Original Papers.

PLACENTAL PRESENTATIONS. — EXPOSITION
OF DR. LEE'S LAST ERRORS OF STATEMENT.

By J. Y. SIMPSON, M.D.,

PROFESSOR OF MIDWIFERY IN THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH, PHYSICIAN-
ACCOUCHEUR TO HER MAJESTY IN SCOTLAND, ETC.

IN my last communication on the subject of placenta prævia, I showed Dr. Lee to have been guilty of a series of mis-statements on the subject of placental presentations, not only numerous in themselves, but so deeply implicating the literary character of any writer who had committed them, that every one would have hastened to do one of two things in regard to them—either, merely rebut the charges individually, if that were possible; or, secondly, duly apologize for them if the first were impossible. I regret to say that, unfortunately for his own character, Dr. Lee has neither followed the one course nor the other, with one single exception—viz., the statistics of the placental cases of Portal; and that, if he had retained any due respect for himself, I fear he ought also to have left alone.

Dr. Lee's Estimate (?) of the Number of Portal's Cases of Placenta Prævia, and his Statistical Definition of "Plusieurs."

In my exposition of Dr. Lee's errors of statement in THE LANCET for Nov. 13th, I observed under the head—

"Sixth error of statement of Dr. Lee—Dr. Lee has latterly averred—first, that the number of Portal's recorded cases of placenta prævia is not fourteen, (as I had stated,) but eighteen; and secondly, that eight of these eighteen were cases of complete, and ten of them cases of partial, presentation of the placenta; and that he (Dr. Lee) had constructed a table proving this. I already gave reference to my fourteen cases, and stated, (p. 378,)—"I call upon Dr. Lee to publish this table, to show that I am in error, or to retract his remarks, or by his silence to acknowledge that the 'false assertion' and 'gross ignorance' of which he speaks are on his side, and not on mine."

At last Dr. Lee has reluctantly published his "table of Portal's alleged cases." And perhaps such an extremely curious statistical document was never before presented to the medical profession.

Into this table Dr. Lee admits—1. Fourteen cases of Portal which I have given in the table published in THE LANCET, p. 518. 2. He includes in it, as a fifteenth case, Portal's fifty-fifth observation, which I more than once stated (see THE LANCET, p. 378, and p. 518) to be of so doubtful and equivocal a nature, as not to warrant its adoption into any table of "statistical facts." These $14 + 1$ make still, however, only 15 in all. But Dr. Lee had declared Portal to have reported not 15 but 18 cases of placental presentation. How, then, were the additional three to be obtained in order to make out the 18? Now, mark the unique and characteristic perspicuity of Dr. Lee on this point!

I quote verbatim, in the foot-note, the whole details which Portal gives of the second case in his work.* Out of that

* "OBSERVATION II. The delivery of a woman afflicted with an excessive flooding.—October 9th, 1664, I was sent for to a gentlewoman, who reckoned to have been big with child near eight months. I found her excessive weak, so as to be scarce able to speak, and much dejected, having been afflicted with a continued violent flux of blood for eight days. I asked the midwife what remedies she had made use of, who told me that she proposed several things, but they were not accepted of by the patient, who, being now in imminent danger of perishing by her own obstinacy, sent for a priest, who, having given her the eucharist and extreme unction, I told her spouse that the only way to save her life was to deliver her immediately, though after all I would not engage for her life, yet assuring her that I had saved divers women in the same condition in the hospital of Paris. He begged of me to try my utmost skill, which I being unwilling to comply with without the advice of a physician, they sent a coach for Dr. Brayer; but it being late at night, he refused to come, yet sent me an answer to the letter I had writ to him, leaving the whole management of the matter to my discretion, of which he hoped to see the issue the next day. At the encouragement of the physician, having anointed my fingers and hand with fresh butter, I put it into the neck of the womb, whence I brought forth many clots of coagulated blood; and coming to the inward orifice, I found the same opened to the bigness of a French crown-piece, and of the thickness only of a twelfth part of an inch. Thus entering further with my fingers, I perceived a spongy substance, which at first I mistook for clots of blood, but soon found it to be the placenta uterina, which having separated gently from the womb, I broke the membranes, which were full of water. After I had once taken hold of the child's feet, I delivered the woman, but the child was dead. We ordered the childbed-woman strengthening medicines, which were approved the next morning by Dr. Brayer, who prescribed a nourishing diet and emollient clysters, by the help whereof the woman was restored to her former health, except that for a considerable time after she was afflicted with violent pains in the head—it being rarely seen that women escape these pains after such a delivery, which, without the singular application of Dr. Brayer, would have proved of much worse consequence."

single second case, Dr. Lee attempts to manufacture four individual cases—namely, first, the case (Observation II.) itself; and, secondly, three others to make up his alleged number of eighteen cases. And his process is this:—Portal, in the details of this case of unavoidable hæmorrhage, states that he had previously seen several ("plusieurs") instances of flooding treated by forced delivery, and the mother saved. Now, with a rare logic, (reasons Dr. Lee,) "plusieurs" (several) must mean precisely three; for it is precisely three that I stand so much in need of to eke out the alleged number of eighteen cases, which I aver to be contained in my table. Therefore $14 + 1 = 15$, and "plusieurs" = 3: then $15 + 3$ "plusieurs" is exactly = 18.

Perhaps never was there before such a sad and miserable satire on statistics perpetrated. And I feel almost sorry in being obliged to destroy this last laughable and yet lamentable fiction, behind which Dr. Lee has attempted to shelter and save himself.

But first, unfortunately for Dr. Lee, the word "plusieurs" in the passage alluded to, refers to severe hæmorrhage before delivery, without at all adverting to whether that hæmorrhage were of the accidental or unavoidable species. At the time at which Portal made the remark, Portal had not made an examination of the patient, and, consequently, could not know to what species the flooding belonged. Accidental hæmorrhages are as frequent as unavoidable. From his "Clinical Midwifery," Dr. Lee himself seems to have met with thirty-eight of the former, while he encountered thirty-six of the latter. And certainly Dr. Lee has no right or title whatever to say that the "plusieurs" instances which had previously happened to Portal were all of the unavoidable variety, except the simple and clamant necessity of declaring them all of this variety, and of this variety only, for the sake of filling up the unfortunate gap in his unfortunate table.

But, secondly, let us grant to Dr. Lee, that these three or "plusieurs" instances were instances of unavoidable hæmorrhage. Then the consequences of this admission will be still more disastrous to Dr. Lee's deductions regarding Portal. Dr. Lee argues (p. 547) that the maternal mortality in Portal's cases was extremely small. "It would be seen," he infers, "that Portal's cases were eighteen in number, and that only one was fatal." Dr. Lee has lately re-read and re-analyzed all Portal's placental cases, and he must, consequently, be perfectly aware, that in commenting on his thirty-ninth observation, (a placental presentation,) Portal makes some important observations, which he (Dr. Lee) charily abstains from once alluding to. In commenting upon this case, (his thirty-ninth,) Portal observes, "In such cases as this, the delivery ought to be despatched with all possible speed, without which, the woman must expect nothing but present death. Of this I have seen divers instances (*plusieurs femmes*) in the hospital of Paris, where I officiated as man-midwife many years, in conjunction with M. de la Cuisse, and Mr. Bouchet's son-in-law, unto whom I acknowledge myself infinitely obliged for their directions and good advice upon many occasions."

Now, if we are to take the "plusieurs cas" under observation two as meaning, as Dr. Lee avows it means, three cases exactly of hæmorrhage, and these three cases, too, all of the unavoidable kind, then we must read the "plusieurs cas" under observation thirty-nine as having precisely the same signification. And they must be different cases, too, for the first "plusieurs" (observation thirty-nine) all died. Hence, if we admit that "plusieurs" signifies three, having now two "plusieurs," why these two "plusieurs" are, consequently, according to Dr. Lee, equal to six. And thus, according to Dr. Lee's mode of reading, the number of placental cases reported by Portal is not eighteen, but twenty-one. Nay more: all these three last "plusieurs" died; one of the previous eighteen died; but $1 + 3$ "plusieurs," according to Dr. Lee's algebra, means four. Hence, among Portal's cases we have not, as Dr. Lee avers, only one in eighteen cases fatal, but four in twenty-one fatal; or, according to Dr. Lee's own reading, nearly one in every five of the mothers in Portal's cases died.

Here we have Dr. Lee's own strange arithmetic overturning Dr. Lee's own strange allegations and assertions; and I fear the improper means by which he has attempted to cover his retreat and errors have only rendered that retreat the more impossible, and those errors the more transparent.

I ought, perhaps, further to observe, that Dr. Lee asserted, that of Portal's alleged eighteen cases, eight were complete and ten partial presentations of the placenta. In drawing out the table which he has published, he has evidently felt equally incompetent to prove this second and often repeated

asseveration; but he makes one or two distressing attempts to do so. For instance, at page 437 of *THE LANCET*, he describes Portal's second observation as the first of his series of complete placental presentation. He now, at page 548, doubts if this was a case of placental presentation at all. In Portal's twenty-ninth observation, the child's head presented, and passed *through* the structure of the obstructing placenta, (a pretty conclusive sign that it must have been lying quite across the os uteri.) But even here, so writes Dr. Lee, page 548, "in the history of this case, no fact is stated to prove that it was an example of complete placental presentation."

Still, with all these and similar equivocal means, the alleged number of ten partial placental presentations is not made out by Dr. Lee; and it simply remains one other illustration of his inimitable powers of assertion.

Let me close these remarks in Dr. Lee's own apposite words:—"There can now be no longer any difficulty in determining how much reliance is to be placed on Dr. Lee's statistics, and whether he has been sufficiently impressed with the importance of observing the most rigid accuracy—the most scrupulous regard to truth. . . . In proportion to the imposing effect which figures give to assertions, so ought to be our jealousy with regard to the data on which numerical calculations are founded. If correct, we are furnished with a safe and steady stepping-stone to truth; if incorrect, (as lamentably exemplified in the above instance,) we are confounded by the sudden yielding which takes place, and get involved in a slough of error."

Dr. Lee's Apology for Concealing his Detection of his Published Errors regarding the Structure of the Placenta.

In a former communication, (see *THE LANCET*, page 519,) I had occasion to notice incidentally—first, that Dr. Lee had propounded, in 1832, an entirely new view regarding the anatomy of the vascular relations between the uterus and placenta; secondly, that he had discovered in May, 1833, that this supposed great anatomical discovery was simply a great anatomical blunder on his part; and thirdly, that he had, for eight or ten years afterwards, wittingly and improperly concealed from the profession this knowledge of the error into which he had thus led anatomists and accoucheurs. In defence of his conduct, Dr. Lee avers in his last paper, (*THE LANCET*, page 549,) that a month after he discovered his error, it was mentioned in a review of a work of Velpeau's in the *Medical Gazette*. In other words, he would argue, that the casual notice and correction of his error, in the course of this anonymous review, was a sufficient public notice of his mistake. And this is his only apology (?) for continuing for years to mislead his professional brethren on the matter. But I have already shown, that about a twelvemonth after this review, by an unknown hand, had appeared, the editor of the very journal in which the review appeared, announced, as if officially, to his readers, in reference to Dr. Lee's views of the utero-placental circulation,—"We are enabled to state that Dr. R. Lee is still pursuing his inquiries on the subject. We have not learned that there has been any change of opinion."

Can Dr. Lee explain two things—1. Who could possibly have told the Editor of the *Medical Gazette* to make this false and deceitful semi-official announcement to the profession? and 2. Why did not Dr. Lee at once contradict it, and why did he not confess his error, when publicly called upon to do so, a few weeks subsequently, by the duped Editor of the *Gazette*? (See *THE LANCET*, p. 519, for quotations and references in full.)

Dr. Lee's Argument regarding reliance being formerly placed on his recorded Observations.

"In spite," says Dr. Lee, "of all the errors that are stated by Dr. Simpson to have been committed by Dr. Lee, Dr. Simpson placed . . . unbounded reliance on Dr. Lee's accuracy for constructing the Old Mortality Table, in 1845." Quite correct. But then I believed that Dr. Lee, like other writers, spoke and wrote the truth. His anatomical facts (?) have been all severally doubted and challenged by competent anatomists. Let him beware lest his late papers do not invoke from accoucheurs a similar judgment upon his obstetric facts.

Dr. Lee's Objections to the Corrected Statistical Results of the Cases of Dr. Ramsbotham, &c.

In the table which I first published in *Cormack's Journal*, I entered Dr. J. Ramsbotham as having reported sixteen cases of placenta prævia, with eight deaths, and Dr. F. Ramsbotham as having given forty-four cases with eight deaths; sixty cases in all, with sixteen maternal deaths, or one mother perishing in $3\frac{1}{10}$ deaths. To this it was objected that the cases were partial and selected, and hence apt to lead to error. Dr. F. Rams-

botham most kindly, and with great trouble, drew out for my second table, the notes and results of *all* his father's placental cases and *all* his own, and has certified their accuracy in a letter to Dr. Lee which Dr. Lee himself has published. (See *THE LANCET*, p. 440.) But in objection to my thus stating the whole of the Drs. Ramsbothams' cases instead of a part, Dr. Lee earnestly argues, "In the old table, J. Ramsbotham reports nineteen cases, eight of which were fatal; in the new, 129, and forty-one fatal. In the old table Dr. F. Ramsbotham reports forty-four cases, eight of which only were fatal; in the new table he reports 189, of which forty-nine were fatal. These tables represent Dr. J. Ramsbotham as having reported nineteen cases in 1845, and 129 in 1847; and Dr. F. Ramsbotham eight fatal cases in 1845, and forty-nine in 1847." After some more precisely similar citations, he adds,—"It would be insulting to the understandings of the enlightened practitioners throughout Great Britain to carry comparison further. . . . I have great difficulty in comprehending how any man endowed with common sense and the ordinary feelings of humanity could have ventured to publish such a statement," &c., &c.

Now I most willingly leave it to my professional brethren to decide what character should be given to such melancholy mutterings as these, and whether they are capable of being explained, except on the ground of the old adage, that *Ira brevis dementia est*.

Dr. Lee goes on to allege that his statements have excited "great wrath" in me. I can most truly and sincerely assure him of the very contrary. They have excited, not anger, but most unfeigned regret and pity on my part—regret and pity that a man of Dr. Lee's previous literary standing and supposed integrity should have so far forgotten the respect which he owed to himself, and the respect which he owed to his profession, as to have indulged in making those numerous and deliberate errors of statement of fact, which it has been my very painful duty to unwind and expose.

Edinburgh, Dec. 1847.

ON THE
USE OF ETHER AND CHLOROFORM IN
SURGERY AND MIDWIFERY.

By J. G. LANSDOWN, M.R.C.S.E.

SURGEON TO THE BRISTOL GENERAL HOSPITAL.

THE recent discovery, by Professor Simpson, of the anæsthetic effects produced by the inhalation of chloroform, will no doubt prove a great boon, not only to the public generally, but especially to those medical men who may think fit to apply its use practically. For my own part, I consider myself much indebted to the Professor, not merely for the discovery he has made, but also for his great kindness in so early forwarding to me an account of it.

I did not fail to take the first opportunity afforded me of testing its qualities, and I have found that the experience of my own practice fully bears out its properties, as described by Professor Simpson, and the advantages of the chloroform over ether, which he has stated to be the case in his pamphlet, the greater part of which appeared in *THE LANCET* for Nov. 20th.

I have used it several times to relieve pain in natural labour, in operations, and in tooth-drawing; also for the reduction of strangulated hernia, and in a case of delirium tremens. Each time I have used it I have found the effects produced more suddenly than they can be with the ether, and that the state of sleep can be continued for a much longer period without a renewal of the inhalation, should such be desired, as in performing operations about the mouth, when a renewal of the vapour may be impracticable. It is also by many considered exceedingly pleasant in taste. This, added to the peculiar state of quietude or happiness which some experience during the period they are under its influence, renders its inhalation a thing to be desired rather than to be dreaded, or, at the best, to be taken as the alternative against the suffering of pain. One lady, to whom I was administering it in natural labour, having been in a complete state of rest for about two hours, aroused only by each return of the uterine action, when she would make signs for a renewal of the inhalation, remarked, at a time when her friends, thinking she was fast asleep, were indulging in a little talk,—"I enjoy it more when you are quiet,"—thereby implying that she was not suffering from the pains of her labour, but that she was actually enjoying the happy state of repose into which she was thrown by the chloroform. She inhaled two drachms and forty minims in three hours and ten minutes.