

Abuses of the Speculum.

From an article in the last American Journal of the Medical Sciences, we insert the following extracts, referring our readers for fuller information to p. 534 &c. of that periodical, or to the London Lancet for June. A paper was read before the Royal Medical and Chirurgical Society in May last, by Robert Lee, M. D. on the use of the speculum in the diagnosis and treatment of uterine disease, of which an exposition is given. We omit all that is said of the history of the instrument. "The object of the author in this communication is stated to be, to give concisely the results of his observation during the last twenty-three years, on the use of the speculum in the diagnosis and treatment of uterine diseases, believing that, at the present time, it is equally important to the medical profession, and to society at large, that the legitimate use and real value of the speculum in practice should be accurately defined and made known. In the two great classes of organic disease of the uterus—malignant and non-malignant; and in all the displacements of the uterus, he says he has derived little or no aid from the speculum, in their diagnosis and treatment. Several cases of ulcerated carcinoma are then related, in which the speculum and ignorance of uterine pathology appeared to have led to the commission of the most grievous mistakes. The author then proceeds to give a sketch of uterine disease before the middle period of life, and observes that an examination of the physical condition of the uterus, in unmarried women, either with or without the speculum, he has always refused to make, even when requested to do so, unless pain, severe and almost constant, in the region of the uterus, existed; leucorrhœa or hemorrhage, which did not yield to treatment; and where the symptoms did not make him strongly suspect the presence of some displacement or organic disease. In cases of obstinate leucorrhœa he has often employed

the speculum, in married women, after he had failed to detect the existence of organic by the ordinary mode of examination. The appearances observed in these examinations are then minutely described, and the fact stated, that the author had never seen ulceration of the os and cervix uteri, in such a case, which was not of a specific character, especially scrofulous and cancerous. The lamentable effects of applying potassa fusa to the os and neck of the uterus are then given, in the histories of several cases. The following most important statistical statements were then given by the author; 'In the year 1832,' he says, 'my colleagues at the St. Mary-le-bone Infirmary—Dr. Hone, Dr. Sims, Mr. Stafford and Mr. Perry, late secretary of the society, at my request, desired that the uteri of all the women who died in the wards should be carefully examined, and that they should be preserved for my inspection when any morbid appearance was observed. From 1017 post-mortem examinations of females of all ages, made by Dr. Boyd, (after deducting those of children and others, in which special mention is not made of the uterus,) there were found 708 where either the state or weight of the uterus was noted. In thirteen of these there was congestion or inflammation, which had no specific character, and in some the inflammation was limited to the fundus, and could not have been detected unless the uterus had been removed or cut open. In at least three there were enlargement and induration, which did not appear to have any specific character; and in two there was extreme wasting; twenty-four were puerperal cases, thirteen dropsy of the ovaries or Fallopian tubes, in thirty-one fibrous or bony tumours, and in twenty-one, cancer.' 'My impression is,' adds Dr. Boyd, in the same report, 'that ulceration of the neck or mouth of the womb is an exceedingly rare disease; else I must,' he says, 'have observed it, having cut up and weighed many hundreds; it could scarcely have escaped my notice.' Dr. Allen, the present resident medical officer at the St. Mary-le-bone Infirmary, has held the office about twelve years; and he states to me that he has examined, or been present at the examination of the bodies of more than 1000 adult females, and of these he does not believe that he ever saw more than twenty examples of ulceration of the os uteri of any kind, scrofulous or venereal, excluding cases of ulcerated cancer of the uterus, which were known to exist before death. Dr. Allen further states that he has observed in some cases a portion of the mucous membrane of one lip slightly abraded; this he has seen occasionally, but not often. Mr. Prescott Hewett was six years curator of the Museum of St. George's Hospital, and conducted all the post-mortem examinations. He states that during that time he could not have examined fewer than 600 uteri, and very seldom, if ever, did he meet with anything which could be called ulceration of the os and cervix uteri, independent of scrofula and cancer. Mr. George Pollock held the same office for three years, during which time he examined the bodies of 300 women, and in every case the uterus was cut open and examined. In four

cases, uterine ulceration was observed, but three of these were scrofulous patients, and scrofulous ulcerations existed in other organs. In the fourth case, the ulceration must have been cancerous, as it involved the vagina extensively, as well as the os uteri. Mr. Hewett and Mr. Pollock did not, therefore, observe a single example of simple ulceration of the os and cervix uteri in the 900 uteri they examined, which confirms the accuracy of the opinion given by Dr. Boyd, that ulceration of the neck or mouth of the womb is a very rare disease. Mr. Gray succeeded Mr. Pollock at St. George's Hospital, and he examined 180 uteri. Distinct ulceration of the os and cervix was only observed by him in three uteri, and the nature of the ulceration in these three cases was not determined with certainty. Mr. Gray states to me, further, that redness, slight abrasions, and granulation were sometimes, but not frequently, observed. Neither in the living nor in the dead body, says the author, have I ever seen ulceration of the os and cervix uteri, except of a specific character, and especially scrofulous and cancerous; but I have met with a considerable number of cases in which it had been affirmed by others to exist, after deliberate and repeated examination by them with the speculum, where I ascertained that ulceration did not exist in the os and cervix uteri, nor disease of any kind. Cases are then given in which this gross mistake had been committed, and the paper concludes with a remarkable case of a lady, aged fifty, (communicated by Dr. J. Copland,) in which the speculum was used with fatal effect, when it was ascertained, after death, that the uterus and all its appendages were perfectly healthy. There were marks of recent violence at the orifice of the vagina, and the hymen was torn. Lymph, recently effused, was found coating the upper part of the spinal cord."