

CASE OF TRIPLETS, — WITH REMARKS.

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[The following communication was addressed to the professor of Midwifery in Harvard University, and by the favor of a friend was procured for the readers of the Magazine.]

DEAR SIR ; — On the morning of the eighth of March, I was called to a case of midwifery, the details of which I have thought might be interesting to you.

Mrs C. D., aged 32, the mother of five or six children, was said to have been in labor four hours when I arrived. The

pains being regular, and the waters having passed off soon after the commencement of the labor, she was placed in the proper position, and by examination the head of a foetus was found nearly ready to pass the external organs. The presentation being natural, it was with one or two pains delivered. As it did not use its lungs, I felt of the chord and found it pulsating. I therefore followed your directions, and moderately resisted the efforts of the womb (while expelling the pelvis and lower extremities) that it might not too suddenly empty itself; at the same time using means to excite the respiratory organs. These, however, proved unavailing, though continued for sometime after the child's detachment from the placenta. Immediately on a subsequent examination, the feet of another child were found occupying the lower part of the vagina. The womb now acted with more rapidity and more power than before, and soon the cries of a second child announced its life.

As soon as this was disposed of, attempting an examination, a large rounded mass was felt descending with considerable force. I made what resistance I could, thinking whether it might not be an inversion of the uterus. Still it descended, the womb acting with greater energy, than when expelling the second child, and before I could use any means, as pinching, or the like, to ascertain the nature of this globular mass, it was about to pass the external organs. At this moment the flow of waters and the cries of another child, told the nature of the case. And although it was much larger than either of those that preceded it, at the same time that it was covered with membranes well distended with liquor amnii, still its passage through the pelvis and external organs was much more rapid, and apparently much more easy than was that of either of the others. This was owing, partly, no doubt, to the dilatation their passage had effected, and partly to the womb being able to concentrate its powers as it became freed of its burthen.

This case perhaps affords no evidence of the doctrine of superfœtation. Although the children were not equally developed, yet the difference was by no means so great as to require this cause for an explanation. The patient by her calculation had gone the full period of gestation. The situation of the placenta seemed to afford evidence that two of the ova came from the ovarium of the left side, and one from the right, for that which belonged to the two first born, was attached to the right side of the body of the uterus, while the other was attached to the left side near the fundus.

Now although this might not have been a superfœtation

according to the general acceptation of the term, yet might it not have been the result of two cohabitations, the second being allowed to take place before the uterus was closed, whether by the membranes produced for the reception of the first impregnation, or by the mucus thrown out at its neck?

Such a fact seems to be established by the case recited by Dr Good, from M. Bouillon, who advances this explanation in a case where a negress brought forth at the usual time of pregnancy, 'two male children full grown and of like proportions,' but the one a negro the other a mulatto, — and after long resistance, confessed that on the same evening, she had had connection, with a white and also with a negro. And does not a case of this kind go far to set aside the doctrine of conception being dependent on absorption, inasmuch as the lymphatics might act on semen in the vagina, at any stage of a previous connection, and thus superfœtation would constantly be taking place. Whereas, if it be necessary to conception that the semen should be lodged within the cavity of the uterus, while the parties are cohabiting (whether by propulsion or suction), then the closing of the mouth of the womb, stops the farther increase of offspring.

There is no necessity of supposing two connections to account for this case of triplets, only while we allow that they might have been the product of one cohabitation, we also allow that there might have been two.

These children were all females, and so far as their organization and development depended on the powers of their parents, they might have been reared, had the circumstances of their birth and the nursery been favorable. The first, as above related, was stillborn. This was owing no doubt to the over-distended state of the womb, preventing regular efforts in its delivery; and thus probably the head had long been suffering from pressure at my arrival; add to which that the waters common to the first two, passed off early, therefore the head of this child performed in part the office of the protruding bag of water. In regular development it was the most perfect of the three, having its navel in the centre of its length, its chord, too, was one third larger than that of its fellow, and it exceeded it in weight eleven ounces. The chord of the third born was considerably larger than that of the first, showing that the size of the chord was in proportion to the size of the children — and the placenta to which it was attached was nearly two thirds as large as that which served the others.

Their respective developments were as follows :

| | | | <i>Weight.</i> |
|-----------------------|-------------|----------------------------------|----------------|
| Length of first born, | 15½ inches. | Navel in the centre. | 4 lb 3 oz. |
| “ of second born, | 15½ “ | Naval half an inch below centre | 3 “ 8 “ |
| “ of third born, | 17½ “ | Naval half an inch below centre. | 4 “ 9 “ |

The two placenta with their membranes weighed 2 lbs. 1 oz. These measurements were taken thirtysix hours after birth. I took the dimensions of their heads, but these have got mislaid ; they were, however, so far as my experience goes, less under size than were their bodies. In fact, as stated above, had the circumstances of the birth and the nursery been in every respect favorable, they might have been reared. However, the mother not being able to afford them any nourishment at the breast, they were fed by hand. The second-born lived fifteen or twenty days, and the third about four weeks.

The parents of these children lived by the water's edge, where shell-fish abound, and other fish are taken in such plenty that they are distributed a great part of the time, to those asking, 'without money and without price.'

Now as this conception happened in June, in the midst of the fishing season, I think we are justified in attributing this fecundity of offspring in some measure, to the food of the parents.

The above case occurred in Tiverton, R. I., in which town there have been two other cases of triplets, one about seventeen years since, still-born, the other sixty years since, of Indian parents, two of which I have understood attained to manhood.

Your ob't servant,

SAMUEL WEST, Jr.

New-Bedford, Nov. 6th, 1833.