ON THE
RIGHT MANAGEMENT OF YOUNG WOMEN

BEFORE THE FIRST APPEARANCE OF MENSTRUATION.

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It has been so frequently admitted as an axiom, that on the right education of youth depends the peace of families, the prosperity of states, and the progress of humanity, that it would be only a truism to say the same of the education of girls; and yet, were I to ask whether we have been as skilful in improving the human race, as we have been in developing the instincts of animals, and in endeavouring to appropriate their capabilities to our advantage, no one would presume to say—Yes! It would seem as if we thought that the art of educating man had long ago been brought to perfection, for with but slight differences, the child is tutored as his grandfather, notwithstanding the change of time, the alteration of circumstances, and the boasted advance of civilization.

The task of maturing the body as well as the mind and the affection of the female child, so as to ensure health, is a sacred duty which devolves almost exclusively on the mother. It is not my intention to write a treatise on education, but being firmly convinced that many of the most serious diseases incident to women, are caused by the bad management of girls at this critical period of life, I shall proceed to embody the advice I have been frequently requested to give, with the view of awakening the attention of the profession to a subject of such importance.

During the stage of puberal development, nature is for some time attempting to inaugurate a most important function, and those efforts which should be assisted, are often frustrated by girls themselves, who—taken by surprise—are either in total ignorance or are insufficiently prepared to adopt such means as will favour its establishment, and ensure its due reappearance. If mothers, independently of professional assistance, are, from ignorance unprepared to give their daughters advice at this period, or withhold it from mistaken notions of delicacy, the most serious consequences may ensue, as is obvious from the result of a statistical inquiry in which I have been long engaged. In several hundred women I find that twenty-five per cent. were unprepared for its appearance; thirteen girls out of the twenty-five were much frightened, screamed, or went into hysterical fits; and six out of the thirteen thought themselves wounded, and washed with cold water. Of those frightened the flow was checked in seven instances, was never restored in three, and the general health of all was seriously impaired. Of those who washed with cold water, two succeeded in effectually suppressing the flow, which only reappeared after several years, and then at irregular intervals, and was never healthily established.

It may be said, that it is only in the lower classes that girls are kept in darkness relative to what is of so much importance: but this is perfectly groundless. The same bad management equally prevails in the middle and the higher classes of society. Girls in affluent circumstances and well educated, are, I know, often taken by surprise at the appearance of this function. Mothers who, in other respects, act judiciously, will not condescend so far to bow down to the infirmities of their nature, as to give the necessary advice to their daughters; but when the event happens, they are too often turned over to the management of an unmarried attendant. I have been also informed by a lady presiding over a large establishment of young ladies, that the pupils who are placed with her after the appearance of that function, are never properly prepared for the event, and that many are so ignorant of themselves, that it is extremely difficult to prevent their washing with cold water, in the endeavour to remove what they naturally view with feelings of disgust.

When girls—young though they may be—suffer habitually from headache, and when this is accompanied by dulness of intellect, dizziness, heaviness, and great tendency to sleep, it is most probable that menstruation is impending, particularly if these head symptoms coincide or alternate with pains in the back and lower limbs. Additional confirmation may also be found in the change which may be observed in a girl's character. If she no longer takes pleasure in the society of children, shuns companions of her own age, and finds in solitude charms hitherto unknown;—if uneven in temper, she is at times as usual—cheerful and expansive, at others cold, peevish, fretful, and even mischievous, but afterwards atoning for these inconsistencies by the most fervent expressions of tenderness;—if her eyes shine with unwonted lustre in mixed society, having lost the innocent confiding expression of children, who boldly dive into the depths of other eyes, because they know not of dangers to be encountered there;—in fact, when woman has become unto herself a mystery, the medical attendant should lose no time in advising the mother not to let her daughter be taken unawares, and to prepare her to expect what is the common lot of all her sex, so that its first appearance may neither be arrested by the alarm naturally felt at something hitherto inexperienced, nor by the dangerous application to which, in their ignorance, they may imprudently have recourse.

Here I must allude to the disastrous use of emmenagogues at this period of life, and to the question so often asked of the medical attendant whether it would not be judicious to give forcing medicines, so as to hasten the desired event. The following sad history, related by Dr. Dewees, a celebrated American physician, is the best answer that can be given on this subject:—"We too often call to mind, with bitter recollection, the fate of a most amiable interesting young creature, for whom we were requested to prescribe for the expected menses, but who had not one mark that could justify an interference, more especially as she was in perfectly good health. 'She was 15; it

was time ;' and this was all that could be urged by the mother in favour of an attempt 'to bring down the courses.' We relied too much on the good sense of her anxious parent, and freely explained ourselves to her. She left us apparently satisfied with our reasoning, and we heard nothing more of the child for six months, when on being suddenly summoned to attend her, we found her throwing up blood in considerable quantities from the lungs, of which disease she died in a few days. The distracted mother told us that though she *appeared* satisfied with what we had said, she felt convinced we were wrong, and that her daughter's health required the immediate establishment of the menstrual evacuation. With this view she determined upon trying a quack medicine of some celebrity in similar cases. She gave it according to the direction, and in a few days her daughter became feverish, lost her appetite, and suffered from nausea ; her strength gradually diminished, and she was soon confined to her bed. The mother called in the quack doctor, who encouraged her to persevere by telling her the fever was an effort of nature for the end proposed. She persevered, and in a few days lost an only and a lovely daughter. (We examined the medicine which had been exhibited, and it proved to be oil of savin.")

Having stated what fatal consequences may arise to the unprepared from the unexpected appearance of this function, as well as the sad results of an attempt to bring it on suddenly, I shall now proceed to make a few remarks on that mode of training girls which is best calculated to second nature in her cautious attempts to inaugurate this new and important function.

1. With respect to the body, there is no reason for interfering with habits and customs which have hitherto maintained girls in an average state of health. The regular performance of the various functions should continue to be insured, and the frame should be invigorated by an increased amount of out-door exercise. In dress there are two evils to be guarded against : insufficient and injudicious clothing. Rich young ladies suffer as much from insufficient clothing as the daughters of the destitute, for poverty and fashion are two tyrants which exact the same things, and often bring on the same diseases. In my work "On Diseases of Menstruation," I have laid great stress on the fact that girls are clothed in trousers until they are about to become women, and then trousers, drawers—all are thrown aside, and the body is exposed to our piercing easterly winds, and to the atmosphere, which in the morning and evening is at all seasons cold and clammy, or to cutting draughts when waiting for the carriage, in hall or passage, after continued active exercise in a hot crowded room. Should fashion command, the loins will be constantly kept in a state of undue warmth, by two or three inches of padding, petticoat, and dress ; why then should the slenderest covering be denied to a part of the body hitherto carefully protected ? If I dwell upon this subject, it is because my opinion differs from that of many practitioners : the late Mr. Pennington, for instance, though I know not for what reason, used to recommend a totally different plan from

that which I advocate. In my opinion the use of drawers would preserve women from numberless infirmities, sometimes even from death. A great physician, Joseph Frank, relates that a beautiful girl, a relative of his, in splendid health, went to a ball, (although the period of the month was inconvenient to her) and returning home while still in perspiration, was seized with acute inflammation of the womb, and died of that complaint on the fourth day from the attack. I could detail several cases from my own experience in which a similar cause produced inflammation of the womb, of the ovaries, or interminable menstrual derangements, I therefore consider short drawers an indispensable article of female attire at all ages.

2. With regard to the government of the mental faculties, we have little to say, except that one ought not to be more fully developed than another ; they ought to be kept in a regular state of counterpoise, so as fully to develop the reasoning powers, and by more completely occupying the time and thoughts, to keep in check the too sudden development of those sentiments which have already tried their young strength in many a way, and which, in girls of the higher classes, often assume a wrong direction, attain a morbid intensity, and are productive of the most deplorable consequences. Far better off in this respect are the daughters of the poor, in whom the wild freaks of imagination are successfully kept under by poverty and hard labour, which as effectually put an extinguisher on romance as they dull the acuteness of intellect, and give the skin a plebeian hardness.

3. The proper direction of the affections is one of the most sacred duties of a mother, and if we touch on a subject so delicate, it is because, in accordance with her destiny, her moral and mental conditions effectually react on the organs, directing that periodic flow which *critically* determines the measure of woman's health ; for a mother, in attempting to perform her duty towards her daughter, to deny the validity of this principle in its highest earthly manifestations, would be folly : it should be admitted, directed, and judiciously developed by a mother's conversation and that of well-chosen associates. Novels and romances, in general, should be spurned, as capable of calling forth emotions of a morbid description, which, when habitually indulged, exert a disastrous influence on the nervous system, sufficiently explaining the great liability of women of the higher classes to hysteria and nervous diseases. It may be contended that many of these works contain excellent principles and admirable precepts of morality, but what do girls care about moral axioms, which are almost always obscured in the brilliancy of fiction ; they seek for the stirring adventure, the extravagant romance, the victorious hero, as if there were not sufficient romance in real life to excite the young imagination without stimulating this faculty by fantastic creations, evoking heroes as gods of their idolatry, with whom in fancy they could live for ever in regions of boundless and unfading bliss.

4. How should girls at this critical period be treated ? I answer by that happy mixture of firmness and mild-

ness oftener met with in the mother than in one of the sterner sex, who is too apt to check by parental severity those faults which he may himself have caused by undue indulgence. It is not wilful wickedness that afflicts girls at this important period, but a transient want of self-control, the consequence of a new influence obscuring for a time the clearness of the moral principle. Until nature asserts her sway, the adoption of gentle means, and a soothing treatment, to keep in check all eccentricities, added to the firm assertion of the rights of reason, blended, however, with the tenderness of a mother's affection, (without which all reasoning would be powerless,) seems to me the best plan to be pursued; for harsh treatment might, and probably would, give a permanent warp to the yet unformed character.

Thus have I attempted to show the medical and moral principles which should guide us in the management of women at this important crisis of life, and on some other occasion I shall offer a few reflections on the right management of women at the first appearance and during the persistence of menstruation.

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"UNEASY lies the head that wears a crown," says the prince of English poets. Shakespere had not any experience in conducting a medical journal, or he would assuredly also have left behind him some testimony as to the occasional discomfort of that less dignified portion of the human frame which, metaphorically speaking, occupies the Editorial chair. Our position, at least, is no exception to the general rule of Editorial malaise. Having so lately been reprehended by one party for not taking sufficient notice of medical politics, and by another for taking too much, we had imagined that a respite would have been granted us, and that we might have been allowed to "pursue the even tenor of our way," if not with praise, at least without censure. *Sed Dis aliter visum est*, and we have once more to take up the cudgels in our own defence.

"A Frequent Reader," whose uncivil letter appears in our last number, finds fault with the publications of the Association. For this we should not have blamed him, did we see just cause for his animadversions; for, every man has a right to his opinion, and having the honour to be placed in a prominent position, we are content to pay the penalties, as well as to receive the gratification contingent thereupon. But without presuming to think too highly of ourselves,

we must beg leave to suggest that "A Frequent Reader" reads oftener than he reflects, or he would not have penned the epistle in question. In the first place, if he be at the pains of inspecting this journal he will find that the "varied type," which he seems to regard as a desideratum, is really made use of; though upon what grounds, beyond that of typographical convenience, this should be regarded as a desideratum, we do not see. Again, before he is so hard upon the foreign department, it would be well that he exerciseth himself a little upon foreign medical literature; a personal acquaintance with the task would, we predict, tend considerably to mollify his critical asperity.

We may safely appeal to the experience of our brother Editors for confirmation, when we assert that it is no easy thing to keep up a constant supply of valuable foreign medical information. The Italian journals are next to worthless as far as original matter is concerned, all their best articles being mere transcripts and that chiefly of British writings. The French and German journals are not, we admit, open to the same remark; but in these also, the amount of really available matter is comparatively small. It is true that in German literature there is much, in a purely scientific view, of great interest; but we would ask, if, in a journal mainly devoted to the use of the busy general practitioner, we should be thanked for elaborate disquisitions on the more abstruse subjects connected with our profession? It is a matter of anxious consideration with us to make our journal one of practical utility, and our foreign selections are, whenever we have the material, made with that view. It has appeared to us that by giving a concise abstract of the proceedings of the foreign scientific societies, together with the translation of such articles in the French and German journals at our disposal, as have a direct clinical bearing, we best fulfil the important trust which has been confided to us, as a portion of our duties; but we shall ever feel obliged for any hints, by the adoption of which our usefulness to the Association can be enhanced; and if our "Frequent Reader" will favour us with a more definite idea of the means by which, in his opinion, our labours may be rendered more worthy, we shall have much pleasure in tendering him our acknowledgements; and the more readily if his suggestions be made in his own proper name.