

**On the expulsion and extraction of the placenta before the child in
placental presentations / [Sir James Young Simpson].**

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ON THE EXPULSION AND EXTRACTION OF THE PLACENTA BEFORE THE CHILD, IN PLACENTAL PRESENTATIONS.

BY J. Y. SIMPSON, M.D.,

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(13)

To the Editor of the Provincial Medical and Surgical Journal.

SIR,

The propriety and practicability of the complete separation and extraction of the placenta *before* the child, in cases of "unavoidable hæmorrhage," is a subject which has engaged my attention for a considerable time past. I might have printed some years since a series of cases illustrative of my views on the subject, but I have hitherto abstained from doing so, under an anxious wish that before venturing to publish the results of the enquiry, I might be able to collect as many individual facts as possible, in order to have a sufficiently broad and solid basis, for the important deductions which seemed to me, from the first, to flow from the investigation. I believe the data I have gathered together, now consisting of 135 cases, to be ample enough to show:—

1st. That the *complete* separation and removal of the placenta before the child is very seldom followed by any great hæmorrhage.

2nd. That, on the other hand, the previously existing hæmorrhage almost always ceases from the moment the placenta is *perfectly* and *completely* detached from its connections with the uterus.

3rd. That the cessation of the hæmorrhage is explicable, not on the idea that the descending head of the child acts as a plug or compress upon the exposed orifices of the uterine sinuses, but on the mutual vascular economy of the uterus and placenta, and the circumstance that the hæmorrhage principally comes from the partially detached surface of the latter.

4th. That the placenta may be, and ought to be, detached from its connections with the uterus in some varieties of unavoidable hæmorrhage, and that these varieties are for the most part exactly those in which our present recognized methods of treatment are most inapplicable and most unsuccessful.

5th. That under such circumstances the practice would in all probability be attended with much saving of maternal life.

6th. That this treatment has been in repeated instances accidentally followed with complete success, when had recourse to by midwives and others, under supposed mismanagement, and in defiance of the established rules of treatment in this special complication. And,

7th. In one very dangerous case, in which the previous hæmorrhage was great, and continued in despite of the evacuation of the liquor amnii, and where the os uteri was imperfectly dilated, I adopted, as a matter of principle and choice, the plan of separating and extracting the placenta, with complete success, the

flooding immediately ceasing, though the child was not expelled for about two hours, and the mother recovering without one bad symptom.

Whilst, with the kind assistance of some of my professional friends, here and elsewhere, diligently collecting data for the testing and establishment of the opinions which I have just stated, the practical inferences at which, at an early part of the inquiry, I have arrived, have in the meantime been laid before the public as original, by more than one member of the profession, and that in quarters from whence I certainly least expected it. In order that the subject of priority may be set right, as far as the valuable pages of your Journal are concerned, I will feel obliged by your inserting in an early number, the following extract from the minutes of the Medico-Chirurgical Society of Edinburgh, and the accompanying correspondence on the question between Dr. Radford and myself.

I have the honour to be, Sir,

Yours very faithfully,

J. Y. SIMPSON.

Edinburgh, Jan. 25, 1845.

Extract from the Minutes of the Meeting of the Medico-Chirurgical Society of Edinburgh, for December 4th, 1844.

ON THE SPONTANEOUS EXPULSION AND ARTIFICIAL EXTRACTION OF THE PLACENTA BEFORE THE CHILD, IN PLACENTAL PRESENTATION. By PROFESSOR SIMPSON.

Professor Simpson gave a communication on the expulsion and extraction of the placenta before the child, in cases of unavoidable hæmorrhage. He showed, that in common cases of presentation of the placenta, when managed according to the rules generally followed under the circumstances, the mortality among the mothers was very great. Out of one hundred and seventy-four cases, tabulated from different authors, by Dr. Churchill, this complication had proved fatal to forty-eight mothers; and a more extensive table of three hundred and thirty-nine, drawn up by Dr. Simpson himself, presented a mortality of one hundred and fifteen mothers; or, one out of every three died.

In contrast with these statistics, Dr. Simpson brought forward a number of cases, (some previously recorded, and others collected from private sources,) in which the placenta had come away before the infant, either expelled by the natural efforts alone, or in conse-

quence, in several instances, of the reputed bad management of the accoucheur. The number of cases collected was one hundred and twenty in all. Out of these only eight mothers died, or one in fifteen. In two of these, the cause of death was not stated by the reporter; in three the patient perished from puerperal fever; and two only were alleged to have died from hæmorrhage. In one of these two last cases, the hæmorrhage ceased as soon as the placenta was separated, but too late to save the woman.

The same cases also show that, though much blood may have been escaping *before* the placenta comes away, yet, as soon as the separation is *complete*, the hæmorrhage usually ceases, or becomes very trifling. A complete separation of the placenta is thus proved to be far less dangerous than a partial one,—a fact that at first may appear somewhat paradoxical, but which is readily explained by the structure of the fœtal placenta. The hæmorrhage comes chiefly from the placenta itself. When it is only partially separated from the uterus, the blood enters freely by the adherent portions, and escapes as freely from the surface of the portion of placenta that is detached.

From a consideration of these facts, Dr. Simpson was led, four years ago, to propose to the Obstetrical Society,—whether, in cases of hæmorrhage from placental presentations, we should not sometimes adopt the practice of extracting the placenta, in order to arrest unavoidable hæmorrhage, leaving the fœtus to be expelled by the natural efforts of the uterus, or otherwise. Dr. Simpson stated he had adopted this procedure in one case, in autumn last, with perfect success, the placenta having been extracted two hours before the birth of the child. This method, he thought, would be found particularly applicable to those sets of cases in which turning or rupture of the membrane is inexpedient or impracticable; as, in cases where hæmorrhage occurs to an alarming extent, while the os uteri is still small and rigid; in unavoidable hæmorrhage in first labours; in placental presentations, when the patient's strength is already so sunk, from the flooding, as not to allow, without danger, of immediate turning or forcing delivery; in cases where the child is known to be dead; &c. &c.

I.—LETTER FROM DR. SIMPSON TO DR. RADFORD.

My dear Sir,

I have the pleasure of acknowledging the receipt of your letter, and of the galvanic machine from Abraham and Dancer, for all which accept my best thanks. I will forward a post-office order to Abraham & Co., for the amount.

Of late I have had little or no time to bestow on finishing my paper on extraction of the placenta, for the press. * * * * *

You tell me you are going to send another communication to the *Provincial Journal* about this very subject, viz., extracting the placenta before the child in placental presentations. Let me beg of you to put me right in that matter when you do so; and I ask you to do this, more at the solicitations of some of my obstetric brethren here, than for any anxiety of my own on the subject.

The fact—as I believe it—is this, that I first suggested this plan of practice as the most proper one in some cases of unavoidable hæmorrhage; and my

friends here advise me strenuously not to forego any claim I may have to it. I proposed it to the Obstetric Society here in 1841, on the strength of the results of thirty-nine cases I had then collected. I repeated the suggestion again in the spring of last year, when I brought before the Society some additional cases. I have taught it ever since I got the Chair of Midwifery in the University, as possibly the best and safest method of procedure in some conditions connected with placental presentations. On the 4th of December last, I brought the whole matter before the Medico-Chirurgical Society, in a communication of some length. I would have published on it long ago, but I was afraid it would be deemed rash in a youngster like me, propounding from the data I had, such a revolution in the usual practice of unavoidable hæmorrhage.

Last autumn, when I had the pleasure of having you residing with me here for a few days as my guest, I fully explained to you my views on this and other points of practice; and one professional friend who read your late lecture, and was surprised at the want in it of all allusion to, or acknowledgment of, my investigations, tells me that he distinctly recollects of you when here, speaking to him in laudatory terms of the plan I had mentioned to you of detaching the placenta entirely, as the best method in some of the most severe varieties of unavoidable hæmorrhage. I wrote to you afterwards, about the beginning of October, that I had adopted successfully in one recent instance, the treatment alluded to, and apparently saved the mother by it, the placenta being extracted about two hours before the child. In your answer to that letter you stated that you “now” mentioned to me “confidentially” that you were going to propose in placental presentations to detach the placenta, and then to apply galvanism. I give you every credit for the latter part of the suggestion, but unless there are facts about the case with which I am unacquainted, I would claim as my own the first part, (the detachment of the placenta,) and will confidently rely on your sense of justice, for this being properly stated in your proposed new communication. I shall feel sorry—very sorry indeed—if I am obliged to reclaim publicly on the point.

Now, my dear Sir, do not mistake me. I am quite aware that many practitioners have, as a matter of *necessity*, and not of *choice*, brought away the placenta before the child in unavoidable hæmorrhage, when the placenta was so far down, or otherwise situated, as to prevent turning without its previous detachment or removal. You yourself did so (as I take it) in one of the cases mentioned to me in your letter of to-day. No modern author, however, has, as far as I know, laid it down that the placenta should ever, as a matter of choice and principle, be separated and removed before the child. If you, however, or any one else, have ever taught this last rule in your lectures, it would so far cancel any claim I may have, as to being the suggestor or originator of a plan, which, I believe, to be calculated to save often our patients lives under one of the most fearful complications of midwifery. If the cases you had seen or read of had suggested the plan to your own mind, you must be aware that when I described my views to you here, you gave me no hint to suppose that I was disclosing a plan with which you

were already familiar in any degree, as a mode of treatment.

I have written a very long note, and would not have encroached so much on your time, had I not been here myself a prisoner in attendance upon a case of tedious labour. It has given me pain to pen it, but as your omission of my name in your lately published lecture, in connection with the proposal of detaching the placenta, was, (as I believe,) an unintentional oversight, which can be easily rectified and amended in your additional communication upon this identical point, I have stated my feelings to you honestly and openly, lest any future similar error might create disagreements and heart-burnings, where I, for one, most sincerely pray there may be cause for none.

* * * * *

Yours, &c.,

J. Y. SIMPSON.

Edinburgh, Jan. 14, 1845.

II.—LETTER FROM DR. RADFORD TO DR. SIMPSON.

My dear Sir,

In answer to your letter I beg to reply, that I had sent off my paper when I received it. As to the point of originality of claim as to the practice of detaching and removing the placenta in some cases of unavoidable hæmorrhage, I beg to refer you to my lecture. I there pretend to no originality, nor are you at all entitled to any merit as the "suggestor or originator" of the plan. I had practised it in 1819, as a matter of necessity. I had also, in a course of lectures, spoken of it as a plan to be adopted in extreme cases of flooding, delivered many years ago. It was the practice of some of the older writers; but within my own time, the late Mr. Kinder Wood, who was a colleague of mine at the Lying-in Hospital, both practised this plan and taught it in his lectures. He has been dead twelve or thirteen years.

Yours, &c.,

THOMAS RADFORD.

Manchester, Jan. 18, 1845.

III.—LETTER FROM DR. SIMPSON TO DR. RADFORD.

My dear Sir,

You must permit me to set you right on one or two points referred to in the letter which I have received from you. I would have written sooner had I had half an hour's leisure to do so.

I would first strongly reiterate to you what I alluded to in my previous note, that there is the widest possible difference between incidentally watching over, or assisting in, "*as a matter of necessity and compulsion*," any line of practice adopted by nature, and deliberately repeating and performing the same practice in other instances, "*as a matter of principle and choice*." Before the middle of the last century, accoucheurs had occasionally remarked that, in cases of contracted pelvis, premature labour was sometimes successfully induced by nature; and they were obliged to superintend the progress of the labour and the birth of the child, as a matter which they could not avert or arrest. That, however, does not, I opine, detract in any, the very slightest degree, from the merit of those physicians who, about the period I have stated, first determined upon, and put in practice, the *artificial*

induction of premature labour in the same set of cases as a matter of choice and selection. Cases of difficult labour, in which the symphysis pubis gave way, had been repeatedly mentioned by preceding writers; and accoucheurs had had occasion to observe the accident occur in despite of themselves. This circumstance, however, does not in any degree detract from the happy but fruitless ingenuity of Sigault, in proposing to produce, by operation, this same separation of the pubic bones in some examples of pelvic contraction, as a matter of election.

Now, holding these principles in view, I feel myself called upon to maintain that the remarks in your note do not show that spirit of justice which I fondly hoped to meet with in you:—

1. You argue "I had practised it (the removal of the placenta before the child) in 1819." This, as you are well aware, is no objection against any claims I possess, as to originating the treatment in point,—for according to your own candid confession, you here practised it (to use your own words) "*as a matter of necessity*."

2. You say that in a course of lectures, delivered many years ago, you had spoken of it as a plan to be adopted in extreme cases. Guillemeau, who, as you know, was the first author to inculcate the propriety of turning at all in placental presentations, at the same time lays it down distinctly, that in some extreme cases you must, as a matter of necessity, remove the placenta if it be much advanced and cannot be replaced. Guillemeau's successors—Mauriceau, Daventer, Lamotte, and indeed almost all subsequent authors, teach the same treatment under the same circumstances, and tell us to remove the placenta when it is thrown off, and by its presence in the vagina, prevents the delivery of the infant. This, however, is a perfectly *different* thing from advising, as I have for some time back ventured to do, to separate the placenta entirely, though it is still within the uterus, and the uterus still only partially open; and to separate it with the view, *not* of clearing the maternal passages, but with the prospect and on the *principle* of arresting the accompanying hæmorrhage by its complete separation.

3. You allege it was the practice of some of the older writers. You must permit me to be sceptical as to this assertion, for after a pretty careful and extensive search through the older authors, I was unable to find any notice of it when investigating the subject some time back. I was the more surprised at this, for, believing as some of the older accoucheurs did, that when the placenta was present at the os uteri, it had *already* separated from the fundus and fallen down there, I expected to find some of them recommending it to be removed as a foreign and obstructing body.

4. You state that Mr. Kinder Wood both practised and taught the plan of removing the placenta before the child. You do not mention, however, in your note, under *what* circumstances he did so, whether under those pointed out by obstetric authors in general, or under any of the conditions which I have proposed. If under the latter, I can asseverate that I for one had never heard of his practice or proposition, or of the same practice or proposition being made by any others

when I first worked out the matter. If he did so, I cannot further but express astonishment, that when I stated my views to you here, you should have apparently received them as new, and not given me the slightest hint as to the practice being one that you were acquainted with.

When I wrote to you on the day that I received from you a copy of your lecture, I had read over the paper hurriedly, and was principally interested in the fact that you were acquainted with some cases that were not previously upon my list, and I asked you for references or notes of them at the time. It was only by a more careful perusal of it afterwards, that I was led to think of what some of my friends here insisted on—your apparently careful suppression of all mention of my cases and views on the subject; and I was anxious to trust that the omission was unintentional. The tone and tenor of your last letter is, I fear, calculated to dissipate any such hopes, and to show that the suppression had (as my friends here from the first insisted) an object in it; and I certainly do not envy you the position in which you have thought proper to place yourself; for it is this. You came here last autumn; had disclosed to you all my views upon this, and upon other points; heard from me by letter some time afterwards that I had in reality, in a case that had just occurred, separated the placenta from the cervix as a matter of choice, and thus, as it appeared to me, saved the life of the mother. You wrote to me acknowledging the receipt of this letter, and the importance of the case referred to in it; and then in December you publish a lecture containing references to every one's cases *except* mine, and recommend in it, as one modification of practice in placental presentations, the plan which I had fully divulged to you.

As you seem averse to affording the just and simple measure of amendment which I requested in my last note, I fear I have nothing left but to take the proper means and proper channel of vindicating myself, a course which it gives me, I can sincerely assure you, true and heartfelt sorrow to be obliged to adopt in regard to you.

I have the honour to be,

Yours, &c.,

J. Y. SIMPSON.

22, Albany Street, Edinburgh,

Jan. 22, 1845.

Since writing the above letter to Dr. Radford, I had occasion to look, for another purpose, into an old and valuable author, whose work I had not previously sufficiently searched. In it I found one case detailed, in which the author decidedly detached and removed the placenta immediately before extracting the child, and probably he may mention others. In the case I allude to, the patient seems to have afterwards suffered from purulent effusion into one eye, the puerperal disease some years ago described by Dr. Hall and others. I take very great blame to myself for not having been previously conversant with this author's valuable case or cases.

IV.—LETTER FROM DR. RADFORD TO DR. SIMPSON.

My dear Sir,

Your letter came to hand this day, but I presume you had not received my paper when it was posted. You will, by this time, be acquainted with my views of detaching the placenta in several cases of placenta prævia. You will find in the paper sent that I have mentioned your case, &c., which I should have done in my lecture, had I not thought by so doing I should have violated the rules of propriety, not having your sanction. You will recollect that you sent a letter dated October 4th, which I answered October 7th, requesting the privilege of citing it; but from that time I did not hear from you, directly or indirectly, until I received a letter from you, dated January 27th, 1844,—this date should be December,—after you had received and perused my paper. Now, Sir, can you, or any of your friends, under such circumstances, complain that I had not noticed your case, or alluded to you in any way in my lecture? I may just mention, that Mr. Kinder Wood's was a practice of *election*, and done for the express purpose of arresting the bleeding, in cases of placenta prævia, attended by exhaustion.

Yours, &c.,

THOMAS RADFORD.

Manchester, Jan. 26, 1845.

V.—LETTER FROM DR. SIMPSON TO DR. RADFORD.

My dear Sir,

I presume you will agree with me, that there is nothing in your note of the 26th, which I require to answer.

Your *second* paper places the matter in a still less happy light than the first.

The gravamen of my complaint is not that an individual case or cases of mine are *not* mentioned by you; it is that the results of all my cases and investigations *are* mentioned by you, and that without any due acknowledgement.

You complain that I did not (as would appear from your last note) give you the special liberty, which you had wished, to state one special case. I complain, that you have stated the deductions and generalizations from the whole inquiry (as far as you understood them) without asking any liberty of me,—without having my sanction,—or without offering any adequate reason or apology for so doing.

If you can furnish me with any proper clue to Mr. Kinder Wood's particular views or cases, I shall be delighted to do honour to his memory.

Yours respectfully,

J. Y. SIMPSON.

Edinburgh, Jan. 30, 1845.