A C A S E
OF
PREMATURE MENSTRUATION.

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THE case which follows lately occurred in my practice, and appears to me to be sufficiently remarkable to deserve record. It is a case of premature menstruation, in which the menstrual flow appeared in a little girl on the eighteenth, nineteenth, twentieth, twenty-first, and twenty-second months of her age respectively. The patient, Miss W—, was seen by me in the summer of 1865. She was then suffering from quick weak pulse, loss of appetite, sleeplessness, periodic sweats, wasting, and other symptoms of hectic fever.

Mrs. W— told me that her child was then one year and six months old, and that she attributed the above symptoms to exhaustion consequent upon an appearance of the menses which had taken place upon the previous Saturday evening, and lasted till the noon of Monday. My visit was on the Wednesday. The mother, though surprised by the appearance, did not seem to be fully aware of the real strangeness of the circumstance. I naturally received the account with perfect incredulity, and examined the genital organs for

the origin of a local discharge. I found the parts, however, quite normal, well formed, natural in size, and having no appearance of premature puberty. I also examined the parts about the anus, which I found quite healthy. I then took upon myself to assure the mother that she was wholly mistaken in her supposition—that discharges of the kind she had seen were not very uncommon in young children—that it had apparently quite disappeared, and probably would not return. I also carefully examined the child all over, but could find no tenderness anywhere on pressure, or evidence of disease in any organ. As the child was then mending a little, according to the nurse's account, I ordered some simple remedies, and gave a favorable opinion. In three or four days the child was well enough to allow of my taking my leave.

On the Saturday evening month after the reported appearance I was called to a serious case of illness in a distant part of Yorkshire, and was unable to reach home until the Monday morning. On my arrival I found a message reporting a return of the discharge in M. A. W—, and begging me to call. Engagements beyond my control prevented my seeing the child until the evening, when I found that the discharge had ceased some hours. On a most careful investigation I could not discover anything more than some congestion about the pudenda. Certainly there was no ulceration within reach, and at that time no discharge of any kind. Some napkins having the appearance of menstrual cloths were shown me. The child was again in a dangerous state of hectic. I could not help showing to the friends that I felt still great doubts upon the matter, so much so that the mother, her sister, and the nurse, got a little out of temper with my scepticism, and the nurse observed, "Well, doctor, if three women do not know better than one man, when a girl is at her poorly time, we had better hold our tongues."

I attended the child for about ten days. The hectic state, if, for brevity, I may use a comprehensive term, was more severe than before, but slowly passed off, leaving the child

wasted and feeble. In about three weeks, however, she regained some flesh, and was beginning to put on her natural appearance of a well-grown, rather delicate-looking child of nineteen months old. I waited with some interest for the next period, and was accordingly again sent for with curious exactness on the Saturday evening month, when the napkins were removed, and I could no longer doubt the fact that this baby was actually menstruating. The quantity was much less than that of a girl at puberty, but nevertheless it was now clear that a sanguineous discharge issued at monthly periods from the otherwise quite healthy genital organs of this young child, which discharge lasted for two or three days, and then wholly disappeared until the following period. The child now fell again into a state of hectic more severe than the former states, and leaving still more feebleness and emaciation.

I witnessed two more monthly periods occurring at the due times, followed in each case, as before, by a cessation in about two and a half days, the periods being succeeded by states of hectic of progressive severity. After the fifth appearance the consecutive disorder was so great that the little child died wasted and exhausted.

I much regret that the parents were unwilling, from a false sense of shame, to allow me to call in any other physician or medical man, and that they absolutely refused a post-mortem examination. They even forbade my removing the ovaries.

Such are the particulars of this curious case, which, at the time, I supposed to be almost unique. On reference, however, to the literature of the subject, I find that Mad. Boivin quotes from Sir C. Clarke a case of menstruation in a child of nine months old, in which case the periods recurred until the age of nine years, the age at the time of observation. After hunting for this case in vain, I found it at last recorded by Dr. Martin Wall in the 'Transactions' of this Society, Vol. II, p. 116. Sir C. Clarke, indeed, mentions a case of menstruation at the age of nine years, and such cases are not uncommon. In Dr. Wall's case the child

("muliercula potius quam puella," as he calls her) seems to have borne the function well, and at the age of two years presented all the signs of puberty. No such signs appeared about the vulva or mammæ in my case. I find mention several times of cases of menstruation above the age of four years. But in the 'Lancet' of 1848, p. 137, Mr. Embling, of Brompton Row, writes, "I had a little patient, aged three years, who was reported to be poorly. I found, on inquiry, that the child had menstruated for one year. The mammæ were healthily developed, as in an adult at twenty. The nates were also large, and the pubes had a slight flush of hair upon them. The labia were as in a matured young woman. The hymen was perfect, and the vagina large anteriorly. The countenance was antique, and altogether this babe of three years had the appearance and gait of a little old woman. I observed the child for a few months."

I also find the following case quoted from Meckel's 'Archiv f. Anat. u. Physiol,' 3e cah., in the 'Lancet' of November, 1828. In this case the child menstruated at the age of nine months. It was born like other children in size, &c., but soon began to grow rapidly, and at the ninth month was of the size of a child aged a year and a half. At this time appeared a sanguineous emission from the vagina, and again more abundantly at the eleventh month, when the breasts began to enlarge and the pubes to become hairy. The courses again appeared at the fourteenth month and at the nineteenth. At this time the child was well formed, three feet nine inches high, and twenty-two inches round the thorax. The breasts and external genitals were fully developed. The child had shown no sexual desire, nor did it exceed other children in intelligence.

These three cases are curiously like one another. It does not appear, however, that premature menstruation necessarily coexists with obvious bodily development, as in many such cases I find that it caused emaciation. In one case (the reference to which I have unfortunately misplaced) it caused hectic and death, as in my own.