

ARTICLE XVI.

A DEFENCE OF THE CÆSAREAN STATISTICS OF AMERICA. By ROBERT P. HARRIS, A.M., M.D., of Philadelphia.

IN the *Medical Times and Gazette* of April 8th, 1882, under the head of "Porro's Operation," are the following editorial remarks, page 359: "The risk of Cæsarean section is very great. Statistics are quite misleading, from the tendency of operators to publish a case if successful, but try and forget it if fatal." . . . "Dr. Harris, of Philadelphia, has got together a number of cases, from which he represents the mortality as being only twenty-five per cent., a conclusion evidently affected by the fallacy to which we have alluded."

Remarks of the same import having been repeatedly made at home and abroad, editorially, in medical societies, and to me by letter, it becomes me to set the matter at rest by a few words of explanation. It is true that operators are often inclined to keep their unsuccessful cases out of print; but that does not prevent their being obtained, if the statistical hunter is sufficiently persevering, and not easily discouraged by the amount of time and labour required. As an offset to this, it is equally true, that some of the most encouraging Cæsarean cases here and in Great Britain were withheld from publication by their operators, and not obtained until after their death. There are two ways of collecting statistics. The common and easy one is to search all the published records in books and journals, and tabulate the cases; setting down the percentage of success as an evidence of the relative standing of the particular operation in question. The other plan is to begin the real work of collecting just here, and to make a persevering search, if it takes years to accomplish it, after the unrecorded cases of the country, without the least regard to their success or failure. Many of my correspondents will bear me out in the claim, that I have made as persevering searches after fatal cases, as I have ever made after those that were the contrary. My work commenced in 1869, and I may say that in twelve years, the whole United States were very thoroughly searched over; as evidenced by the fact, that 55 unpublished cases were obtained, as an addition to 69 published ones. Had I stopped with the 69 I should have shown a mortality of only $46\frac{1}{3}$ per cent.; but the addition increased the mortality to a fraction above 57 per cent. As the record for the United States now stands, we have saved 53 out of 124 cases. The 55 unpublished cases, although adding largely to the percentage of deaths, were by no means as fatal as might have been presumed; for 16 of them recovered, or as many as were saved out of the first 100 in Radford's statistics of Great Britain.

I have never claimed that we had had a mortality of only 25 per cent. This I presume has been founded upon a statement to the effect that but

28 of the 124 operations had been performed in good season ; rated by the time in labour, and the condition of the woman when operated upon ; and that 21, or 75 per cent. of the operations, resulted in safety to the mothers. Of the 28 children, 23 were delivered alive, of whom 4 lived but a short time ; leaving 21 mothers and 19 children as the results of 28 *early* or *timely* gastro-hysterotomies.

To sum up, we have had 124 Cæsarean operations in the United States, 7 in the West Indies, and 1 in Mexico, with 60 women saved, or $45\frac{5}{11}$ per cent. in North America.

It has been a great surprise to many, who were inclined to overrate the dangers of the Cæsarean operation in the United States, to find that even the unrecorded cases presented a recovery percentage of $29\frac{1}{11}$. It is a very simple matter to decry statistics, on the ground that "all good cases are reported, and bad ones withheld;" but such a guess has not been sustained by the facts, as shown in this record. Conscious of entire honesty in my searches after the truth, it is not very pleasant to hear remarks, which indicate a want of confidence in the thoroughness of the work as presented. I know that in tracing rumored operations to get the truth, I have rejected a large number ; that from one to five years have been expended over some cases ; and that those retained have ample evidence of reliability. My only regret is, that the corresponding work in other countries has not been done in the same manner.

The claim has been made recently, by one of our own writers, that European operators are more inclined than Americans to publish their cases. This may be true in a measure as to the present, and in particular as to Great Britain, where weekly journals are in active search for medical intelligence ; but personal experience leads me to a very different opinion as to the past, and particularly in regard to some of the continental countries. As to England herself, I have only to cite the fact that notwithstanding the Cæsarean searches made and published on three several occasions by the late Dr. Thomas Radford, of Manchester, he failed to secure the only case in his country in which the operation had been performed twice upon the same woman, although the parties resided in Sheffield, thirty-five miles distant. Had Dr. Radford sought out unrecorded cases, as I have done, through correspondents, instead of by notices in journals, he would hardly have failed to learn of the operations by the late Mr. Henry Jackson and his son. There is this difference between Dr. Radford's "*communicated*" cases and mine. His, with very few exceptions, were on the eve of publication, and mine were chiefly old lost cases, or such as there was no intention of ever reporting. Of the 55 unpublished cases, 13 were obtained after the deaths of the operators, and 9 through other physicians, either present or having knowledge of the operations.