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TRISTRAM SHANDY AND OBSTETRICS.

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Dr. Cross's recent history of the "Life and Times of Laurence Sterne,"* revives an interest, which the medical profession should never have allowed to languish, in the "Life and Observations of Tristram Shandy, Gent."

Of all English fiction writers Laurence Sterne has given us the clearest picture of the obstetrical customs of his time and country. But Sterne's wit was an exasperating one and could never touch any subject either directly or seriously or reverently. Furthermore, even his unblushing and irreverent imagination had to stop short at the door of the upper chamber where Tristram Shandy†—already nine months afloat on a sea of bad luck—lay becalmed for fifty-four chapters while passing through the narrow straits, and while his father and Uncle Toby and Dr. Slop were discoursing in the parlor below on every subject under the sun from noses to fortifications. For Sterne was a minister of the church of England and knew to an inch how far his double-edged weapon would be allowed to cut without unfrocking him. But sitting just outside that forbidden door he still manages, in an unparalleled satirical frolic, to hold the mirror up to most of the scientific, obstetrical, and religious weaknesses of the eighteenth century.

Mrs. Shandy was to be entitled under her marriage contract to go up to town for her first lying-in, but should she "through false cries and tokens" delude her husband into an unnecessary journey to London, she would have to even matters up by submitting the next time to an accouchement in the country.

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* MacMillan's.

† The word "Shandy" is still current in Yorkshire for an individual who is "gay, unsteady, crack-brained." Tristram was certainly well-named.

As might have been expected, such a contingency actually arose, and it was to this unlucky contract and the subsequent error in his mother's judgment that poor Tristram attributed the defacement, or effacement, of his nose by the forceps of a country obstetrician.

Just 280 days prior to Tristram's advent into the world, Mrs. Shandy consented—"as they lay chatting gravely in bed afterward, talking over what was to come"—thus to balance the last year's journey by lying-in this time in the country. Mr. Shandy contended that the dangers of such a confinement would be somewhat mitigated by employing Dr. Slop, a local celebrity, living only eight miles distant, "who had devised many curious improvements for the quicker extraction of the fetus in cross births." The doctor "was a little squat, uncourtly figure of about 4 1/2 feet perpendicular height, with a breadth of back and a sesquipedality of belly which might have done credit to a sergeant in the horse guards." He had lost his front teeth through the unfortunate slipping of his forceps during a previous delivery.* "My mother, on the other hand, was absolutely determined to trust her life, and mine with it, into no soul's hand but that of a licensed old woman whose only claim to her confidence lay in the fact that, in the course of twenty years' practice in the parish, she had brought every mother's son of them into the world without any slip or mishap which could fairly be laid to her account." After Mr. Shandy "had done arguing the matter with his wife as a Christian and came to argue it over again with her as a philosopher and had put his whole strength to it' depending upon it as his sheet anchor," he got the worst end of the argument—of course; and they finally agreed to compromise. Within three days after the above conversation, Mrs. Shandy completed her arrangements with her midwife, and Dr. Slop was engaged to drink a bottle of wine with Mr. Shandy and Uncle Toby in the back parlor during the ceremonies. No one knows what the midwife charged, but whether Dr. Slop did or did not take any otherwise active part in the deliverance, he was to be paid five guineas.

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* Dr. Slop was really Dr. John Burton, a Papist man—midwife. No one could doubt who was intended by "the little, squat, uncourtly figure waddling through the dirt upon the vertebræ of a diminutive pony" out to Shandy Hall to try his newly invented forceps upon the head of Mr. Tristram Shandy, Gent. "Dr. Burton, woefully lacking in a sense of humor, solemnly disclaimed all resemblance to the caricature Sterne had drawn of him. Then another doctor of the neighborhood, thinking Sterne might have meant him, called the parson up one morning, and entered a vigorous protest against the indecent liberties taken with him. After vain attempts to convince the doctor of his error, Sterne lost patience and remarked sharply: 'Sir, I have not hurt you; but take care; I am not born yet; but heaven knows what I may do in the next two volumes.' "

Shandy *père* was a man of wide reading, and rejoiced in an active imagination which during the ensuing nine months was given full play. He had views which would have done full credit to many of our present-day obstetricians. In fact, many of his theories still have a suspiciously modern flavor. For example, he saw in Cesarean section less danger to the child than in difficult and prolonged labors; and even went so far as to advocate prompt recourse to that procedure whenever labor even threatened to become obstructed. He mentioned this one day to Mrs. Shandy, remarking casually that certain towering geniuses—notably Julius Caesar, Hermes Trismegistus,* Scipio Africanus, Marius Torquatus, and Edward the Sixth—all came sideways into the world; "but seeing his wife turn pale as ashes at the very mention of it, as much as the operation flattered his hopes, he thought it as well to say no more of it."†

While Uncle Toby was demonstrating the mathematics of fortification in the kitchen garden with the aid of Corporal Trim, and bragging interminably about "what prodigious armies we had in Flanders," the elder Shandy was pondering the mechanics of childbirth and evolving still another theory which has but recently come again to the surface. "It is of the nature of an hypothesis, when once a man has conceived it, that it assimilates everything to itself, as proper nourishment; and, from the very moment of your begetting it, it generally grows the stronger by everything you see, hear, read, or understand." It suddenly dawned on the squire that the reason for the intellectual stature of the just mentioned worthies was that their brains had not been subjected to obstetrical pressure either through the application of forceps or through maternal efforts during prolonged labor. "By heavens!" cried he, "the world is in conspiracy to drive out what little wit God has given us, and the professors of the obstetric art are lifted into the same conspiracy! What is it to me which end of my son comes foremost into the world, provided all goes right after and his cerebellum escapes uncrushed!" Hence, in cases refusing

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* After whom Tristram would have been named but for an unfortunate misunderstanding between the nurse who held the child up for baptism and the parson who did the christening.

† Not to name others like McDuff, who perhaps flourished but in Shakespeare, and only there in order to make the witches' prophecy come true. The reader will of course also recollect that Apollo is said to have cut the living Aesculapius from the body of the dead Semele.

Cesarean section, Mr. Shandy strongly advocated that podalic version* should be substituted. In these views Mr. Shandy held not only the sanction of Dr. Slop, but he seems to be once more in accord with the theories advanced by some of our most modern writers, who have shown recently that in certain labors the soft brain and its easily ruptured blood-vessels are to their great detriment squeezed part way through the foramen magnum during the parturient effort. To quote Dr. Slop, "it would astonish you to know what improvements we have made of late years in all branches of obstetrical knowledge."

The obstetrical moment finally arrived, but Dr. Slop, whose visit that day happened to have been a purely casual one for the purpose of inquiring after Mrs. Shandy's health, had unfortunately left all his modern improvements hanging at the head of his bed in a green baize bag between a pair of pistols. Obadiah was sent post haste—eight miles and return—after the *tire-tête*, the crotchet, the vectis, the fetus-hook, the newly invented forceps, and the papistical baptismal squirt.†

In spite of this extensive tokological armamentarium which came back around Obadiah's waist, and which rattled ominously each time the gray coach horse took a leap through the mud, the reader will note that Sterne makes no mention of the Davidson syringe, the Barnes bag, the Kelly pad, and other modern India-rubber adjuncts without which now-a-days no infant of any social standing consents to uncover its face. For the obstetric art was then in its infancy and even the forceps or "tongs" or "extractors" were novelties in Dr. Slop's time. Tristram—whose memoirs commenced to appear in 1760—could not have been born later than 1730, and the wonderful secret instruments of the Chamberlen family did not come into general use much before that date. Deventer describes them as curiosities in 1716, and Heister pictured them crudely even in 1724.

As to the Kelly pad, the present writer can find no reference to it at any date earlier than that of the Dublin Rotunda, *and none even in the records of that institution;* but the name would strongly suggest that the pad might have come into use first through the Kellys of Dublin, who probably flourished there and then, and who undoubtedly enjoyed—both as practitioners and patients—large opportunities at the Rotunda lying-in hospital. As against this fascinating hypothesis may be raised the plain fact that Goodyear first succeeded in vulcanizing rubber in 1844, so that if the pad was in existence prior to that time it must have been constructed of some material other than vulcanized rubber. A branch of the Kelly family settled in Maryland, where some of its members are still said to be engaged in medical practice. Possibly the pad found its way into America with this family, very much as did the "tongs" which were first invented and used in England by the Chamberlens, a family of French Huguenot refugees. This question presents an inviting opportunity for a future obstetrical memoir in the style of some of the valuable publications issued from time to time by our institutions for higher research.

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* As originally practised by Ambroise Paraens.

† Undelivered infants, still living but in extreme peril, were baptized by injection.

None of the modern improvements which the jingling Obadiah brought back on the coach horse to Shandy Hall seem to have been called into favorable action to save poor Tristram's nose.

"Bless my soul!—my poor mistress is ready to faint—and her pains are gone—and the drops are gone—and the child is where it was, continued Susannah—and the midwife has fallen backward over the edge of the fender, and bruised her hip as black as your hat. 'I'll look at it,' quoth Dr. Slop. There is no need of that, replied Susannah—you had better look at my mistress—but the midwife would gladly first give you an account how things are, so desires you would go upstairs and speak to her this moment."

Sterne, unhappily for the reader's curiosity, lets Dr. Slop, in response to the call of the midwife for help, go above stairs unaccompanied, and we have to wait for our next sight of the doctor until he appears in the kitchen, after the ceremony is all over, "making a bridge" under the observation of Corporal Trim. Uncle Toby, whose mind dwelt perpetually on war and fortifications, thought the obliging doctor was constructing a model, such as had been previously under discussion in the parlor, of the Marquis d'Hopital's draw-bridge used at the seige of Dunkirk—and sent the doctor his thanks accordingly.

"God bless your honor, cried Trim, 'tis a bridge for young master's nose—in bringing him into the world with his vile instruments—he has crushed his nose, Susannah says, as flat as a pancake to his face; and he is making a false bridge for it with a piece of cotton and a thin piece of whalebone out of Susannah's stays to raise it up." "Lead me, brother Toby, cried my father, to my room this instant."

Interesting, also, in this connection, are the views quoted by Sterne from certain of our scientific forefathers, relative to the obstetrical and other causes of variations in the shape of the nose. A certain Prignitz, for example, is quoted as holding that the nose, being filled mostly with blood and animal spirits, and these in turn being impelled and driven by the warmth and force of the imagination, develops in direct arithmetical proportion to the excellency of the wearer's fancy. Scroderus, on the other hand, believed Prignitz quite wide of the truth, and held to a directly contrary theory—namely, that the nose begat the fancy. The great obstetrical authority, Ambroise Paraens—at least a modern in his materialism—held that both of these worthies were not much better than guessers, and proved conclusively that, barring accidents during parturition, the length and goodness of the nose was in inverse proportion to the softness and flaccidity of the nurse's breast—and that by sinking into it, as into so much butter, the nose was comforted, nourished, plumped up, refreshed, refocillated, and set agrowing forever.

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