

*Account of a case in which Impalement of the Uterus occurred in the production of Criminal Abortion.* By F. BROUGHTON, Esq., Civil Surgeon, Kolapore.

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This case presents several points of interest. First, as regards the advanced age of the woman who became pregnant at 50; second, the mode by which death was produced; again, from the fact of existence being prolonged for a period of ten

days after such violent injury; and lastly and chiefly, from the discovery by *post-mortem* examination of the impaling rod *in situ*.

I will premise by stating that abortion is frequently produced in this part of India by the introduction of long skewers into the uterus. These rods are not intended to rupture the membranes or injure the fœtus, but are tipped with cotton and smeared with euphorbium, lead, or mercury. Such excitants carefully introduced readily produce uterine action, the fœtus is soon expelled, and the mother does not seem as a general rule to suffer any permanent injury. It has occurred to me to see many such cases, and these extending over a lengthened period, yet this is the first in which a fatal termination has been exhibited.

I am inclined to attribute the result in this case to accident, the stick probably breaking off in consequence of some convulsive movement of the patient; otherwise we must suppose most cruel violence on the part of the operator. There is yet another way in which it may be accounted for. The instrument may have been clumsily introduced either by the woman herself, or by others, and broken off, and the perforation may have been caused by the contraction of the uterus upon its point after the birth. I am inclined to the latter supposition, and the more especially as the unfortunate woman concealed the fact of mechanical means having been resorted to, although she admitted having taken medicines with a view to the production of abortion.

The history I could obtain of the case was as follows. Nursingna, the deceased, was nearly 50 years of age, and the mother of seven children by her husband, a barber in the village of Kapsee. Two years since the barber died, and the widow having lost her husband, her teeth, and her income, formed an intimacy with a neighbouring goldsmith, and pregnancy was the unexpected and undesired result. To obviate discovery and evade the punishment inflicted in this country upon both parties when convicted of adultery, she was as usual tempted into the commission of a more heinous crime, and persuaded by her paramour to submit to measures for the induction of abortion. Such measures were adopted, and a five months' fœtus was expelled. Slight hemorrhage but considerable pain followed. This pain, instead of yielding to the usual remedies, increased alarmingly, until a fatal termination being evident, the Police authorities sent her into my hospital (a distance of fifteen miles) on the tenth day after her delivery.

Arriving almost "*in articulo mortis*" she died in a few hours, and a *post-mortem* examination was instituted to determine the cause of death.

The body was exceedingly fat, and the abdomen distended. Upon incision this distension was found owing to an immense quantity of serum, and the bowels although empty were swollen and congested.

Bands of coagulable lymph passed in every direction, easily broken through, and therefore of recent formation, but by this means the fiery red intestines were united to the fiery red peritoneum, and the whole mass was firmly glued together. The large red patches, and the minute injection of the smaller vessels, evidenced the most intense inflammation.

Upon lifting up the bowels some difficulty was experienced in exposing the uterus, and my hand came in contact with a rod, which passing through its fundus projected three inches into the bowels, which were lacerated and hanging upon its extremity.

The other end broken and occasioned the abrasion of the internal membrane, which may be seen at one spot to have proceeded to ulceration. This doubtless was the cause of the intense pain experienced in that organ. The uterus was firm and tolerably contracted, and would appear to have been more passive under such fearful injury than the intestines.

I examined the remains of the foetus, which were in a state of advanced decomposition and confirmed the statement as to its probable age.

As to the treatment adopted, I may mention that although capable of speaking upon her arrival, she made no mention of any violence or accident; her bowels were said to have acted, and she passed urine readily; her skin was cold and her pulse scarcely perceptible.

Ignorant of the presence of a foreign body in the uterus, an opiate with stimulants were the only remedies employed; and I think it is evident that, however well informed I might have been, ten days having elapsed since the introduction of the weapon, that although the instrument might have been withdrawn, the same melancholy termination must have ensued.

The preparation and rod are herewith forwarded in illustration of these remarks.