

fœtus was indefensible even in the interests of the mother, and the desire of devout parents that the unborn child might not be deprived of admission within the pale of the Church made the operation much more usual in Catholic countries than in Protestant England, where the operation of craniotomy was regarded with less disapprobation. Rousset first used the term "Cæsarian"; he thought it apt, because Pliny stated that the first of the Roman family of Cæsars was delivered by abdominal section—"a matris utero cæsus." (Thus Rousset makes the origin of the name Cæsar the verb *cædere*—to cut.) If this were so, his mother survived the operation. Pliny also says that Scipio Africanus and Manlius Torquato were delivered thus. The stories of all the remarkable men whose births were invested in this manner with romance and celebrity by historians, are not well authenticated. Shakespeare speaks of Macbeth "from his mother's womb untimely ripped," and there was a rumour current that Edward VI. of England was "Cæsar-like, cut out of his mother, Jane Seymour." The story runs that Henry VIII., on being informed of the danger to mother and child, brutally said: "Save the child, by all means, for I shall be able to get mothers enough." He was probably calumniated; at any rate, it is certain that Jane Seymour lived twelve days after delivery; the probable cause of her death was puerperal fever, then a common scourge.

Monsieur Simon, in the first and second volumes of the Memoirs of the Royal Academy of Surgery in Paris, gives an account of seventy-four successful cases of Cæsarian Section; the results were so uniformly good that it is very doubtful whether some other operation is not meant—*e.g.*, craniotomy. The husband was the operator on several occasions, and a wife of a physician of Bruges is reported to have been delivered thus seven times! This is, of course, possible; there are many well-authenticated cases of repeated Cæsarian Section on the same woman. In the early part of the nineteenth century a German patient had four operations, but in those pre-antiseptic days it was highly improbable. Lepage says that not a single case operated upon in Paris between 1799 and 1877 recovered; and in the early part of the nineteenth century about 50 per cent. of the women died.

It is little wonder that the English obstetricians of those days spoke of it as a last resource. Ramsbotham, writing of it in 1841, speaks of it as "a dreadful expedient, appalling in its character, terrible in its consequences." In a later edition, 1867, he states that out of seventy cases in the British Isles only seven or

eight were successful as far as the preservation of the mother was concerned. It is interesting to find that one of these latter was performed by an illiterate Irish midwife, Donally by name. Smellie gives an account of the operation, as described by Mr. Duncan Stewart, surgeon. The woman had been in labour twelve days; the child was thought to be dead after the third day. Mary Donally was called, and "tried also to deliver in the common way; and her attempts not succeeding, performed the Cæsarian operation by cutting, with a razor, first the containing parts of the abdomen and then the uterus, at the aperture of which she took out the child and secundines. She held the lips of the wound together with her hand till one went a mile and returned with silk and the common needles which tailors use; with these she joined the lips and dressed the wound with whites of eggs. The cure was completed with salves of the midwife's own compounding." A Dr. King, of Edinburgh, speaks of seeing the woman two years after, when he "drew out the needles which the midwife had left to keep the lips of the wound together." The patient was reported as having good health, "capable of doing something for her family, with the assistance of a large bandage, which keeps in her intestines."

Besides this case there are two others on record in which midwives operated—one in 1838 in Louisiana, in which both woman and child were saved, and one in 1881, in which the mother was moribund, the child was saved.

There are also at least six cases of very peculiar interest in which women have performed Cæsarian Section on their own persons; it is stated that five survived. One can imagine the pitch to which the women were brought by the maddening and tearing pains of difficult labour before they could resort themselves to this expedient for ending their agony. Other cases are given in which expectant mothers have been gored by animals, a truly horrible end to pregnancy.

That delivery by abdominal incision is practised among some uncivilised peoples is well known. In Uganda, the abdomen of the woman and the hands of the practitioner were washed in palm wine before the incision was made. In pre-antiseptic days, and before the introduction of sutures for the uterine wound in 1769, the mortality from Cæsarian Section was appallingly high; most of the women succumbed to sepsis.

Ramsbotham insisted that no sutures were necessary for the uterus, but that two, or perhaps three, were required for the abdominal parietes. He thought the most important factor in the operation was the heat of the

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)