

*Case of malformation and spontaneous amputation of one of the lower extremities of a foetus in utero.* By F. P. FITCH, M. D., of New Boston, N. H.

Sir—Having noticed in your journal, (No. 21, November, 1832,) "Observations on the spontaneous amputation of the limbs of the foetus in utero," I am induced to communicate the following case of *malformation and separation of one of the extremities of the foetus*, which has since occurred in my practice. Although I am unable to discover any connexion between the condition of the mother and the appearance that the child presented after birth, or to throw a ray of light upon the causes which operated in effecting the separation of the limb, yet, as instances of "spontaneous amputation" are, I believe, of infrequent occurrence, I shall relate briefly the more prominent features of the case throughout.

Mrs. —, a healthy labouring woman, mother of six robust children, but who had suffered an abortion from injury in her last pregnancy, was alarmed, March 17th, about the sixth and a half month of gestation, by a sudden discharge of the liq. amnii. This discharge at first, though unattended by pain, was abundant, and continued in decreasing-quantities forty-eight hours.

On the morning of the 21st, a substance escaped from the vagina, which was found to be a perfectly formed foetal foot, apparently separated at the ankle joint, and in a state of complete preservation. At this time the abdominal tumour had greatly diminished; the foetal movements within the womb were active, but no expulsive efforts had occurred. On the next day a slight uterine hæmorrhage supervened, which, on the 27th, had so much increased as to require attention. For three days the bleeding was arrested almost entirely; but at the end of this period, although there was yet no indication of an effort in the uterus to throw off its contents, while the woman was engaged, contrary to earnest entreaties, in severe exercise, the flowing was renewed, and the patient lost at a single gush, according to her own statement, "more than a quart of fresh blood." Faintness was induced, but by attention to prescriptions she was again made comfortable. In this condition the patient remained till the morning of the 5th April, when, after a labour of ordinary duration, she was delivered under circumstances of extreme danger from the excessive flooding that ensued. The cord was ruptured at the moment of delivery by a sudden movement of the mother, and was afterwards found to be unusually weak throughout its whole length.

The child exhibited signs of life more than half an hour after birth, and on examination presented the following condition:—It had attained full size for that period, (about the seventh month,) and was apparently vigorous. Situated a little to the left of the centre of the forehead was a horny protuberance, of the size of the middle finger, projecting about half an inch. Below, upon the face, was an extensive deformity, caused by the entire absence of the upper lip and bones beneath to a great extent. This last malformation the mother *very confidently* attributed to an accidental view of a person whose upper lip and part of the nose, had been destroyed by a cancerous sore. But what excited the greatest interest in this case, and, in connexion with the early discharge of the foot, gave origin to this communication, was the condition of the right lower extremity. As far as the knee joint this limb did not differ in appearance from its fellow, but at that point it terminated abruptly, and over the end the skin had contracted uniformly from every side towards the centre, without, however, forming a complete cicatrice. With these exceptions, the child was perfect.

It was fifteen days previous to the birth of the child that the foot, exhibiting no traces of decay, was passed from the vagina, without pain, and unattended by any sanguineous discharge; and it should be added, that, two days after delivery, a substance escaped which had every appearance of having been the portion intervening between the knee and ankle joint, but at that time in a stage of decomposition so advanced, that it could not be well examined. Upon the foot the place of separation was contracted to the size of a small pinhead, and the healing process had apparently been as perfect, and had progressed very nearly as far, as that on the lower extremity of the femur.

In the above case is presented a remarkable property of the impregnated uterus. As the contractions or healing upon the divided surfaces of the limb could not have been accomplished at once, it appears evident that in this instance the uterus not only preserved a detached portion of the fœtus from decay, but maintained its vitality also; nor is this supposition contradicted by the putrescent condition of another portion of the limb, as that had remained exposed to the warmth of the body and other influences two days after delivery of the child.

The mother recovered rapidly, and in eight months was suddenly delivered again of twins, one of which survived two, and the other ten days.

*New Boston, N. H., February, 1836.*