

QUICKSILVER GIVEN TO PROCURE ABORTION, FOLLOWED BY MERCURIAL TREMORS.

BY SIR G. DUNCAN GIBB, BART., M.D.

A GASFITTER, occasionally employed about my premises, asked me to see his daughter, aged twenty, who had been seduced, and upon whom an attempt had been made to produce abortion by the administration of quicksilver. When about three months pregnant she was given by her seducer two teaspoonfuls and a half of quicksilver; the quantity was said to be near upon three, but the former was probably the correct amount. No effect was produced upon the uterus, but in the course of a few days she commenced to shake on the right side of the body, her gait became unsteady, and she stumbled frequently in walking. All these led her mother to discover her condition. When seen by me she was six months pregnant. The above symptoms were still present, and she could not grasp firmly with the right hand. In a fortnight after the shaking had extended to the other side of the body, and the left hand grasped feebly like the right. In the course of the next two months all the symptoms gradually became less, and I learnt were scarcely observable when she was confined at the end of September. The child had the snuffles from birth, no doubt from the constitutional effects of the mercury.

I found three teaspoonfuls of quicksilver to weigh five ounces and three-quarters, and she must have swallowed four ounces and a half. Probably a large part of this passed off by the bowels; some remained, became oxidised, and gave rise to the peculiar and well-known effects of the metal. There was not any salivation throughout, nor was there any blue mark on the gums as in lead-poisoning; they looked to be natural. I gave evidence in one of the police-courts, when her seducer, a young man and a neighbour of her father's, employed counsel in opposing an affiliation order; but the case was too clear, and it was granted.

So far as my knowledge goes, the case is unique in the object for which the metal was given, and medico-legally is of sufficient interest to place upon record. Differing from the generality of cases, the muscles of one side of the body only were first affected by the tremors, instead of the upper extremities, and then they extended to the opposite side of the body. No treatment of any kind was adopted.

Bryanston-street, Portman-square.