

ed, but never satisfactorily decided. Recent circumstances have again called this question into discussion, and several medical practitioners, supposed to be very conversant with such inquiries, were examined before the highest judicial tribunal in this country, for the purpose, if possible, of determining this point; but their conflicting testimonies have tended rather to obscure than to elucidate the matter.

Indeed such a contrariety of opinions exists, upon almost every circumstance connected with the functions of the uterine system, and there is so much difficulty in obtaining from females precise information upon such subjects, that it is little wonderful if the investigator find himself, at every step, involved in intricacy and confusion.

Before it is possible to determine the utmost duration of pregnancy, it becomes necessary to ascertain the point of time from which its commencement is to be calculated; but this remains quite unsettled, for some persons date from the time at which the monthly period intermits, others begin to calculate from a fortnight after the intermission: some reckon from the day on which the succeeding appearance ought to have become manifest; some are inclined to include in their calculation the entire last period of being regular, and others only date from the day on which they were first sensible of the motions of the infant.

It is highly probable that more accurate observation would clear away much of the uncertainty in which this question remains; and it may be hoped that those, whose opportunities afford them the means, will not neglect to note

Calculations respecting the Period of Parturition in Women.

By SAMUEL MERRIMAN, M.D. F.L.S.
&c. &c.

THE question respecting the utmost period to which utero-gestation in the human species can be prolonged, has been often agitat-

down such facts as may assist in effecting this desirable purpose.

With the view of somewhat elucidating this subject, I take the liberty of laying before the Society a Table, for the accuracy of which I can fully vouch, and which was thus constructed. When I have been requested to calculate the time at which the accession of labor might be expected, I have been very exact in ascertaining the last day on which any appearance of the catamenia was distinguishable, and have reckoned forty weeks from this day, assuming that the *two hundred and eightieth* was to be considered as the legitimate day of parturition. The subjoined Table shows how often this day was deviated from, and what was the actual number of days from the day of menstrual intermission to the birth of the child.

A Table of the Births of 114 Mature Children, calculated from, but not including the day on which the Catamenia were last distinguishable.

At 272 days	2		
273	3		
	—		14 in the 39th week.
At 274 days	4		
275	2		
276	4		
277	8		
278	3		
279	3		
280	9		
	—		33 in the 40th week.
At 281 days	5		
282	2		
283	6		
284	1		
285	4		
286	3		
287	1		
	—		22 in the 41st week.
At 288 days	5		
289	2		
290	2		
292	4		
293	2		
	—		15 in the 42d week.
At 255 days	1		
256	1		
259	1		
	—		3 in the 37th week.
At 262 days	2		
263	2		
264	4		
265	1		
266	4		
	—		13 in the 38th week.
At 267 days	1		
268	1		
269	4		
270	1		
271	2		
	—		4 in the 44th week.
At 295 days	1		
296	2		
297	2		
298	4		
301	1		
	—		10 in the 43d week.
At 303 days	1		
305	1		
306	2		
	—		4 in the 44th week.

From this Table it seems fair to infer, that conception is effected soon after the catamenial period has intermitted more commonly than immediately before

the recurrence of that discharge, contrary to the opinion of a physician, who has directed considerable attention to this subject; and who says, "It is more probable that conception takes place a short time previous to the next expected menstruation; an opinion which we know many physiologists entertain."* I may add, that though I have restricted the Table to 114 cases, because those are the only ones which I have been able completely to verify; yet I have calculated a great many more in the same manner, and with results so nearly similar, that I have no doubt of the general correctness of the principle.

A knowledge of this fact is likely to be useful on many occasions, but is of paramount importance in enabling the accoucheur to fix upon the proper time for inducing premature labor, in those afflicting cases of deformed pelvis which allow of no other hope of preserving the child.

Upon a few occasions the period of delivery, dated from the last appearance of the catamenia, has exceeded forty-four weeks, or three hundred and eight days, and I subjoin a short detail of these anomalous cases.

1. Mrs. I. had in ten pregnancies borne eleven children; she had on all these occasions become pregnant almost immediately after the monthly intermission. She was regular in March, 1813, and had no appearance after the 7th inst. She was led to believe that she conceived on the 8th, and made preparations for her confinement in the early part of the fol-

lowing December. Her labor did not take place till the 11th of January, 1814, making 309 days, not including the day of supposed conception, since the disappearance of the catamenia.

The child, a boy, when born, was larger than most, if not than any of her former children, and her labor was of several hours' longer duration. She was once pregnant afterwards, but this pregnancy presented nothing unusual.

I have always been inclined to think, that in this case gestation was protracted beyond the usual term of forty weeks. The lady was a woman of great modesty and good sense, and free from every sort of affectation. She could have had no motive for fixing upon the 8th of March, as the time of conception, but a firm conviction that she was right in her calculation: and neither the time of quickening, nor any other circumstance, induced her to suspect that she had formed an erroneous opinion.

It has indeed been assumed* respecting this case, that the lady did not conceive on the 8th of March, but much later in the interval of freedom from menstruation; namely, only just before the next recurrence of the period. Ought this assumption to be admitted as decisive against the opinion of the lady herself? She had formed her opinion after the experience of ten pregnancies, in all of which, she calculated from the same premises, and her reckoning had proved correct; and in a subsequent pregnancy, calculating in the same way, she again formed a correct opinion. The

* Dr. Lyall, "Evidence in the Gardner Peerage Cause," p. 60.

* Evidence in the Gardner Peerage.

assumption rests altogether upon the hypothesis, that in this one particular the usual course of nature cannot be deviated from, though we have evidence *ad infinitum*, that the course of nature in every other point relative to conception, gestation, and parturition, is continually interrupted and deranged. But let us grant what is assumed, that the conception did not take place till "the day preceding the next menstruation," will this clear up the difficulty? The catamenia ceased on the 7th of March: according to the laws of nature, as contended for by those who make this assumption, the catamenia, unless arrested by conception, ought to have returned at the end of twenty-eight days, consequently on the 4th of April, but they did not return on that day; and therefore, according to this hypothesis, the conception must have been complete on the 3d of April, which gives to the 11th of January following 283 days; and demonstrates, that the longest period of pregnancy which the objectors allow to be possible, was exceeded by three days.

2. Mrs. N. had lain in of one child, and the number of days which elapsed on that occasion, between the catamenial intermission and the labor, was 303. Mrs. N. was unwell in November, 1822; she recovered on the 15th, and had not the slightest appearance afterwards. Her labor took place on the 5th of October, 323 days from the day of intermission.

It should be remarked, that Mrs. N. is of a very nervous temperament, and has always been irregular in her periods of menstruation. The child was large, but not larger than might be ex-

pected from a mother, who is herself above the usual size of females. This case, therefore, though exhibiting so considerable a deviation from the usual course of pregnancy, cannot be adduced as satisfactory evidence of protracted gestation.

3. Mrs. B. upwards of 40 years of age, who had not borne a child for more than nine years, was unwell in March, 1823. As there was no appearance of the catamenia in April, nor the following months, she comforted herself with the hope that the critical change in her life had been happily effected. After some considerable time, however, she began to enlarge in size, and fearing that some disease was forming, she consulted the late Mr. Chevalier, who probably supposed that her complaint was ovarian.

The enlargement continuing to increase, she was recommended to procure the advice of an accoucheur, and in consequence applied to me. On hearing the history of the case, and being positively assured that there had been no appearance of the catamenia for more than twelve months, there was no reason to suspect pregnancy, and I concluded, therefore, that the enlargement was occasioned by an ovarian tumor. When, however, I had other opportunities of seeing Mrs. B. and was permitted to make an examination per vaginam, it became evident that pregnancy was considerably advanced, and in nine or ten weeks afterwards (*viz.* Sept. 27, 1824) she was delivered of a very stout healthy boy.

This is the only instance which has occurred within my knowledge, of impregnation being effected under such very unusual

circumstances. It is not a common event for a woman, upwards of forty years of age, to have a child after an interval of nine years, even when she continues to have regular returns of her periods; but when the menstrual discharge has ceased for many months, in a woman at so late a period of life, it is a very extraordinary occurrence that pregnancy should take place, especially as there was no return of the catamenial secretion.*