Art. IV.—Researches on Operative Midwifery. No. I.

Induction of Premature Labour. By Fleetwood Churchill, M. D., Physician to the Western Lying-in Hospital, and Lecturer on Midwifery, &c. in the Richmond Hospital School.

[Read before the Surgical Society of Ireland, April 7, 1838.]

“Neque temeré neque timide.”

Mr. President,

I beg leave to call your attention, and that of this learned society, to an operation of great value in certain cases, in the hope, that from the experience of so many of the profession, a greater amount of accurate information may be acquired than we at present possess. I allude to the induction of premature labour, for the purpose of saving the life of the infant, of its mother, or of both. It is of comparatively modern origin, and is one of the few instances of an improved science augmenting the number of operations.

There would appear to be, in the minds of all men, a repugnance to interfere with the natural progress of those great phenomena which ordinarily run a definite and uniform course, and in the present instance this objection is increased, because the supposed interference is to remedy an irregularity. Accordingly, the first consideration has always been, not the usefulness but the morality of the operation. Dr. Denman states,* that Dr. Kelly informed him, “that about the year 1756, there was a consultation of the most eminent men at that time in London, to consider of the moral rectitude of, and the advantages which might be expected from, this practice, which met with their general approbation.” The conclave decided in favour of the morality of such interference, and shortly afterwards,

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* Introduction to Midwifery, p. 318, 7th Ed. *
the operation was successfully performed by Dr. Macauley. Subsequently, Dr. Kelly "practised it, and among other instances, he mentioned that he had performed this operation three times upon the same woman, and that twice the children had been born living." So numerous, and upon the whole so successful have been the instances in which it has been tried since Denman's time, that it has taken its place among the regular obstetric operations in the various systems of British writers and teachers, and among its supporters may be found the distinguished names of Denman, John Clarke, John and James Barlow, Burns, Merriman, Conquest, Gooch, Blundell, Hamilton, &c.

Dr. Denman's remarks are so much to the point, that I may be excused if I quote them. "With regard to the morality of the practice, the principle being commendable, that of making an effort to preserve the life of a child, which must otherwise be lost, and nothing being done in the operation which could be injurious or dangerous to the mother, but on the contrary, a probability of lessening both her danger and suffering, I apprehend, if there be a reasonable prospect of success, no argument can be adduced against it, which will not apply, with equal force, against any kind of assistance at the time of parturition, against inoculation, or medicine in general, and, in fact, against the interposition of human reason and faculties in all the affairs of life." In France, however, the proposed operation was by no means so frankly received, or so readily adopted. Certain doc-

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* Introduction to Midwifery, p. 319.
† London Practice of Midwifery, p. 233, 6th Ed.
‖ Outlines of Midwifery p. 135. ¶ Lectures reported by Skinner, p. 221.
** Principles and Practice of Obstetricy, p. 559.
 §§ Introduction to Midwifery, p. 319.