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CLIMACTERIC DISEASE.

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It is the duty of physicians at all times to endeavor to correct errors in their profession, as well as to communicate facts in relation to the cure of disease ; and on this account I am induced to make a few remarks on a form of medical superstition which still obtains many adherents. There can be but little doubt that the idea still prevails, to a certain extent, with the people, and even with the enlightened portions of the community, as well as with many physicians, that at every seventh year, which is called the climacteric year, the body undergoes an entire renovation, and that great and important changes take place at that time. These are called critical periods, or climacterics, and they are said to occur at the ages of 7, 14, 21, 28, 35, 42, 49, 56, 63, &c. The age of 63 is called the grand climacteric, or critical period of great danger, at which the greatest change in human life is supposed to occur. The multiplication of 9 by 9, which makes 81, is supposed to be another grand climacteric.

Dr. Darwin says—"Ignorance and credulity have ever been companions, and have misled and enslaved mankind. Philosophy has in all ages endeavored to oppose their progress and to loosen the shackles they have imposed. Philosophers have on this account been called unbelievers ; unbelievers of what ? Of the fictions of fancy, of witchcraft, hobgoblins, apparitions, vampyres, fairies—of the influence of stars on human actions, miracles wrought by the bones of saints, the flights of ominous birds, the predictions from the bowels of dying animals, expounders of dreams, fortune tellers, conjurors, modern prophets, necromancy, cheiromancy, animal magnetism, with an endless variety of folly." To which I may add, the royal touch, the touch of a dead man's hand, spiritual intercommunications, eclecticism or Thomsonism revived, homœopathy, hydropathy, phrenology, as exclusive systems of medical practice, and a whole round of empiricism needless to enumerate, to which the indolent and crafty resort to get rid of the toil and labor of pro-

curing regular professional knowledge. These may all be placed on a par with the belief in climacterics. "These," continues Dr. Darwin, "philosophical physicians have disbelieved and despised, but have ever bowed their heads to hoary Truth and Nature."

As it is the subject of individual climacteric years, in which many intelligent men of the present day express their belief, it shall be my object to expose the fallacy of such a belief. This opinion has been prevalent in connection with the subject of vaccination. In the early days of inoculation many people expressed their fears that its efficacy would not extend beyond seven years, or further than any climacteric year, and that the human body did not then consist of the same particles of matter as before. True it is that great changes take place in the system at the age of puberty, which occurs at different periods in this climate; and also at the change of life in women, which also occurs at various periods, from 45 to 55. That the cowpox acts with diminished power, as the subject advances in life, is now acknowledged by all who have thoroughly examined the subject, and the same is also true in relation to the smallpox, hooping cough and numerous other contagious diseases; but it has nothing to do with the climacteric disease in question. It however suggests the great importance of frequent re-vaccination.

The subject of age, however, demands some attention in the history of the human economy. By the laws of the land, certain periods are prescribed, before which a child shall not be deemed guilty of certain crimes. For instance, a male child is supposed not capable of committing a rape before the age of 14. There are, however, cases on record of children arriving at puberty at a very early age. Some cases are recorded of boys attaining it at the age of 4 and even younger. But these cases are rare. Others, again, arrive at that period in from 8 to 10 years. A case occurred at Paris, where a woman attributed her pregnancy to a boy 10 years old. It may be a subject of consideration whether the powers of the individual should not be taken into account, rather than the age.

The subject of age seems particularly to have attracted the attention of the ancients, who divided the life of man into several climacterics or periods. They supposed, as I have stated above, that the human body underwent a radical change once in seven years; that is, by the constant absorption going on in the body, every part was completely taken up in seven years, and carried off by the absorbents, and a new deposition of animal matter succeeded to supply the loss or want which it then sustained. Tullius, King of Rome, divided age into infancy (which was under 7 years); childhood, from 7 to 14; youth, from 14 to 21; manhood, from 21 to 46; old age, from 46 to 70; and from that time till death he called decrepitude. Many of the moderns have adopted this division, though most of them vary. After the age of 60, in England and in some parts of the United States, men are not obliged to serve on juries. The age of 63 is the first grand climacteric, and is supposed to be a critical

age. It has been ably described by Sir Henry Hallford, with its incidental climacteric disease, some account of which may be found in Good's Study of Medicine, and in Copland's Medical Dictionary. This disease occurs between the ages of 50 and 75, but more frequently about the age of 63. After 65, men *usually* cease to procreate, but there are some exceptions. *Seventy years* is the scriptural limit of life, though there are, especially of late, many exceptions, and it is supposed that the average of old age has increased. Only 1 in 15,000, however, reaches 100 years; nor is the age of 81 (the second grand climacteric) often attained.

Infancy, in the acceptation above laid down, may comprehend childhood and youth, though many think that youth extends to the age of 28. The period allowed to manhood, undoubtedly, in this climate, is by far too short. The mental faculties are often as bright at 70, the time at which decrepitude is said to take place, as at any period of life; and, perhaps, the judgment is not more matured and perfect at any period, provided a man enjoys good health, than at 60. After all that has been said upon the subject, it seems that no other division of age is necessary than that which is naturally suggested in the rise and decline of life.

I have but few statistics to prove the correctness of my belief that there are no more deaths in the supposed climacteric years than in any others, and at present can only give those of the town of Deerfield, in Massachusetts, accurately kept for a period of sixty-six years. These statistics commence in 1787, and terminate in 1852. The whole number of deaths there in that time was 1531. Of these, 216 were under 1 year, and 16 were between 90 and 100 years of age. I give a little table from these deaths of those who have died during their climacteric years, and the years preceding and succeeding them:—

At seven years,	11	At six	10	At eight	5
fourteen	5	thirteen	7	fifteen	5
twenty-one	20	twenty	9	twenty-two	14
twenty-eight	7	twenty-seven	10	twenty-nine	11
thirty-five	9	thirty-four	8	thirty-six	8
forty-two	9	forty-one	6	forty-three	5
forty-nine	3	forty-eight	10	fifty	17
fifty-six	5	fifty-five	7	fifty-seven	9
sixty-three	3	sixty-two	10	sixty-four	12
seventy	23	sixty-nine	12	seventy-one	11
seventy-seven	15	seventy-six	16	seventy-eight	17
eighty-one	6	eighty	18	eighty-two	10
Total	116		123		124

The above table shows that the climacteric years in Deerfield have been less fatal than those immediately preceding and succeeding them, and this I think will hold equally true in other places. So there seems to be but little fear of special danger from these supposed fatal years.