

DESCRIPTION OF TWO NEW VAGINAL SPECULA.

By ALFRED MEADOWS, M.D.,

PHYSICIAN TO THE HOSPITAL FOR WOMEN, AND TO THE GENERAL Lying-IN HOSPITAL.

THERE is an old and trite saying that "seeing is believing"; and, in a realistic age like the present, it might almost be said that not seeing is not believing. Undesirable, however, as this may be as a maxim of general acceptance, there can be no doubt that, in medical matters at least, the advance of therapeutics as an exact science, which is the aim and object of all medical inquiry, is largely indebted, especially of late years, to the application of physical methods of examination to the investigation of disease. The school or party that essayed to decry this mode of inquiry in the case of the diseases of women, because, forsooth, it was supposed to be indelicate, is fast dying out, if it be not already dead. This is only what might be expected; for the obvious benefit which has accrued to suffering humanity in the greater exactness of diagnosis resulting directly from an improved method of examination, was certain to defeat all unreasoning opposition. Far be it from me to advocate any unnecessary resort to physical examination in these diseases. I would be among the first to lift up my voice against such a practice; but, on the other hand, I know too well what mistakes are made for want of such examination intelligibly conducted, and what help therapeutics derives from it. Therefore it is that I am anxious to perfect this method of inquiry, so that, when it is necessary, and we are really obliged to resort to it, we may not seek in vain; and I am sure that there is nothing which will help on the work better than that we should have at hand the best possible instrument for our purpose.

With this object in view, I have sought to improve the specula which we have in use; so that what we want to see we may see perfectly, and with as little discomfort to the patient as possible. There are, it appears to me, three chief requisites in a speculum, whether it be for the vagina or rectum. They are: first, that when applied it should bring into view as much as possible of the parts we wish to examine; secondly, that it should be easy of application; and, thirdly, that the parts brought into view should be illuminated as far as may be by the reflecting surface of the instrument.

Now, it is obvious that the last requirement is not equal in importance to the other two; nor is the second equal to the first, though, in my judgment, it is of great moment. In regard to the third condition, it should be borne in mind that, if any given instrument fails in this respect, the deficiency can easily be made up by other means; as, for instance, by a lamp and a mirror, or by so placing the patient as that the natural light of day may be transmitted directly along the vagina. But if our instrument fails in regard to either of the two other conditions, the defect is so far fatal to its utility.

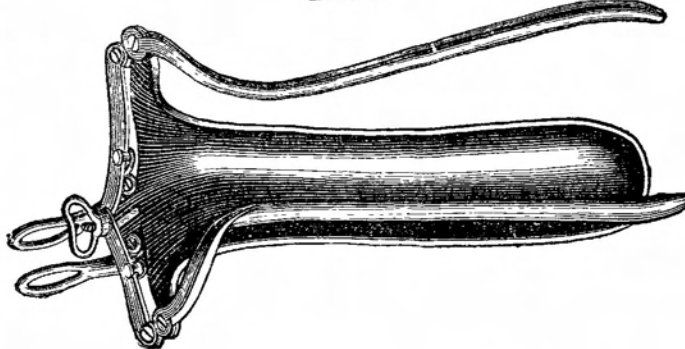
In THE LANCET of last year (vol. i., p. 125) I described a modification of the ordinary bivalve speculum, which, as I then thought, fulfilled these conditions better than any other instrument with which I was acquainted. That speculum I have constantly used since with great satisfaction, but still it did not seem to me as perfect as it might be, judged by the standard of requirements given above. Cases are constantly occurring in which we require to see more than can be seen even by that instrument. Accordingly I had a speculum made somewhat similar to that in regard to the posterior and two small blades, but minus the anterior blade; and I found that with this instrument (which is here represented—Fig. 1 closed, Fig. 2 open) I could see quite as well all that I saw before, and a great deal more; for the surface which was previously covered by the anterior blade was now exposed to view: in short, not only could I see the cervix uteri and parts around, but almost the whole vagina, except a portion of its posterior aspect which was covered by the back blade. I had lost, no doubt,

somewhat of reflecting surface, but I had gained largely in extent of view; and the parts brought within range of sight I could easily light up by other means.

FIG. 1.



FIG. 2.



Further consideration induced me to try yet another step in the same direction. It appeared to me that if I could spare the anterior blade with the gain already alluded to, probably I might be able to dispense also with the posterior blade and gain similarly on the corresponding side of the vagina. Nor was I disappointed in my expectation; for with the instrument represented in Fig. 3 (closed) and

FIG. 3.

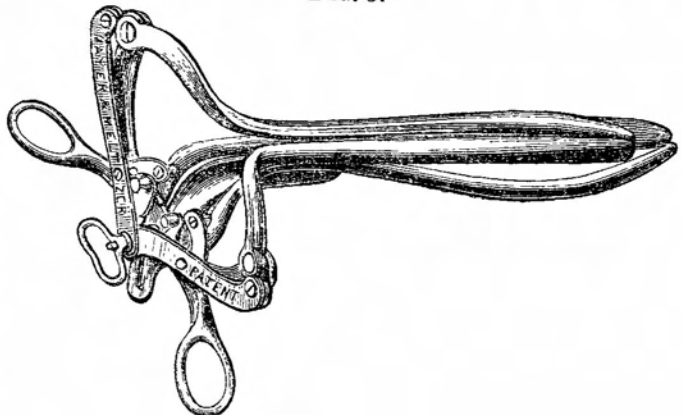


FIG. 4.

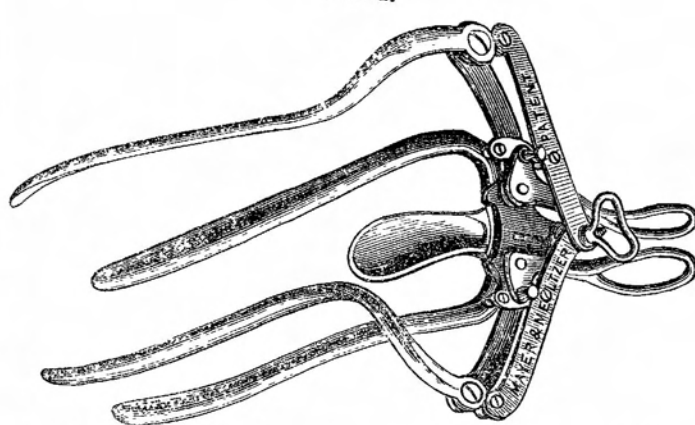


Fig. 4 (open), which is composed of four narrow blades, I can now see almost the whole vaginal surface, as well as the cervix uteri and parts around. Thus what I regard as the first requisite in a speculum is here perfectly fulfilled in this instrument. Not only so, but the second condition also—facility of application—is met more completely in this than in any other speculum. Fig. 3 shows the instrument

closed; and the space which these four blades occupy is considerably less than even the very smallest-sized Ferguson speculum, while at the same time it admits of the blades being expanded to an extent equal to the capacity of almost any vagina.

There are two other great advantages possessed by these instruments which I ought to mention. In the first place, they admit of a digital examination being made simultaneously with the specular. And, secondly, especially with the four-bladed instrument, a variety of operations, including those for vesico- and recto-vaginal fistula, can be performed without the help of an assistant in holding the speculum, with a far better view of the parts concerned, and therefore with more ease to the operator.

It might be urged as objections to these instruments—first, that by the loss of so much reflecting surface inspection would be difficult for want of light; and, secondly, that between the blades the vaginal folds are liable to collapse, and so to obstruct the view. The first of these objections I have already anticipated. Proper management can easily obviate it, and, after all, the defect is not nearly so great as might at first sight be supposed; for in the four blades we have a total amount of reflecting surface very little short of the ordinary speculum of Bozeman or Sims. Moreover, in the small posterior coccygeal blade, which I have added for the purpose of keeping back the coccyx, as this otherwise interfered with the view, we gain still more of reflecting surface just at the part where the rays of light may be made available. As to the collapse of the vagina between the blades, I can only, in reply, oppose fact to imagination, for in practice the objection certainly does not exist.

In conclusion, I suppose that the drawings will explain themselves. Fig. 1 shows the three-bladed instrument closed. The two small side blades fall easily within the larger blade, making it very easy of introduction; while compression of the two handles together simultaneously expands the blades, as is shown in Fig. 2, thus separating the vaginal walls, and exposing them and the cervix uteri to view. Fig. 3 shows the four-, or perhaps I might rather call it the five-bladed instrument, closed for introduction; and no speculum can glide in more easily than it does. Fig. 4 represents the blades expanded, and the extent of surface thus exposed to view can be readily appreciated. The blades all open simultaneously by approximating the handles, as is shown in the drawing; they also collapse together for the purpose of withdrawal. In each instrument there is a small screw, by means of which the blades can be fixed at any point of expansion we may desire, and the instrument will then maintain its position in the vagina without being held there, thus freeing both hands of the operator for any further proceeding which may be required.

I may add that the principle of the latter instrument is equally applicable to the rectum as to the vagina, and it appears to me to be as useful either for inspection or for operation. On this point, however, I have no experience, and must leave that for others to determine.

George-street, Hanover-square, May, 1870