

1856

Clark



On the Speculum as a means
of diagnosis.

On Ulcerations of the Os and
Cervix Uteri.



Among the many & varied branches of study, required for a general practitioner to be fully accomplished in the healing art, a careful and special attention to Female disease, is, in the present day, most important and perhaps more so than many are willing or inclined to believe until they find out even by a small amount of experience.

That there are objections ~~to~~ in some cases to the modern means & auxiliaries for diagnosing disease, of the uterus, may be quite true; but such may be decidedly put in the back ground when we consider the benefits and satisfactory results derived from such means, by giving rise to improvements in treatment; and when one sees the good that can be done and the relief afforded even in trivial cases, we ought certainly to give our attention and consideration to the now enlightened subject of Uterine Pathology.

In the present day the continental schools afford perhaps more opportunity for investigating this subject than elsewhere and consequently have done more to advance this branch of medical science by proposing new means of diagnosis; or rather reviving old ones - the speculum being the chief one - while on this side the channel the modern & perhaps quite new invention of the uterine sound is an invaluable adjunct in the way of Uterine diagnosis -

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Lately we have had here most invaluable and more extended opportunities of daily seeing, and seeing examined, diseases of the uterus and it is surprizing that at first many students were shy & backward in embracing those advantages, which, if they thought such things were not worth their notice, fancying that in practice they might be so fortunate as not to meet with them, they will certainly be painfully mistaken. It is true that even experienced practitioners avoid making any examinations even of a married person labouring under uterine symptoms even of a grave nature - It may be that they happened to study where no opportunities were afforded for attendance on uterine cases & therefore not being accustomed to the use either of the speculum or the sound & not even of the finger, and not seeing them used, had naturally a dislike to these modes of practice from a delicacy or modest propriety, or because they required ex-
-perience to open their eyes to the importance

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and necessity of such means of diagnosis and would think the uterine sound a horribly dangerous & criminal instrument. Of course those who are specialists in uterine diseases must not allow any objections to the means above spoken of and they find that with all due decorum the female patient will not object if really suffering from disease.

Since there has been established new means of physical examinations of the several organs of the body, we have had the real nature, character and extent of their disease revealed, creating an advancement in pathology as well as in practice.

To examine the diseased state of the os uteri by the touch is evidently from records very ancient & perhaps the ancients used a speculum as it is supposed they made ocular examinations as well. It is well authenticated that the Greeks and Romans were familiar perhaps with quite as much on many subjects, therefore probably on this, as we are in the present day.

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It may be here stated that from laws existing then it is plain that they practised passing instruments into the uterine cavity, and abusing the use of them by criminally bringing on abortion by puncturing the membranes, and this became quite a habit among the Roman ladies, so that their figures might always be preserved but at last laws were made to prevent such practices. We may go back and turn up several ancient authors such as Hippocrates for information. They we know were familiar with Inflammations and ulcerations of the Uterus therefore we may infer they examined by the sight, that is, saw these affections.

Discoveries at Pompeii bring to light many things similar to those in use now, or things for the same use, which we suppose to have been original. What is supposed to be a speculum has been found. "The Speculum Matricis was said by Aetius to have been invented in the days of the Emperor Domitian; but that it must have been known to the ancients, at

an earlier period. In 1818 a bronze instrument consisting of three branches, two handles and a screw in the centre, was dug up out of the ruins of Pompeii which has been preserved in the museum at Naples, described in Vulpes' work. This instrument is called the Speculum magnum matricis, is thought by Dr. R. Lee to be undoubtedly to bring the Os Uteri into view, and probably a most perfect bivalve speculum ever invented."

The Dioptra is said to be the instrument used by the ancients & a Latin author of the 7th century makes mention of it, but as it is made of ~~the~~ bronze and the sides open & shut by a screw, it may have been only a dilatator as that kind of metal is thought not to have taken a polish & therefore could not be a speculum in the ordinary sense of the term. Yet dilatating may have been used as a means to allow of the possibility of seeing a hidden diseased part, such as the Os Uteri.

Attention to uterine diseases after the Romans seems to have undergone a total eclipse for a

lengthened period & owing to a peculiar state, especially a religious condition of the world after the fall of the Roman empire, this class of diseases, was put out of medical literature and Midwifery in general never made any advancement until a comparatively recent date and then the works of ancient authors were handed down in their primitive condition.

But perhaps it was not the handing down of ancient records that gave rise to the study, or caused any advancement in the science of Midwifery or in the treatment of female diseases, but that a certain few men made an especial study of this branch of medical science and therefore as a natural course of events the subjects ~~of~~ have gradually become enlightened because this a rapidly progressing age in which there are new inventions of every description and of means to produce effects which we know were produced in ancient times but perhaps by different means and those of which we are not aware.

All history and very recent history, too plainly & painfully testifies to the objections and stumbling blocks that are

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raised when anything new, especially ^{in the} way of treating disease, is proposed. Indeed he is thought by many a bold man who goes out of the usual course and does anything that his forefathers have not done. Perhaps from habit or from not having good opportunities of seeing anything, newly proposed, put into practice they fear attempting it themselves and are inclined to oppose on ill founded grounds.

The Speculum has had as much or more opposition than anything yet it has maintained its stand and affected an introduction for itself. How many old practitioners there are still opposed to Chloroform; because perhaps they have had no opportunity of seeing it used and from ignorance on the subject they fancy more dangers than there really are and no doubt wisely on the grounds of not having practical experience to be able to safely give it themselves. A few years ago there was quite a paper war, called The Battle of the Speculum, shewing as it was with vaccination and many other things that

there are always many who oppose anything that is to be introduced which may be of service, raising their objections chiefly on what may be termed the abuse rather than the use of any means either for diagnosis or for the treatment of diseases

In the world generally speaking there seems a natural inclination for mankind to carry on to abuse what we have for proper and beneficial use. What a man chiefly gives himself up to, either in proposing or newly inventing anything, it very often happens that he is prone to ride his hobby too fast.

For any unprejudiced person to consider well the use of the speculum, he must or ought to come to the conclusion that it is the safest and wisest plan not to discard it altogether ~~and~~ nor to make up his mind, ^{to give up its use entirely} ~~never to use it~~. The only precautions necessary to be remembered are - not to get into the habit of too often using it; and not to go to extremes ~~either the one~~ either the one way or the other, but to use it with all due discrimination and

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judgment, according to the nature of the case,
and with due regard to the patient's feelings &
wishes. Because what seems ~~of~~ of
little moment or consideration to some is by
^{others} thought very objectionable; and so it
is necessary to study the peculiar opinions
and idiosyncrasies of patients. And besides,
the practitioner being guarded and judicious
in the use of the speculum he must also
make it his duty ^{to prevent or restrain} any morbid desire that
a patient may sometimes have for exam-
-ination by the speculum when there is no
real cause for its use.

In speaking of the use versus the abuse of the
speculum I quote a letter ^{from} the Lancet of 1850
giving what maybe considered proper remarks
on its use. Mr. Moon thus says - "I have for
some time adopted it in my practice and have
found it so valuable an aid to diagnosis
and treatment, that I consider its use in
uterine diseases as indispensable as is
the stethoscope in affections of the chest.
In proof of this assertion I would cite the
following case which remarkably illustrates
not only its utility but its necessity -

"I was consulted about four months since by a married lady who presented symptoms of uterine disease, and on stating this to be my decided opinion, I was requested by her mother at once to ascertain the fact. On examining ^{with} the finger per vaginam, the labia uteri presented that velvety feel described by Dr. Henry Bennett as indicating existence of ulceration and also considerable induration. The diagnosis was afterwards confirmed by the speculum. I lost sight of this patient until very recently, when she again requested my attendance; I found her again with all her symptoms much aggravated. She said she had been under the care of one of the obstetric physicians who are now taking so prominent a position in the present anti-speculum crusade, & who had been occasionally attending during the last seventeen years. This gentleman had always declared that she was labouring under stricture of the rectum for which he had been drugging her ~~for~~ during that long period. In this opinion he was strengthened by another eminent obstetric physician of the same school, who

"occasionally saw the patient - on becoming worse she again sought my advice, but I declined any interference unless I was permitted to make a thorough investigation of her case - To this she willingly consented.

I first passed my finger easily into the rectum, through which it was declared a crow quill could not pass - I felt a hard projecting tumour completely filling the hollow of the sacrum - This I discovered on examination per vaginam to be the retroverted fundus uteri much enlarged and excessively tender to the touch.

The labia uteri presented unmistakable granular ulcerations with induration extending up the walls of the cervix. Now I would ask, am I to believe the evidence of my senses, or am I to take the opinion of men who would not for the world use that dangerous instrument called Simpson's uterine sound, and who are of too pure a school of medical ethics to make a vaginal examination? I would ask the profession in sober earnestness, are we to accept the dicta of such

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"men as to the use of instruments which many of us have proved to be of incalculable value, and which have been introduced to us by men certainly of as high professional standing, as any who oppose their employment. Of what value are the opinions of those who either declare that they have never derived any information whatever from the use of the speculum, or who altogether ignore the use of instruments in uterine diagnosis?"

I would also hint to Dr. M. Hall that should his opinions become known to the wives and daughters of England they would repudiate his championship of their morals and would throw back upon him with indignant scorn the sentiments he has dared to attribute to them."

In consideration of this last sentence I will turn to what Dr. M. Hall says in the *Lancet*. He states in a paper entitled "a new and lamentable form of hysteria" written after a discussion on the use of the speculum vagina at the Medical & Chir. Society, that it is a question not of mere medical or surgical

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treatment, but of medical and public ethics; and he says, "I confess myself astonished at the light manner in which a vaginal examination was spoken of by one of the gentlemen present at the Society. He huffed the idea of indecency in making a vaginal examination. There need be no exposure of the person of the patient; surgeons make no scruples about an examination of the rectum (as if the two examinations could, morally speaking, be compared), but if there be no exposure of the person and if the examination of the rectum be frequently made is there at first, no wounding of the feelings and is there afterwards no deterioration and blunting of those feelings, by the repeated daily or weekly use of the speculum vaginae ~~in~~ ⁱⁿ the virgin and in the very young even amongst the married? I loudly proclaim that there is such deterioration and that the female who has been subjected to such treatment is not the same person in delicacy and purity that she was before." He says, "I have known the most revolting attachment on the part of such patients to

"the practice and to the practitioner!

"I have known them speak of the womb and the uterine ~~system~~ ^{organs} with a familiarity which was formerly unknown, and which I trust will ere long be obsolete. The current of the ideas becomes hypochondriacally directed to these organs. The very mind is poisoned, a new and lamentable form of hysteria, I had almost said of furor uterinus is induced, with this aggravation, that the subject of distress is either concealed by the greatest effort or explained at the expense of virgin or female modesty.

There is a case of poisoned mind in the male sex induced by the quack doings of the day, relative to the existence of impotency which all of us must have treated and deplored. A similar case of mental poisoning is now being induced in the other sex by the frequent, constant and undue reference on the part of the profession to the condition of the uterine organs. The advocates of the speculum speak of cases which had resisted the efficacy of the usual general and local

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"treatment and which yielded to the use of the speculum and the caustic - I have seen cases in which the above having been employed and unduly employed as I believe, the patient remained more miserably afflicted in mind and body than ever and this the effect of that treatment, whether the former supposition be as well founded as the latter I will not presume to determine; but I believe the case in which the injection of a solution of Nitrate of Silver by her own hand may not take the place of the application of this valuable remedy in substance by the hand of the practitioner to be rare indeed." Dr. Hall says further, "I will not advert even to the epithets which have been applied to the frequent use of the speculum by our French neighbours, who are so skilled in these matters; but I will ask, what father amongst us, after the details which I have given, would allow his virgin daughter to be subjected to this pollution? Let us then maintain the spotless dignity of

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"our profession with its well deserved character for purity of morals and throw aside this injurious practice with indignant scorn, remembering that it is not mere exposure of the person, but the dulling of the edge of the virgin modesty and the degradation of the pure minds of the daughters of England which are to be avoided."

This is very strong against the use of the speculum but it is more regarding the abuse of it & so it does not put down the proper & legitimate use of it -

D^r Ashwell stated that as now used he had no hesitation in stating his conviction that the speculum was subversive of female delicacy and safety. He asserted that in nine cases out of ten in which it was now employed its use was unjustifiable. He had had a moderate share of practice in the treatment of diseases of women and he could not help thinking that the use of the speculum as practised by some medical men amounted almost to a professional dishonour. This feeling had been slowly

"forced upon him, but it was a powerful one, so powerful indeed that if the speculum ^{should} ~~was~~ be continued to be employed as it now is he knew not whether to withdraw from the treatment of the diseases of women altogether.

He thought Dr. Lee deserved well of the profession and of Society, but more particularly of the female portion of it, for his efforts to retard the progress of this most dangerous instrument.

Dr. Murphy thought, on the other hand, that a distinction had not been drawn between the use and the abuse of the speculum; its abuse is no argument against its use. He knew of no sufficient substitute for it in the treatment of those cases of uterine disease in which its employment was indicated. With respect to the influence of the use of this instrument on the female character, he said; let it be remembered that the name of Englishwomen in every age was chastity and it could not be believed that they would connive at indecency of conduct in those who went

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"about unnecessarily employing this valuable instrument merely to raise their own character. No! it was clear from the way in which they submitted to its use they found benefits from it which they had not experienced from any other plan of treatment". Again, it has been said that there are many lesions which cannot be detected without the speculum, and that there is no more harm in the use of a speculum than of a spoon to ascertain the condition of the throat, but it does not follow that every woman need have the speculum employed. ~~no~~ certainly thousands of women have been made happy and comfortable from the treatment indicated by the speculum and the same still continues.

Dr. Locoek says thus on the matter. "In our eagerness to denounce the unprofessional use of the speculum we must not lose sight of its very great advantages. We would be sorry not to continue the use of this instrument for he knows of no substitute for it. as to the talk of the indelicacy of its employment

"that is all nonsense. When properly applied there is no exposure. Dr. Bennett was in the habit of placing the patient on the back, but he placed her on the side. Having done this and having drawn the clothes round the speculum there is no more exposure to the surrounding parts than there would be of the face in a mask when the throat is examined. He certainly objects to the use of the instrument in unmarried females if there are not sufficient grounds for its employment, but when ordinary means had failed and ulceration ~~was~~ suspected, the only means to detect this must be the speculum and then he employs it. as to the breaking down of the hymen this is necessary some = times to be done when examination is made by the finger. He considers there is no immorality or danger to female purity by the use of the speculum. The purity is mental and not to be destroyed by a proceeding, ^{necessary} as this would be, in some cases of disease". and now there is chloroform to fall back upon if there is any need. "Surgeons are less particular

"than accoucheurs in the exposure of the patient in their operations and yet they meet with no opposition. The absence of pain does away with one great indication of diagnosis from touch and is an argument in favour of the judicious use of the speculum. We are not justified in withholding from our patient the benefit of the speculum any more than we should be in withholding a means of diagnosis when applied to other parts of the body. The judicious and cautious use of the speculum is here meant."

Since we find in the present day that neither practitioner nor patient can do without the proper & judicious use of the speculum, we have only by a little practical experience to know when it is justifiable or not, to make use of it. We may by its use either make a more perfect diagnosis or satisfy the patient's mind as to whether there is anything of consequence wrong or not. It no doubt will be the best rule for young practitioners, never to have recourse to this instrument

unless the urgent necessity of the case renders such an examination unavoidable. at that rate perhaps the speculum would be very seldom required; but often there may occur cases, which will require this instrumental interference to get to the root and throw light upon the obscure cause of certain unaccountable and unpleasant symptoms, which the female part of the community are liable to, which had baffled all other treatment, requiring really some local management.

after all that has been said against the use of the speculum, it may be inferred that many are very much prejudiced and some from some peculiar influence, that they have met with, depreciate even its legitimate use, therefore, out of what has been here quoted, I will certainly agree with those ^{who} uphold the use and value without abuse, and conclude with the words of Dr. Murphy that "the blundering of unskilful practitioners is no argument against the legitimate use of the speculum in the hands of the well informed".

In Uterine Pathology, the chief and most frequent cases that come under the notice and inspection of the practitioner are perhaps Inflammatory Induration, ulceration with or without congestion and a red granular condition of the os uteri after abrasion of the mucous membrane. Regarding the term ulceration there seems to be a great difference of opinion some even denying that there is such a thing and others that it is mere abrasion. But there is a great deal of unnecessary cavilling about words, for one is only an excessive degree of the other. Most abrasions may go on to what may be termed ulceration, if the exciting cause or cause, are continued, an inflammatory condition is no doubt caused in the first instance from several cause; sometimes it may depend upon constitutional and sometimes on local derangement. also on different affections of the sexual system, and on mechanical influences, and morbid leucorrhoeal secretions; Parturition maybe also a cause.

That Inflammation should be liable to occur at all periods of life is not peculiar when

* said to be by Theller - Burns + Neeson.

* M. Luskett's investigation -

* we know something of the structure of the os
 and cervix uteri, Muscular fibres are found
 to be less abundant in the cervix; this is lined
 by many glands either of simple or com-
 -pound follicles situated beneath the
 mucous membrane thro' which the secretion
 of the glands is exuded. It is a thick glutinous
 fluid increased by inflammation, ~~as~~

* as there is an erectile tissue in the vagina
 so there is also in the cervix. The micros-
 -copical investigations of Mr. Lockett show the dis-
 -position of the minute vessels in the os uteri,
 "they are looped and distended at certain
 points, more particularly at the branching
 off of blood vessels one from another, which
 is characteristic of erectile tissue as it is in
 the lips and nipple" and in the erectile tumour
 or nevus. This condition is only found
 during the menstrual period of a woman's
 life time.

The frequency of the existence of ulceration
 is much doubted by many authorities, those
 who find it in such a majority of uterine
 cases recorded, it must have been in many
 cases of slight degree, tho' I quite believe

that inflammatory induration & ulceration, ^{in some degree or other} are if looked for, the chief of the uterine ailments, along with either retroversion or prolapsus, which bring women to seek relief from unpleasant symptoms referable to these uterine affections.

The recorded frequency of ulceration must then depend upon the facts that that term has been used indiscriminately for all degrees and kinds of sore or raw surface of the os uteri deprived of its mucous membrane or the latter denuded of its epithelium.

To speak in a strictly pathological sense these latter cannot be called ulcerations because there requires to be a solution of continuity with a secreting surface, having defined, regular or irregular, inverted or everted edges as are found in mucous membranes of all other parts of the body.

The term ulceration has also been objected to because it gives rise to a certain kind of objectionable heroic treatment which however, to differ a little from this authority, is no good founded objection, because there are several degrees of treatment a mild set

and a stronger set according to the mildness or the obstinacy of the case.

One is very much inclined to believe that these ulcers of the Os are entirely mis called, and that they have been called such by some because there is no better name for these raw surfaces; including all degrees of it under one head. ~~It is~~ The ulcerations, which many people call such, but are not strictly so, are for the most part mere superficial abrasions of the epithelium ~~and~~ and the ~~lips~~ of mucous membrane of the lips of the Os uteri either partially or entirely, either one lip or both, chiefly the anterior; the abraded surface is of a vivid red colour and finely granular. Sometimes the epithelium is denuded with less of the membrane or not at all, then the surface is covered with red papulae, or with a number of minute, superficial aphthous ulcerations between which the tissue is either healthy or a little redder than natural.

In describing an ulcer Dr. Bennett says, "The margin of an inflammatory ulcer is scarcely ever, if ever, either everted or inverted. So much so that it is very difficult to detect with the finger

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"the margin of the ulcer. It is always on a level with or above the non-ulcerated tissues that limit it, its margin never presents an abrupt induration."

The ulcers hardly ever appear excavated with raised edges, their surface is either smooth or a little raised, they begin at the inner margin of the os uteri & extend outwards, the cervix inside is also denuded of epithelium and slightly granular. The os uteri is generally more open than natural and is said to be a sign of ulceration if the finger is admitted & there is the characteristic velvety feel. Sometimes there is softness & sometimes hardness of the cervix & os. The chief part of the leucorrhoeal discharge is from the inside of the cervix and uterus & less from the sore or abrasion but sometimes considerable from the latter. The surface of the ulcer may be sensitive.

It is not proper, for the sake of the patient (at least in her hearing) to call abrasions, excoriations, or slight ulcers - ulcerations - for she is easily alarmed at the word ulcer & then may arise a panic (which has been spoken of), but when the affection is only slight, keep strictly to the terms abrasion or excoriation, which perhaps are the most

frequent.

on taking all the uterine cases that have been treated here in this Infirmary for the last 5 or 6 mo^s in one ward and giving the term ulceration to all the degrees, varieties and stages of it - out of 44 uterine cases including organic and functional diseases of the uterus there have been 22 ulcerations treated. But really these are not all ulcerations but modifications, therefore diminishing the number; for at least one third are only either abrasions, excoriations, or inflammatory eruptions - therefore making these latter more frequent than the real ulcerations and at the same time more frequent than other affection of the uterus. Most of these had inflammatory induration & hypertrophy with more or less leucorrhoea.

The causes seemed to be various, the principal part I think were in women who had a family, some of whom also had a miscarriage or two. ~~some~~ ^{a few} perhaps were syphilitic, two or three from prolapsus, and in some it was difficult to say what the cause was, but they suffered functionally from menorrhagia.

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In the most obstinate looking and worst case, with a great deal of induration and inflammation & giving rise to every unpleasant symptom of pain, debility, unhappiness, discharge &c & the os uteri was destroyed with Potassa fusca; in the milder case, the chloride of Zinc and in superficial abrasions and granulations Nitrate of Silver was applied. Injections of tepid water, gradually brought to cold, were used once or twice a day, for 2 or 3 weeks and when much leucorrhoeal discharge was present Alum & Oak bark & other astringent injections were used. The aluminated Iron injection was found useful. The application of the Potassa gave no pain; ~~but~~ except when the os was much inflamed & tender. The os uteri did not seem to suffer much loss of substance but after it healed there was always a good os remaining with a cicatrix in it, which gave me the idea that it had the power of reproduction.

There has never come under notice here a case that has suffered any bad effects from this treatment, such as constriction of the os, which will give rise to Dysmenorrhoea.

There are cases sometimes which come to this, requiring the Os Uteri to be mechanically dilated; and I was told of a case, fallen in with by an Edinburgh practitioner quite lately, in which there was constriction of the Os, causing dysmenorrhoea, after the cure of some morbid state or other of the Os with the strong caustic. But it is not fair to argue from this that these means are never to be used even if they do happen now & then to cause some secondary affection.

Dr West, after speaking of the indiscriminate adoption of the local treatment of ulceration being injurious to the patient, ~~he~~ gives his objections to the use of the stronger caustics, which he says "are confessedly devoid neither of suffering nor of danger, because if the caustic is introduced within the cervix, as is usual, the pain produced is very intense & lasts for two or three days causing nausea & sickness, sometimes even syncope or extreme depression, so as to prostrate a patient completely for several days. also because the subsequent treatment of applying the nitrate, & even sometimes repeating ^{the} Potassa, is objectionable, confining the patient & requiring"

the speculum. He even says, then that it is devoid of safety, by producing the contraction or obliteration of the cervix, before spoken of. He objects to the three recommendations viz painlessness, speed and safety. But there are exceptional cases, in which he says, this treatment is justifiable, or local treatment in general.

all I have to say is that so long as high authorities and higher than Dr. West, recommend it, and so long as I know of and see good done with this caustic with no deleterious results (I shall wish to employ it when necessary). It may be that even beginning as a general practitioner such an opportunity may occur. I have seen this application several times, & have not noticed in these cases in the Infirmary, any pain or unpleasant after-symptoms. Quite the contrary. To mention one case only, in which the Os uteri was taken down by Potassa fusa; the patient was under treatment 5 wks ago & came back to show herself a few days since. There seemed to be a very little appreciable difference between ~~the~~ her Os uteri & one, healthy, that had not any application ever. She has menstruated regularly & quite normally, without pain since.

The late letter, in the Lancet of May 3rd, of Dr Shute's
 shews that in his experience he does not believe
 in (as he calls it) "Dr Tyler Smith's "mutilation" myth"
 He says he has never in his cases met with this con=
 -dition which is said to be one of the bad results.
 and publishes this case for "the benefit of those who
 may be deterred from using caustics in proper
 cases by Dr T. Smith's dictum, that their application
 means "mutilation"."

Dr Henry Bennett's latest opinion is concerning this
 that "he has never met with a case of either
 mutilation or of destruction of the cervix uteri"
 from this means..

Therefore, to conclude, it will not be right for us
 to throw aside our caustics, and whatever apology
 is necessary, I readily make, for the incomplete and
 badly arranged ~~subject~~ subject which has been more
 practically spoken of than anything else; being ^{also} more
 practically engaged than otherwise and ~~cannot~~ able to
 aspire to anything original I beg to offer this as a Thesis.

W^m Wake Clark.

May 4th 1856. Edinburgh