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ON THE USE AND ABUSE OF THE SPECULUM IN THE DIAGNOSIS AND TREATMENT OF UTERINE DISEASES.

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The Speculum Uteri has long been in use, but it is only within the last ten or twelve years that it has been recommended as a means of common practice, in the detection and treatment of Uterine diseases. And for whatever merit or demerit there is in its *frequent* application, we are more largely indebted to Dr. J. H. Bennet than any one else.

Dr. Bennet published a series of articles upon the subject in the *London Lancet* for 1845, with *special reference to the great frequency of inflammation and ulceration of the os uteri*. These articles were subsequently published in book form, and were also extensively republished or noticed by the Medical periodical press. Dr. B's views were *ex-cathedra*, and advanced with a *prestige* that was well calculated to gain attention. He went upon the maxim of the celebrated Goethe, that "he who would win upon public confidence, must make bold demands upon their credulity."

He speaks of "*my* doctrines respecting uterine pathology," and "*causes which I have developed*," and also dwells upon his wonderful success, with great *self-complacency*.

Dr. B's *statistics* were of the most startling character. For example, in 300 cases which he examined, there were 243 cases of decided *inflammation* of the cervix and its cavity, and *ulceration* in 222 cases.

The correctness of Dr. Bennet's observations was soon called in question by the large body of medical observers; and from that time to the present, there has been a good deal of bitter controversial spirit manifested on both sides of this question. Although there are many observers who favor the views of Dr. B., yet I am not aware of any whose *statistics* bear proportionally to his. Mr. Whitehead, of Manchester, England, more fully sustains Dr. B's statistics, than any other observer. Mr. W., in his work on "Abortion and Sterility," states that in 2,000 cases at the Lying-in Hospital, Manchester, there were 1,116 cases of leucorrhœal discharge, and in 936 cases the discharge was purulent or ulcerative.

Now, it seems to me that this "purulent discharge" is, in fact, the *mucoso-purulent* discharge which is not unfrequently seen in leucorrhœal cases, without invoking ulceration.

Drs. Murphy and Locock, of London, also corroborate the views of Dr. Bennet; Dr. M. says "he had seen hundreds of cases of uterine disease, and he declared that *seven-tenths* of these were inflammation of the cervix uteri;" and Dr. Locock says "he could not help thinking that ulceration of the neck of the uterus must be a very frequent disease."

These are among the highest authorities, and most accurate observers, who favor the views of Dr. Bennet, touching the great frequency of ulceration of the os and cervix uteri; and it will be observed that their language is indefinite. The two latter authors do not state *specifically* the number of cases examined, nor do they, or Mr. Whitehead, say positively, that they *saw* ulceration in a definite number of cases! Their language is more or less ambiguous, and Dr. Murphy employs the term "inflammation," instead of "ulceration!"

But if the figures of Dr. B. and his adherents have any approximation to truth, and the cauterizations which are so confidently recommended, result in cures, then indeed the Speculum is invaluable in diagnosis and treatment. For Dr. Bennet says, that nearly all his cases were cured by cauterization. But there is a wide discrepancy between these views, and the views of the large majority of observers, and we may with great propriety ask the question propounded by Dr. Tyler Smith, namely: "Does this discrepancy arise from the superior modes of investigation adopted by those who advocate the *special* use

of the Speculum? or does it happen from some misapprehension as to what really constitutes ulceration of the os and cervix uteri?"

The attention of medical observers has now been specially directed to this subject for about twelve years, and during this period the ablest and most distinguished pathologists have under every variety of circumstance examined cases, with a view to ascertain the extent of disease about the os and cervix uteri; and if Dr. Bennet's views had been based upon the solid foundation of *truth*, there certainly would have been more *unanimity* in the statistics of scientific observers.

The *ad captandum* declaration of a writer or speaker, that "*seven-tenths*" of the uterine cases under his practice are "ulcerations of the os and cervix uteri," do not carry much weight to the mind of a calm and judicious practitioner. When *statistics* are resorted to there must be precision and exactitude of observation. That is, state the number of cases examined, and an analysis of each case. Random statements will not do in statistical medicine.

The testimony of such men as Drs. Robert Lee, Tyler Smith, Marshall Hall, Samuel Ashwell, and Charles West, of London, and Thomas R. Mitchell, of Dublin, and a host of other distinguished and critical observers, has decided, after repeated and careful investigations upon both the living and dead subjects, that *ulceration of the os and cervix uteri is an exceedingly rare disease, except among syphilitic and scrofulous patients.*

I might give the statistics of many eminent observers to bear me out in these views, but I should thereby greatly extend this article; these figures can be found in elaborate treatises upon the subject, to which I refer the reader.

There is little doubt but that Dr. Bennet and his followers have mistaken inflammation, excoriation, patches of aphthæ, and the like, for *ulceration of the cervix*. In fact, Dr. B. admits that these ulcerations are in some respects "*unlike*" ulceration as found in other parts of the body. He says, "the surface is *never* excavated," and "after death the ulceration cannot be discovered!"

With these admissions on the part of Dr. B., I conclude that he has confounded inflammation, or abrasion, or some other diseased condition, with ulceration. If ulceration of the cervix cannot be detected upon the dead subject, and is only to be seen upon the living, it is easy to understand how an observer may be mistaken by ocular examination. The parts are naturally red, and subject to slight inflam-

mations, and especially at the menstrual periods; and owing to their occult position, the most careful examination, by means of the Speculum, may lead to incorrect conclusions.

There are those who contend that the Speculum Uteri is as reliable in its means of diagnosis, as the Stethoscope is in the detection of pulmonary disease. This comparison is neither apt nor just. The difference between the Stethoscope and the Speculum is as great as that between *certainly and uncertainty*. To an experienced auscultator the sounds of the chest are almost as certain as the distinctions between the sounds of an empty and full barrel. But such is the occult position of the os and cervix uteri, and the delicate texture of the parts, and the nature of their secretions, and so on, that the eye is liable to be deceived, even aided by the best ocular examination.

I am well persuaded that the speculum is in some few cases an important means of diagnosis and treatment; though, if I were to be compelled to dispense with the constitutional symptoms, and confine my practice to the use of the speculum, or vice versa, I would much sooner rely upon the former. In fact, by means of the touch and constitutional symptoms, the large majority of cases can be understood and treated with more skill and propriety, than when assisted by the speculum.

There is no doubt that the Speculum is often resorted to, in order to deceive and mislead patients and friends; and thus add an unhallowed reputation, or a few dollars and cents to the pockets of the practitioner. It is much more profitable to treat such cases by means of the speculum, than upon general principles. By means of the speculum the practitioner too often impresses the patient with *his* wonderful discoveries, and the great advantages in its use, &c., and thus makes his patient an easy victim to extortion and humbuggery. Nor is this all. Unfortunately for the honor of the profession, there are said to be those who avail themselves of this means to take advantage of an unsuspecting female to overcome her chastity, in order to gratify a sensual appetite. [? We never heard of such a case.—Ed.]

The over-zealous advocates for the speculum deny that its frequent use has any injurious effects upon the modesty or virtue of females. This may be true in some cases; but it cannot be successfully denied that its *frequent* use has a very bad tendency. But if *all*—*all* of those who resort to this mode of practice, *only desired* to “look through the Speculum,” there would be far less demoralizing effects!

I might add, if the use of the speculum always resulted beneficially or *negatively*, there would be much less cause of complaint. But there are doubtless many cases where the most injurious and fatal results have followed its frequent application.

The indiscriminate cauterizations in cancerous disease of the uterus, and also in conditions of engorgement of the neck or body of the womb, and in acute inflammatory conditions, will always result injuriously. There are forms of *hysteria*, arising from leucorrhœa, dysmenorrhœa, or other painful conditions of the parts, which are greatly aggravated by cauterizations. M. Malgaigne says that *neuralgia of the cervix uteri* is a very frequent disease, and in such cases caustics must prove very injurious.

The cervix uteri is abundantly supplied with nervous filaments, and the structure of the parts is so rigid, that any change in the secretion, either of quality or quantity, is apt to bring on pains and aches; and these alternations are looked for every menstrual period, and often the slightest exposure will affect the secretions. Hence every female is more or less *nervous* during her menstruation; and those who suffer much irritation of the parts from leucorrhœal discharges, or otherwise, become peevish and hysterical. And it is manifest that these symptoms are greatly aggravated by cauterizations. I have seen females whose countenances were indicative of extreme torture; and yet they were regularly subjected to the use of the speculum and cauterization. Some of these cases were rescued from such cruel treatment by the overruling advice of consulting physicians; but I have known other female dupes who continued to submit to these caustic applications until they sunk into their graves.

Let us suppose that the most irritant caustics were indiscriminately applied to the mouth, throat and eyes, in the varied inflammatory actions in these parts, and what destruction would follow such treatment!! And these are only analogous cases.

I was called to a German woman in this city, some months ago, who was suffering intensely with neuralgic pains, and was in an extremely emaciated condition. Her friends believed her to be in the last stages of consumption. Upon inquiry, I ascertained she had been for some time under the treatment of Dr. M., (a highly respectable practitioner,) for "womb disease." He had made frequent cauterizations by means of the speculum. All her sufferings were referable to the uterus; and by examination per vaginam, I felt a hard unyielding

surface instead of the os uteri, which amounted almost to an occlusion; and by the further aid of a rectal examination, there was a total destruction of the cervix uteri. It was impossible to penetrate the mouth of the womb with the fore-finger, owing to the severe cicatrix resulting from the cauterizations. Thus, when muscular contractions of the parts came on, her sufferings were intense; and especially was this the case during menstruation.

By means of a medicated sponge, saturated in a dilute solution of creosote and morphine, the local symptoms were greatly relieved; which was followed up by constitutional treatment—such as aperients, the preparations of iron and potass, and cod liver oil. This woman is now in good health, except occasional paroxysms of neuralgia, which are dependent upon the irregular contractions of the os uteri, arising from the cicatrix.

I knew a case several years ago, of a lady from this State, who went on to Philadelphia, and put herself under the treatment of a distinguished practitioner of that city, and who resorted to cauterizations by means of the speculum. She was laboring under carcinoma of the uterus; and from her own history of the case, her symptoms and sufferings were much aggravated by the caustic. And I have no doubt her death was hastened by a perseverance in this mode of treatment.

Such is the *furor* of certain practitioners upon this subject, that it is their boast, of the many cases they have treated in this way. And I have understood that in some instances the wives of certain physicians have remarked, during seasons of health, that but for the use of the speculum their husbands would not have paid expenses!!”

How much of the womb can be seen by the use of the speculum? It is impossible to see into its cavity, and it is even denied that the cervical cavity can be seen during life. I have never been able to see more than a few lines into the cervical cavity; and I am convinced that any caustic application made beyond two or three lines from the os uteri, must be done *without seeing*, and therefore always attended with danger. Medicated applications, by means of a piece of sponge saturated in alum water, creosote diluted, morphine, the black wash, or other preparations, will be more judicious and successful in most cases; and certainly less dangerous. The present improved syringe is often a successful way of reaching the parts by medicated injections.

I CONCLUDE:

1st.—That cases requiring the use of the speculum are exceedingly rare.

2d.—That solid caustics, directly applied to the uterus, are of doubtful propriety, except in syphilitic cases.

3d.—All the benefits arising from cauterizations can, in the large majority of cases, be more permanently and judiciously obtained by means of injections, or the medicated sponge introduced into the neck of the womb.

4th.—In malignant (and sometimes in non-malignant) diseases of the uterus, caustics prove fatal in their applications.

5th.—The common use of the speculum is indelicate, and often justly revolting to virtue and refinement, and is demoralizing in its tendency.

SELECTIONS.

[We find the following timely article in the *Christian Advocate* of this city, and having so recently called attention to this subject, we refrain from comment upon the frequency of suicide in our own country, and its causes.]

LETTER FROM ENGLAND.

Fearful increase of Suicide in London—Proposed method of Prevention.

The crime of suicide has recently been much on the increase throughout England, but in London it has latterly assumed gigantic proportions. In every part of the metropolis it has lately been increasing in a much higher ratio than in the provinces, but in that small portion of London which forms "the city," the increase has been at a vastly higher rate than in any other metropolitan district. So serious has the matter become, that the city magistrates propose an appeal to Parliament next session, based on returns just made by the Police Commissioners, which show that the suicides and attempted suicides in the city have been doubled or quadrupled within the last two years. And this, be it observed, among a stationary, if not a decreasing population; for, though London at large is constantly expanding, and increasing its population at the rate of thirty thousand per annum, the limits of "the city" are fixed, and its population is even lessening by