

SMALL-POX OCCURRING TO THE FETUS IN UTERO.

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I AM desirous of placing upon record the following case of small-pox occurring to the fetus in utero, which came under my observation in the year 1834, the entire particulars of which I have not been able, from circumstances, to gather together until the present time, but which, having now obtained, I venture to think will be of sufficient importance to be placed in the pages of THE LANCET.

Variola existed in Berton, near Aylesbury, Bucks, in November, 1833, contiguous to the residence of Jacob W—, a baker in that village. His son, who had never been vaccinated, caught the disease, as it was supposed, from the family of a neighbour, and the eruption was observed in him on Saturday, November 30th. On Sunday, December 1st, Mrs. W— and all her other children were vaccinated, for the first time, by Mr. W. Hayward, surgeon, of Aylesbury, with whom I was then resident as visiting assistant. The vaccination was successful in all, excepting one daughter, who, however, was successfully re-vaccinated by me at the end of a week. Mrs.

W— had but one vesicle; but there is now (June, 1854) a tolerable scar visible. Fourteen days before her confinement, Mrs. W— states that she remembers most distinctly on that day that a most nauseating and depressing effect was produced in her by the odour of one of the stools from her variolous son, whom she was nursing; and on the 4th of January, 1834, a fortnight from the above sensation produced in her, and five weeks, minus one day, after her vaccination, she was delivered of the child the subject of this notice. On examining the infant almost immediately after its birth, I observed on the abdomen some spots, differing in size and appearance; others were discovered on the loins and back, and on the face and neck, those on the latter parts being most numerous. At the inner angle of one of the eyes was a pustule, nearly matured, of the size of a common small-pox pustule, and others of the same size were found on the hands. On the following day the eruption was considerably more out; each pustule had a distinct red inflamed base, was depressed in the centre, and had unequivocally the true variolous character; a cluster of them existed at the left side of the tongue near the apex, and one on the dorsum of that organ towards the root.

The child was feeble, did not suck, nor take scarcely anything by the mouth, and early on the third day expired. Mrs. W— had herself no illness, nor any manifestations of the disease apart from the nausea arising from the effluvia before mentioned, which she perceived on the fourteenth day prior to her confinement, and at which time it is perhaps scarcely questionable the taint was communicated to the fetus in the womb.

Having had the honour of an acquaintance for many years with Mr. Robert Ceely, of Aylesbury, and knowing how extensive the labours of that gentleman have been on this general subject, constituting him, indeed, by common consent, the greatest living authority upon it, I mentioned this case to him, and he has pointed my attention to two examples recorded by Dr. Jenner; in the "Medico-Chirurgical Transactions" for 1809, p. 269, in which the fetus in utero became affected, the mother escaping any external manifestation of the disease. Dr. Jenner adduces those cases to show the continued susceptibility to variola through life; but as the cases differ as to particulars, I shall briefly state them.

In one of those cases the mother had had small-pox herself many years before, but had never been vaccinated; and on meeting in the street, very shortly before her confinement, a child covered with the disease, and loathsome in appearance, she was very sensibly affected. The sensations passed off, and she had no outward manifestations of the disease; but five days after her delivery, pustules appeared on the infant, and the disease went through its usual stages, though in a mild form.

In the other case related, small-pox had been introduced into the house by the parish surgeon (1808) inoculating three of the sons of the family, but the mother was vaccinated by another surgeon. The vaccination was successful, and in five weeks after its performance (during four weeks of which time she had been exposed to the variolous infection of her three sons) she was delivered of a female child, which on its birth was found affected with the small-pox eruption. The surgeon, (Mr. Gervis, of Ashburton, Devonshire,) whose case the above was, distinctly states that at no period after the exposure of the mother to the variola in the house did she evince any sign of being affected by the effluvia; yet the disease was transmitted through her system to the constitution of the infant, herself clearly escaping any kind of manifestation.

In the case I have related, and which came under my own notice, the mother, it will be borne in mind, had been vaccinated, and successfully; but, notwithstanding, had, fourteen days prior to the birth of the child, and three weeks after her vaccination, "a most nauseating and depressing effect produced on her by the odour of one of the stools from her variolous son."

This strong perception of the variolous infection was not, however, sufficient against the protective influence of the vaccine matter which had been introduced into her system, to produce any development in her of the small-pox, and the infection passed to the fetus in the womb.

The value of this case, in so far as it may be considered by the readers of THE LANCET to possess interest, consists, it may perhaps be said, in this, that it sets forth, at one and the same time, and in a more palpable way than any previously recorded, the continued susceptibility to variola after vaccination; and yet the protective influence of the vaccine lymph in operation, guarding the system so far in this instance as to prevent any eruption appearing, or any other than a transitory affection of the health.

Hanwell, Middlesex, August, 1854.