

ABUSE OF THE VAGINAL SPECULUM.

A FEW days ago a gentleman in a highly respectable position in society in the north of England called on me for advice in the following peculiarly painful circumstances. He averred that through the use, or rather the abuse, of the vaginal speculum he had lost, as he feared forever, the affection of his wife, who is, I may say, an amiable and accomplished lady. His case interested me so much that I asked his permission to publish it in the *Lancet* [from which we extract]. This he at once agreed to; not only so, but he wrote out a history of it himself, so that I shall for the most part allow him to tell his own story.

No instrument is of more importance to a medical practitioner than the vaginal speculum; still the facts narrated below must impress us with a grave sense of the responsibility which at all times rests upon us in the use of the instrument; and how, without any intention on our part, the peace, the happiness of a household, may be broken up forever. But let the chief, not the only, "victim" speak:—

"I was married to a charming woman. Our happiness continued fifteen years. She became the mother of a family. Then some little ailment set in, which was described to me as a simple case of ulceration. The os uteri was touched with nitrate of silver very frequently during a period of three months, and then she was pronounced completely cured. For that three months I was strictly abstinent. She became warmly attached to her doctor, saying he had saved her life, though he generously enough admitted that it was only a common case, and that her life never was in danger. Then, as time wore on, there were more ulcerations, more examinations, and all the rest of it; accompanied by periods of abstention on my part, one of them lasting about nine months. During the period of this treatment I, in some unknown way, lost my wife's love. She seemed never happy unless when from home and seeking after advice, which she had from half a dozen doctors. I put my foot down at length on one of her proposed arrangements, and then for several years there was a vacuum, which was ultimately filled by another, and non-medical, influence, that induced her to leave my roof, and resolve on final and permanent separation. Thus the social ruin of a large family—of daughters and sons—seems due to the use of the speculum, and the estrangement caused by the injunctions of 'ladies' doctors, which, I am told, they never impose upon themselves."

Such is my patient's narrative. To all appearance the lady is in the best of health, though, professionally, I have not seen her. What is my patient to do? For the sake of his family he is very unwilling to expose them in a law-court. He has tried to win back his

own and her love and affection. He ascribes the origin of all his trouble, rightly or wrongly, to the speculum and abstentions. We know from experience that when the use of it, or the catheter, is continued for some time to nervous, hysterical ladies a morbid craving for its continued use is created; and therefore we cannot be too discreet in the use of these instruments.

My friend concludes his letter with some practical advice, under four heads, which are indicative of the points on which he makes complaint. To the credit of the profession, I think I may say, the great majority of medical men already act up to them:—

“The instrument may, or may not, be useful, for aught I know; but I maintain: (1) That when it is employed another lady ought to be in the room; (2) that its employment ought not to be continued against the doctor’s own opinion merely to gratify a craving, or solicitude, for examinations, which its use has seemed to me to create on an apprehensive, highly-strung woman; (3) that doctors are not at liberty to augment their influence by creating the fear of insanity in such natures by expositions of a near connection between uterine ulceration and the nervous system; and (4) that when a husband’s abstinence is imposed its extent should be stated direct to himself, and not merely transmitted through the wife.”

These suggestions, especially the first and fourth, will, I think, commend themselves to every member of the profession. By attention to them we avoid even the “appearance of evil.”

Perhaps some of your numerous readers would give their advice in reference to the above case in its moral and social, as well as its professional, aspects; and especially as to right professional practice in cases where the speculum is used and abstinence imposed, with the risk, it would seem, of destroying conjugal affection.

Yours truly,

M. D.