourteenth, was delivered of her first child secretly, by the aid of Julian Clement, a Surgeon of reputation at Paris. The succeeding labours of this lady were not so secretly kept; but as they were all successfully terminated, “this brought Men-Midwives into repute, and put the Princesses into the *fancy* of making use of Surgeons on this occasion; and as it soon became the *fashion*, the name



of *Accoucheur* was invented to signify this class of Surgeons." — *Astruc's History of the Art of Midwifery*.

When Philip Thicknesse began his abusive career against the Men-Midwives, it suited his purpose to make it appear, that the practice of being attended by men was of novel introduction; that it was a fashion imported from France; and that it was first adopted by a kept woman. This statement of Astruc was therefore propagated by him as far as his means extended. The statement has since found its way into encyclopædias and books of reference, and is now generally believed.

A little inquiry would have proved to Astruc, that the practice, of employing men to attend women in their labour, was established long before the period which he assigns. He indeed admits, that "there were, especially in great cities, Surgeons who applied themselves to the art of midwifery, and made it their particular study, who were sent for in difficult cases, where the Midwives found their incapacity." But it is evident, from many passages in authors, that the Surgeons not only were prepared to give their assistance in difficult cases, but were in the habit of engaging to attend females, without the intervention of a Midwife.

Louisa Bourgeois, Midwife to Mary of Medicis, queen of Henry the Fourth of France, began to practise midwifery in 1594 and in 1609 published her "Observations Diverses," and in 1615 her "Instructions à sa Fille," in which she complains, that women, discarding Midwives, chose men to attend them even with their first children\*. These instructions of Madame Bourgeois to her daughter were translated into English in 1656; and the paragraph in question runs thus:—"There is a great deal of artifice to be used in pleasing of our women, especially the young ones, who many times do make election of men to bring them to bed. I blush to speak of them; for I take it to be a great piece of impudence to have any recourse to them, unless it be in a case of very great danger."

e/u Guillemet, who died in 1609, published a treatise "De la Grossesse et Accouchement des Femmes," in which there is a chapter specifically addressed to Surgeons, to direct them how to manage labour from its very commencement. Unless Surgeons were then in the habit of attending women in labour, when no Midwife was employed, there would have been no necessity for such counsel; for if the Surgeon was

\* "Comme font nos jeunes femmes, qui dès leur premier enfant font élection d'une homme pour les accoucher."

1600  
45  
1555

1615  
1563  
52

1615  
1600  
15



only to be called upon for assistance in difficult cases, he would not have required to be told, what was to be done in the early part of the labour. This very treatise of Guilleminian <sup>ean</sup> not only shows, that he himself was in the habit of attending women in labour, as our Accoucheurs do now, but likewise that M. M. Honoré, Benet, Hubert, Marchand, and others, whose names he mentions, were in the same practice.

It is extraordinary, that Astruc did not advert to what Mauriceau, with whose works it is evident he was familiar, says upon this subject. In 1693, Mauriceau prepared for the press his volume of cases (*Observations sur la Grossesse, &c.*); and in the preface he tells his readers, that for more than thirty-five years he had made midwifery his particular practice\*. Of course he must have commenced practice prior to the year 1658, which is five years before the date fixed by Astruc; and it is certain, that Mauriceau was not the first professed Practitioner of midwifery: on the contrary, a very cursory perusal of his writings will demonstrate, that there had existed many before his time. Of one of these, whom he describes as the late M. Delacuisse, he says, that he used to fall asleep while his patients were in labour, and never awoke till the child was in the passage, just ready to come into the world. This, I think, is sufficient to show, that in 1663 it was not a new thing for ladies to be attended in their labours by men; but probably Astruc is correct in fixing this, as the time at which the denomination, *Accoucheur*, was first adopted.

Respecting the introduction of men into this practice in England, we are told, that “*by degrees* it reached this country,” from the dissolute court of Louis the Fourteenth, after the year 1663. But that Men-Midwives, so known by name, were common in England before that period, may be proved by the following lines, intended for poetry, prefixed to “*Wolveridge’s Speculum Matricis*,” published in 1669:—

“ So the production of thy brain shall make  
Midwives themselves produce, and for thy sake,  
Sol teeming thus, *man-midwives*† out a birth  
That is the product to the globe and earth.”

\* “*Quoiqu’il y ait plus de trente-cinq ans que je fasse une profession particulière de l’art des accouchemens, avec une continuelle assiduité.*”

† Robert Barret very indecorously uses a somewhat similar mode of expression, as applied to the Almighty, who, he says, “*midwifed* man from the tomb of nothing into a state of existence.” — *Companion for Midwives*, 1699.



If man-midwifery travelled only *by degrees* from France to England, such an expression as the above would hardly have been used in six years after the fashion was begun in France.

But there is more complete evidence that men practised midwifery in England before the period stated. "The Expert Midwife" was published in London in 1637. It is addressed "to all grave and modest matrons, especially to such as have to doe with women in that great danger of childbirth, as also to all young Practitioners in physick and chirurgery whom these matters may concerne;" in which the "*Men-Midwives*" are accused of having, "for private profit," interfered with the practice of the Midwives, or, in the words of the book, "too farre already encroached upon women's weaknesses and want of knowledge in these their peculiar businesses."

In Aikin's Biographical Memoirs of Medicine, we have an account of a Practitioner of midwifery at a still earlier period, Dr. George Owen, who died in 1558, and is said to have attended the Queen of Henry the Eighth, when she was delivered of her son, afterwards Edward the Sixth; and it seems probable, from the "Prologue" to the "Byrth of Mankynde," that the editor, "Thomas Raynold, Phisition," was an occasional Practitioner of midwifery. At all events, it is manifest that, during the reigns of Henry the Eighth, Elizabeth, Máry, and James, Men-Midwives were establishing themselves in practice. Dr. Hugh Chamberlen, who is described by Mauriceau as being, in 1670, the most celebrated Practitioner of midwifery in England, was the son of Dr. Paul Chamberlen, who had been many years in the practice of midwifery.

It was not, then, in order to follow a fashion, that women first consented to be attended in their labours by men. It must have arisen from other causes sufficiently obvious; viz. the insufficiency of the Midwives, and the great danger to which women were exposed in their labours, from the ignorance and rashness of the female Practitioners.



## IV.

*Obstetrical Researches.* By MAURICE ONSLOW, M.D.  
No. 2.

IN England we have no Midwife who has distinguished herself by any literary production. In France there is now living a lady, who has published several volumes on obstetrical subjects. This lady, Madame Boivin, superintendent in chief of the "Maison Royale de Santé," besides her "Mémorial de l'Art des Accouchemens," has obtained a prize from the "Société de Médecine de Paris," for her Treatise on Uterine Hæmorrhagies; and has translated from the English, the essay of Dr. Rigby, and the treatise of Dr. Stewart on that accident\*.

To this translation, Madame Boivin has prefixed "an Historical Account of the Treatment of Uterine Hæmorrhagies," from the earliest period to the present day; on one or two parts of which I shall proceed to offer a few comments.

Sue, in his "Essais Historiques, &c. sur l'Art des Accouchemens," vol. ii. p. 114, attributes to Louisa Bourgeois, the celebrated Midwife of Mary de Medicis, Queen of Henry the

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\* "Nouveau Traité sur les Hémorrhagies de l'Uterus, d'Edouard Rigby, et de Stewart Duncan [Duncan Stewart], traduit de l'Anglais, accompagné de Notes." Paris, 1818.



Fourth, the important discovery of the practice of delivery by turning the child, in cases of profuse floodings; and he reproaches Portal for not having done due honour to Louisa Bourgeois, by acknowledging her to be the first person who devised this method.

Madame Boivin, trusting to Sue as her guide, falls into the same mistake; and speaking of Louisa Bourgeois, says, "this woman of experience and discernment was the first who promulgated the bold and distinct precept, that the uterus must be speedily emptied in order to put a stop to floodings in parturition;" but not contented with this, she charges Guillemeau with disingenuousness for not mentioning her name as the author, though he strongly recommends the practice. She says, "In 1609 Guillemeau published his book, entitled, 'the Happy Delivery of Women,' in which he recommends, in cases of flooding, the method *projected* and *adopted* by Louisa Bourgeois. Though this circumstance could not be unknown to the Surgeon of Henry the Fourth, he, notwithstanding, makes no mention of the Midwife to the Queen of that great King."

In these two extracts from Madame Boivin's historical account, two great mistakes are to be found. 1. It is not true that she was the projector or author of this method of practice. 2. Guillemeau does make mention of Louisa Bourgeois; and pretty plainly points out when and where she first got an intimation of this important discovery.

A perusal of the *naïve* and amusing account which Louisa Bourgeois gives of herself, teaches that she was the wife of a military Surgeon, residing in comfort and happiness in the environs of Paris. When Henry the Fourth proceeded to besiege that capital, all the houses in the outskirts were demolished, and at one stroke the whole of her little property was annihilated, and she and her family reduced to great distress. What added to her affliction was, that her husband was absent with the army; and all the various means which she attempted to support herself, failed of success; and her sufferings were evidently very great. At length, in 1594, Paris opened its gates to Henry, and a more favourable prospect was opened to her. She was *now* advised to qualify herself for practising midwifery. This advice she followed; and with some difficulty got herself admitted regularly as a Midwife.

From this it appears, that Louisa Bourgeois did not begin to practise midwifery till after the year 1594. Let us now see what Guillemeau says respecting turning in cases of hæmorrhage.

"In 1599, Mademoiselle Simon, daughter of M. Paré, owing to the jealousy of Madame Dupuis one of the Midwives of Paris.



being near her time, was attacked with profuse flooding. She was attended by Madame la Charonne, her Midwife, and was assisted likewise by M M. Hautin and Rigaud, Physicians at Paris, on account of the violent faintings which seized her every quarter of an hour. M. Marchand, my son-in-law, and myself, were also sent for, when seeing that she was almost without pulse, the voice feeble, and the lips pale, I informed her husband and her mother that her life was in extreme danger, and that there was but one means to save her, which was, to deliver her immediately. *This I had seen practiced by M. Paré, her father, who had directed me to do it in the case of a young woman in the family of Madame de Senneterre.*"

Now, as Ambrose Paré died in 1590, and Louisa Bourgeois did not begin to learn the practice of midwifery till after 1594, it is evident that she could not be the author of the operation in question.

But Madame Boivin says, that Guillemeau makes no mention of Louisa Bourgeois. It is a pity that writers do not sometimes read the books on which they offer comments. In the next page to that from which I have extracted the above case, Guillemeau relates another. It is this: "In the year 1603, Mademoiselle Danzé, or Checé, being in labour, was surprised with a similar attack of flooding, which lasted her from the morning till eight or nine o'clock in the evening. She was attended by Madame Boursier\*, Midwife to the Queen, and Messrs. Le Fevre, Riolan, Le Moine, Doctors regent of the Faculty of Médecine at Paris, were called to her assistance; and as she continued to lose much blood, they sent for M. Honoré, Surgeon to the King; but as he would not attempt any thing without my advice, I was sent for, and immediately on my arrival my opinion was that of all present, that she should be delivered. This was effected by the said Honoré, and the child was born alive."

Now, if Louisa Bourgeois was the inventress of this practice, how came it that she did not employ her method in this case, when she had M. Le Fevre and M. Le Moine (in whose presence, on some other occasion†, she boasts of having performed this operation) to support and encourage

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\* She styles herself, in all her publications, "Louyse Bourgeois, dite Boursier."

† Observations Diverses, cap. v.; in which, by the bye, there is not a single syllable advanced by Louisa Bourgeois which can prove her to be the inventress of this practice. She says that she had repeatedly performed the operation; but does not say that she is the author.



her? Is it not more probable, that this was the first time an idea of such an operation was imparted to her, and that she afterwards adopted it in her own practice?

Guillemeau does not appear to have been of a disingenuous character. In other parts of his writings he seems anxious to do justice to his contemporaries. Speaking, in another place, of this operation, he says, "I learnt this mode of practice twenty-five years ago, from the late M. Paré and M. Hubert, to whom I am indebted for many other practical observations, and must confess that I received this from them."

(Nos. 3 and 4 in our next.)

Louise Bourgeois' Husband had lived  
 twenty years in the House of Ambrose Paré  
 and she was told by one of her Friends  
 who had been advising her to learn and practise Midwifery  
 that he could consequently teach her a good  
 deal and she herself says that before she  
 began to practise "She set herself to study  
 Paré's works!"



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PART I.

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ORIGINAL COMMUNICATIONS.

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I.

*Obstetrical Researches.* By MAURICE ONSLOW, M.D.  
Hive Cottage, Chelsea.  
No. 3.

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[Continued from page 286.]

THE following case is somewhat abridged from Dionis' *Traité des Accouchemens*, (1718), p. 273.

“ A young lady of quality, pregnant of her first child, sent for Mauriceau as soon as she felt the pains of labour. The pains having continued till the next day, the waters broke, and it was now expected that the head would speedily follow, but it remained stationary, without making the least progress. The mother was made to walk about. She was bled; stimulating clysters were thrown up, with the view of exciting such strainings as should force her to bear down; but nothing could produce any advancement. The second day having elapsed, Dionis the younger was called in. The two Accoucheurs were spectators, during the whole third day, of the pains, which she bore without any advantage. At length, on the fourth day, the pulse becoming bad, her strength being diminished, and the pains no longer sufficient, fearing she would die with the child within her, they resolved, in consultation with other Surgeons and Physicians, to deliver her by force; this being the only chance of preserving her life.

“ The patient being placed in a convenient posture, they began by baptizing the child, *sous condition\**, by conveying

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\* In Roman Catholic countries, Practitioners of Midwifery are required to baptize children as soon as they are born, *if they appear to*



water in a small spoon to that part of the head which could be touched. Mauriceau, being the elder Accoucheur, undertook the delivery; but having applied his crotchet to the crown of the head, and the scalp having torn, he tried to fix it to one of the parietal bones, as he directs in his book; but not being able to succeed, after many useless efforts, he gave the instrument to Dionis, saying to him, 'You are young and strong; you will succeed better than I.'

"Dionis took his place, and began the operation. While he was endeavouring to find the best place for fixing his crotchet, Mauriceau, in a dictatorial manner, (*en prenant un ton de maitre*,) gave him directions; but the father of the young lady, who was holding one of her hands, silenced him, telling him to let Dionis alone, who appeared to be doing every thing with the greatest possible caution. In fact, he managed so well, that having fixed the crotchet in the nape of the neck, near the base of the occipital bone, and finding that he had a firm hold, he drew with all his force, and finding that the head advanced a little, he brought it forth in a very short space of time; then extracting the shoulders, he finished the delivery.

"This delivery did great honour to Dionis, since all the ladies of the court interested themselves about it. The recovery went on without any accident, and the lady afterwards was delivered twice by Dionis, in very favourable labours.

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*be in imminent danger of death.* And before any operation is undertaken, which may cause their death, the Practitioners are required to baptize them, *in utero*, (*sous condition*), that is to say, such a form of words as this must be used, 'If thou art alive, I baptize thee in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost,' as was done in the above case. The following process relative to that custom is entered in the consistorial acts of the diocese of Rochester.— See *Gentleman's Magazine* for 1785, p. 939: "1523, Oct. 14.— Eliz. Gaynsford, obstetrix, examinât, dicit in vim juramenti sui sub hâc formâ verborum.—I, the aforesaid Elizabeth, seeing the childe of Tho. Every, late born in jeopardy of life, by the autorite of my office, then beyng Midwyfe, dyd christen the same childe under this maner. In the name of the Fader, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, I christen thee Denys, iffundend meram aquam super caput infantul.— Interrogata erat, whether the childe was born and delivered from the wyfe of the said Thomas; whereto she answereth and saith, that the childe was not born, for she saw nothyng of the childe but the hedde, and for perelle the childe was in, and in that tyme of nede she christened as is aforesaid, and cast water with her hand on the child's hede. After which so done, the childe was born, and was had to the church, where the priest gave to it that chrsytynden that takkyd, and the child is yet alyf."



“ While Dionis was happy at having succeeded so well, Mauriceau was no less mortified; first, at being obliged to give up the operation, after having undertaken it; secondly, by finding that Dionis was able to fix the instrument at the base of the os occipitis, he (Mauriceau) having declared in his book, that this was impossible, because the os pubis would prevent it; and, thirdly, by finding that the child was not dead, he having declared, in his writings, that the child could not be *alive* after a continuance of four days in such a situation.”

What was the crotchet employed in this case, which was applied apparently in the manner of the modern lever, and brought a living child into the world?

In Mauriceau's work, three crotchets are delineated; two are sharp and pointed, and are said to be proper for bringing a dead child into the world; the other is the *crotchet-mousse*, the blunt crotchet, “ proper for extracting the head of the child when separated and left in the womb; the head being held by one hand, and embraced by the crotchet in the other.”

This crotchet is directed to be made full ten inches long, and its shape very much resembles that of the modern lever.



The context certainly does not warrant us in believing that this was the instrument used; we must infer, therefore, that in this case of Dionis, the child, though born alive, was mutilated; but was not this instrument the origin of the lever?

It seems extraordinary, while the sharp hooked crotchets are recommended for bringing the heads of dead children undiminished into the world, that the above very powerful instrument should have been confined to the solitary case of extracting the head left in the womb. One can hardly believe that such an instrument, which seems to have been very generally known, as it is likewise engraved in an edition of Guillemeau, in my possession, dated 1642: one can hardly believe, I say, that some Practitioner would not have attempted to effect delivery with this, especially in those critical cases, where doubts were entertained of the reality of the child's death.

Dr. Bland, in his “ Account of the Invention and Use



of the Lever\*," seems to think it proved, that the origin of the lever was the accidental discovery of the practicability of delivering with a single blade of the forceps; but the fact that a lever was discovered among the instruments of Chamberlen†, overturns this hypothesis, and rather countenances the supposition, that the origin of the forceps was the putting together two levers, than that the lever originated from separating the forceps.

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38. No. 4.

JOHN MAUBRAY, M.D., was one of the first English writers, who published an original work on midwifery; those who preceded him being rather compilers than original authors. Of his history little was known, till he published his "Female Physician," in 1724. He then, and for some time afterwards, wrote his name as above; but, for what reason I know not, changed it to Mowbray; and, in 1730, cancelled the title-page for the purpose of making this alteration, though he preserves the name of Maubray to the dedication.

Maubray was apparently a native of North Britain; he had travelled over a large part of the Continent, and was evidently a man of great book learning. He died October 27, 1732, and his death is thus announced in the Gentleman's Magazine: "John Mowbray, M.D., late chairman of the committee of the charitable corporation; justly esteemed an honest public spirited man."

Maubray's works are a strange compound of weakness and pedantry.

He gives advice to pregnant women how to conduct themselves; and some of his rules are ludicrous enough; for instance, the third:—"She must not desire rashly to walk abroad in moonshine, nor to wash her head in sunshine." And the fourth:—"She ought not to frequent gardens; and that for the following twofold reasons: first, lest perchance she happen to *sit* or *tread* upon some herb of a pernicious quality, as divers are, in provoking abortion; secondly, lest she covet some fruit or herbs, which may be of damage or inconveniency if allowed, and the same if denied her." In one

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\* Medical Communications, vol. ii.

† Few of my readers will require to be informed that Mr. Causardine became possessed, a few years ago, of the obstetrical instruments of Chamberlen, and presented them to the Medical and Chirurgical Society, in Lincoln's Inn Fields.— See the ninth volume of their Transactions, p. 181.



of these rules, she is directed "not to lift her arms above her head; and in another, is very sagely advised "not to be surprised at any thing she hears or sees."—"Lastly," to make well for trade, "let her state of health be never so good, she ought to take proper medicines to strengthen the womb as well as the fœtus, in order to prevent accidents, which may happen to the strongest woman."

Maubray believes that women may carry their children within them eleven *solar* months. One instance of which he relates which happened within his "own proper experience, during his itinerant practice in the city of Prague."—"I happened once to be called [by an eminent Physician] to a lady in labour, whom I had the good fortune to deliver immediately, of a fine lively and lusty girl. After which, I had the honour to attend her in childbed:—Upon this she was pleased to tell me, out of her own mouth, that before the day of her delivery, her husband (who was a colonel in the imperial service,) had been gone to the army, then in Sicily, ten months and two days; so that this proculean child was born, *at soonest*, the third day of the eleventh month. And in this case, I dare say, I was nowise mistaken or imposed upon; that lady being endued with no less true honour and strict virtue than she was otherwise deservedly esteemed of a singular good character, and great distinction in that place."

Another evidence of Maubray's weakness, or rather of what more deeply implicates his character, is to be found in his opinions respecting the generation of monsters; respecting which, he has related an unpardonable falsehood, in the account he gives of the *suyger*, "a monstrous little animal, the likest of any thing in shape and size to a *moodiwarp*; having a hooked snout, fiery sparkling eyes, a long round neck, and an acuminated sharp tail, of an extraordinary agility of feet. At first sight of the world's light it commonly yells and shrieks fearfully; and, seeking for a lurking hole, runs up and down like a little dæmon, which, indeed, I took it for, the first time I saw it, and that for none of the better sort."—page 375.

Of this *suyger* he declares, that it is generated in the womb, and precedes the birth of the child; and further says, "I had occasion to talk with some of the learned men of the several famous universities in these provinces [Holland] upon this head, who ingenuously told me, that it was so common a thing, among the sea-faring and meaner sort of people, that scarce one of these women in three escaped this kind of strange birth; which my own small practice among them afterwards also confirmed; insomuch, that I always as much expected the thing, *de suyger*, as the child itself. They properly call



it *de suyger*, which is (in our language) *the sucker*, because, like a leech, it sucks up the infant's blood and aliment."

Maubray having, by this atrocious falsehood, laid himself open to contempt and ridicule, was lashed by the wits of the day with deserved severity.

It is probable that this ridiculous tale of Maubray suggested to the contrivers of Mary Tofts' imposition the idea of pretending that she was delivered of rabbits. By this trick, Maubray seems to have been easily cajoled; and accordingly he cuts a conspicuous figure in some of the caricatures which that beastly story gave birth to. In the fabricated, "full, and impartial confession from her own mouth, and under her own hand, of the whole affair from the beginning to the end," (1727), Mary Tofts is made to say of Dr. Maubray, "As for the squab man that cried out a sooterkin, a sooterkin, I dont lik him at all; for it seems he wonted to mak a devil's damm of me; and peept, and peept, the devil peep his eyes out, in hops to see a dansing devil cut a capor out of my belli, but he was disapinted."

To Maubray, however, it is but justice to attribute a suggestion, which has done more than any thing else in promoting the improvement of midwifery; this was, to institute a lying-in hospital in London, similar to the Hotel-Dieu at Paris, where students might have opportunities of learning the art. On this subject he says, in his introductory lecture, 1725: "'Tis true, we have hospitals for all other sorts of indigent people, and those, indeed, most superb and magnificent, and in every respect superior to others; only in this point of provision for poor miserable women, in the time of their natural affliction, when they are in no case or condition, either in one regard or other, to help themselves, we have been hitherto, and still are deficient, notwithstanding the excellent good precedents set before our eyes in foreign countries. Surely if such a thing was once begun here, many good people would cheerfully contribute to it, and I dare say that no necessary encouragement would be long wanting, if once undertaken, for promoting of such a truly Christian work; a work that would transcend and exceed all other acts of charity, in that it would extend itself to no less than *two lives* in every *one person* admitted to the benefit of it."

The idea thus thrown out by Maubray was afterwards acted upon by Sir Richard Manningham, who, in the preface to his *Artis Obstetricariæ Compendium* (1739), states, that an *hospitiolum* for poor pregnant women had been founded, where pupils were taught by him, and had opportunities



of seeing and attending real labours. This was the first institution of the kind in the British dominions; but from this sprung up afterwards the Middlesex Hospital in 1745, which, at first, was fixed in Windmill Street, Tottenham Court Road. It consisted of two adjoining houses, capable of containing thirty patients, one of which was appropriated to lying-in women. Mr., afterwards Dr., Layard was the Man-Midwife, and Dr. Sandys was to be called in consultation in dangerous cases.

After this, the British Lying-in Hospital, and others, were founded, and from these sources so many opportunities of carefully studying midwifery and improving the practice were afforded as have established it upon the very firm footing which it has now acquired.

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He found that Patients wanted Relief from the  
bowels about the 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> Day after Delivery. Vol. 3. 44

Sept. 23/1835 D. Robert Lee tells me that  
Smellie was very intimate with Dr. Cullen  
from whom he borrowed Books - see  
Compend's Life of Cullen - Smellie  
practised at Leamington before he came  
to London

Tomkyns published a Translation of  
Mott's Treatise on Midwifery and in  
his Preface he says that Dr. Smellie had  
revised his Translation & compared it with  
the original.



## II.

*Obstetrical Researches*. By MAURICE ONSLOW, M.D.

No. 5.

OF SMELLIE, to whom the science of midwifery is indebted for many great improvements, very little is known; and I should be glad if this mention of him were to lead to a more complete biography of so valuable a man. He was a native of Scotland, probably of Lanarkshire, to which he retired when he quitted the practice of his profession, in 1759. He was a married man, but it does not appear that he had any children. I have heard it said, that he was first a Surgeon, or Surgeon's mate, in the navy, but know not whether this was from authority or merely conjecture. Certain, however, it is, that he practised midwifery in the country from the year 1722 to 1739; he then migrated to London, where he practised from 1740 to 1759; so that he was engaged in the practice of midwifery altogether thirty-six years.

Smellie is said to have been a man of but slight literary acquirements: indeed he confesses that he submitted his various publications to the revision and correction of a friend, who is known to have been the celebrated Dr. Smollet, which implies a consciousness of some insufficiency. But that he was not an ignorant man is very certain. His attendance on M. Gregoire's lectures on midwifery at Paris indicates that he was not unacquainted with the French language; and whoever was so much educated as to understand lectures delivered in French, must be considered as no mean proficient in literature.

Very soon after his arrival in London, he began to give lectures on midwifery, and by his mechanical ingenuity he devised means of rendering the study of this art more easy and agreeable. M. Gregoire was in the habit of explaining labours upon a machine fabricated of basket-work and covered with painted cloth: through this machine, a real foetus, often in a state of putridity, was made to pass, in order to show the progress of the labour. Smellie, improving upon this, constructed machines upon the actual bones of the skeleton, covered with leather, and stuffed out so as to bear a much nearer resemblance to nature; and he covered the skeletons of foetuses in the same manner for the purpose of exhibiting parturition.



The lectures which he gave were numerous attended. More than nine hundred pupils were instructed in the first ten years, besides a great many females, who were fitted for midwives. His lectures, however, were very brief, the course consisting only of twelve in number; and if a comparison be made between the expense of attending these and the lectures on midwifery of the present day, the advantage, in a pecuniary point of view, will appear to have been greatly in his favour, as the following extracts from a prospectus of his course of lectures, published in 1750, will show. "Those who engage for one course, pay 3*l.* 3*s.* at the first lecture;—for two courses, 5*l.* 5*s.*—for two months, or four courses, 9*l.* 9*s.*—for three months, 12*l.* 12*s.*—for six months, 16*l.* 16*s.*—and for a year, 21*l.*

The students were likewise obliged to pay for practice among the patients. "Those gentlemen who pay only for a single course, pay half a guinea for each labour, and six shillings more to a common stock for the support of the poor women; but where they attend two courses, they then only pay five shillings each labour, attend four, and deliver the last natural case themselves. If four courses, they are admitted to all the labours in their turn, deliver twice, and pay four shillings: but those who engage for three months, they are in the last month sent in their turn to deliver in difficult and preternatural cases, and only pay three shillings; if six months, two shillings; and if a year, one shilling."

The inconvenience and indelicacy of having many students in constant attendance on the women in labour, was very great, and subjected Smellie and his pupils to much occasional abuse. Once they were called to a poor woman, in one of the narrow lanes in Broad Street, St. Giles's; the case was an arm presentation. Twenty-eight pupils were crowded together in the room; a great mob assembled in the lane; and the parish officers were sent for, "who at that time were glad of showing their authority." The woman, however, being delivered of a live child, the mob dispersed, without proceeding to further violence.

A perusal of Smellie's works will show much attachment to his profession, a great anxiety to improve it, and a liberal acknowledgment of obligation to those who assisted him by their advice or suggestions in any improvements. Besides Dr. Mead, Dr. Sandys, and others, whom he incidentally mentions, he says:—"In a word, I diligently attended to the course and operations of nature, which occurred in my practice, regulating and improving myself by that infallible standard; nor did I reject the hints of other writers and Practitioners, from whose suggestions I owe I



have derived much useful instruction. In particular I was obliged to Dr. Gordon, of Glasgow, and Dr. English, of Lanark, in Scotland. The first made me acquainted with the *blunt hook*; the other with the *noose*; and in London, Dr. Nisbet assisted me in improving the *forceps*, and Dr. Hunter in reforming the wrong practice of delivering the placenta. On the whole, I have given this short detail of my own conduct for the benefit of young Practitioners, who will see that, far from adhering to one original method, I took all opportunities of acquiring improvement, and cheerfully renounced those errors which I had imbibed in the beginning of life."

In another part, he gives a gratifying proof of his candid temper. After speaking of the various attempts he had made to improve the forceps, &c., he recommends other ingenious persons to persevere in their endeavours to improve these, and adopt other methods that may be safe and useful; cautioning all, however, to despise and avoid, what he appears to have held in complete detestation, "the character of a selfish secretmonger."

Smellie is said to have been coarse in his person, and awkward and unpleasing in his manners\*, "so that he never rose into any great estimation amongst persons of rank." What is meant by the expression coarseness of person, is not very evident. That he was large, and perhaps ungainly in his make, seems proved by an anecdote that is told of him. Being informed that Dr. Hunter was thought the more proper person to perform the operation of turning in utero, because his hand was small and delicate, Smellie laughed at the idea, alleging, that his own hand was not so large as the child's head; if, therefore, there was room for the child's head to pass out of the pelvis, there must certainly be room for his hand to pass in; and then, as the larger hand could reach farther into the uterus, and grasp more firmly the legs of the child, this would give him a decided superiority.

Dr. Smellie, "advanced in years," died, March 5, 1763, at Lanark, in Scotland. Whether any memory of him be still preserved there, whether any delineation of his features is to be found, or a stone marks the spot in which his remains are deposited, the present writer has never heard.

## ERRATA IN No. 1.

- Page 178, line 25, for 1591, read 1594.  
 — 178, — 37, for Guilleman, read Guillemeau.  
 — 179, — 3, for ditto, read ditto.  
 — 179, last line of note, for tomb, read womb.

\* Simmons's Life of Dr. William Hunter, page 14.  
 Mr. Nichol speaks of Smellie as "remarkable for a  
 raw-boned, coarse, clumsy hand" p. 111



