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CASE OF EARLY MATERNITY, WITH REMARKS.

BY

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(Reprinted from the Edinburgh Medical Journal, October, 1861.)

PREGNANCY before the age of fourteen, although not uncommon in tropical climates, is in this country an event of very rare occurrence. The following case of parturition at an unusually tender age, is, I think, deserving of record. For the subjoined report of the case I am indebted to Dr. Macdowall, of Helensburgh, under whose kind and able care the patient was.

"On the 17th November last I was called to visit J. W., a girl aged 13 years on the 4th of July last (according to the record of the family Bible), in consequence of some abdominal enlargement. I soon satisfied myself that the enlargement of the abdomen was due to pregnancy, and intimated my opinion accordingly to the relatives, who received the intelligence with much amazement and doubt. I watched the case from time to time; and as pregnancy is very uncommon at such an early age, I requested my friend Dr. J. G. Wilson, of Glasgow, to see the patient with me, who at once confirmed my diagnosis. On inquiry, I ascertained that the catamenia appeared for the first time in January, and that she menstruated regularly till the end of April. The patient appeared quite ignorant of her condition, and made no complaint.

"On 11th January I received an urgent call to visit the girl, and on my arrival I found she had shortly before given birth to a full-grown female child. She could not have been more than three hours in actual labour. I should infer, from the way I found the infant lying in bed, that the presentation was natural. I at once detached the child and removed the placenta. The patient made an excellent recovery. The breasts (which had been suppurating previously) healed up, but without any appearance of milk. The lochial discharge was quite natural as to quantity, character, and duration. Four weeks after delivery the mother and child were transferred to a neighbouring county, and shortly afterwards the child died, I presume from bad nursing. The age of the lad who acknowledges the paternity is nineteen years."

Remarks.—From the foregoing report it will be observed that the girl J. W., at the early age of thirteen years and six months, gave birth to a full-grown female child. Conception must therefore have taken place when the girl was twelve years and nine months old. Very few examples are on record where pregnancy has occurred at such an early age. I believe the case narrated by Mr. Robertson of Manchester is the earliest authentic instance of pregnancy that has occurred in this country. The girl, who worked in a cotton factory, became *enceinte* in the eleventh year of her age, and at the period of her confinement she was only a few months advanced in her twelfth year. When in labour she was seized with convulsions, but ultimately, without unusual difficulty, was delivered of a full-grown, but still-born child. The catamenial function was established before conception took place (Robertson's Midwifery, p. 30). Another well accredited case of pregnancy in very early life is related by Mr. Smith of Coventry. A girl named Julia Sprayson, when twelve years and seven months old, gave birth to a full-grown, healthy infant, after a short and favourable labour. This girl began to menstruate when ten years and six weeks old (British Record of Obstetric Medicine, vol. i. p. 360). La Motte, in his "Traité des Accouchemens," records the case of a girl who gave birth to and nursed a child before she was thirteen years of age (Obs. xxiv. p. 41). We are told by Dr. Paris, in his "Medical Jurisprudence," that "during the year 1816 some girls were admitted into Maternité at Paris, as young as thirteen years; and during the Revolution, one or two instances occurred of females at eleven, and even below that age, being received in a pregnant state into that hospital." Professor Montgomery states that the earliest instance of impregnation that has come under his own observation was that of a young lady who was delivered of twins before she had completed her fifteenth year. The earliest instance of utero-gestation which is known to have occurred in the Glasgow Lying-in Hospital was that of a girl who was delivered at the full time when fifteen years and a month old.

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"On 11th January I received an urgent call to visit the girl, and on my arrival I found she had shortly before given birth to a full-grown female child. The child was born some three hours before the day of delivery. I found, after some delay, that the infant lying in bed, that the presentation was natural. I at once detached the child and removed the placenta. The patient made an excellent recovery. The breasts (which had been suppurating previously) healed up, but without any appearance of milk. The lochia discharge was quite natural as to quantity, character, and duration. Four weeks after delivery the mother and child were transferred to a neighbouring county, and shortly afterwards the child died. I presume from bad nursing. The age of the lad who acknowledges the paternity is thirteen years."

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