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DISEASES OF FEMALES.

An Address delivered before the Berkshire District Medical Society, at Pittsfield, Nov. 23, 1852, by CLARKSON T. COLLINS, M.D., of Great Barrington, Mass., Fellow of the New York Academy of Medicine, formerly Editor of the New York Medical and Surgical Reporter, Member of the American Medical Association, &c. &c.

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MR. PRESIDENT AND GENTLEMEN,—It is with mingled feelings of pleasure and pain that I appear before you in the capacity of a speaker. It certainly is most pleasing to my feelings to meet with so respectable a body of medical gentlemen, and to recognize in them that beautiful spirit of brotherhood which always exists among true scientific inquirers. But had I not been aware of your characteristic lenity, I scarcely should have ventured to consent to address you.

Even under more favorable circumstances, such an occasion as the present could not fail to cause powerful emotions in my mind, on account of my inability to do the subject *moderate*, not to say that *full* justice which it so richly deserves.

At a meeting of the Berkshire District Medical Society, held in Great Barrington, a few weeks since, its honorable Secretary, Dr. Guiteau, offered the complimentary resolution of invitation to me to deliver an address at the next meeting, upon the subject of a specialty which I had been pursuing. The venerable President of the Berkshire Medical College, Dr. Childs, who possesses all the vigor and enthusiasm of youth, which is guided by the wisdom that learning and experience imparts to age, in the course of the remarks he made in seconding the resolution, said that I need not feel it incumbent upon myself to prepare a labored discourse, but that if I would merely consent to come before the Society and exhibit the instruments I made use of, and explain the remedies I employed in the treatment of uterine diseases, he would promise that the gentlemen present would be satisfied. I shall, therefore, claim your indulgence to the full latitude of the doctor's promise.

As I am comparatively a stranger among you, I trust you will excuse me for making a brief explanation before proceeding farther, which may appear rather too personal at first view, for it is the reasons of my pursuing the slight investigations which I have in diseases of females, and for subsequently becoming a resident of this inland region of country. I am a native of the State of New York, and after pursuing my studies

and graduating in the city, I commenced my professional career in that metropolis. In 1843, I became connected with the New York Asylum for Lying-in Women, and about the same time the Eastern Dispensary, two of the many excellent medical charities of that city. These two institutions report annually over twenty thousand patients who receive attention from the medical corps connected with them. In this situation I found myself daily meeting with diseases of females, many of which could be traced either directly or indirectly to some abnormal condition of the organs of reproduction.

Such I also experienced in private practice. I was constantly annoyed and disappointed in my treatment of these cases. I sought to extricate myself by the experience of older members of the profession—and also read all I could find relating to these complaints. Others were making similar inquiries, both in this country and Europe. I saw that the true pathology of the disease still remained in obscurity. I determined to make myself a thorough student in that branch of medicine, and, gentlemen, allow me to assure you, I am still a student in the same department. I care not for the taunts and jeers of those miserable croakers, who gratify their own stupidity, as well as others of the same calibre, by talking about Dr. A, B or C's using a "spy-glass" to investigate diseases of women. Such ignorance is too plain to require even a passing notice.

I shall not attempt to array before you the names of the different writers upon these diseases; suffice it to say that some of them have written very practical and excellent works, and are justly considered good authority as guides in treating these affections.

The plates which I lay before you to-day are among some that I had prepared for a work on uterine diseases, which I contemplated bringing before the profession, and should have done so ere this had not unforeseen circumstances prevented. In 1849 I had an attack of pulmonary disease, which threatened to speedily terminate my existence by phthisis. About the same time domestic affliction overwhelmed me in the deepest sorrow, by the death of my younger and only brother, Dr. Chalkley Collins, who had then just received his degree in medicine, and was in the practice of the profession in New York, when he was suddenly cut off by the Asiatic cholera. Under such circumstances I took my family and sailed for Europe. After spending about one year abroad, I returned home, with almost the determination to abandon the practice of the profession. I sought retirement in the pure atmosphere of the picturesque hills of Berkshire, and by degrees I have been drawn into business, but have steadily avoided a general practice.

Such, gentlemen, is the brief history or accident of my residence among you. I now stand before you an humble advocate for the study of specialties. I would say to the younger members of the profession, or to those about entering the profession, first make yourselves thoroughly conversant with the corner stones of our art—anatomy, physiology, chemistry, botany, general principles, and then theory and practice. No man is properly prepared to study any specialty until he has had some experience in general practice; and even then he cannot do so to the

best advantage unless he is peculiarly favored by such opportunities as large cities afford. What a fine field there now exists in this widely-spread country for the exercise of talents which may have been cultivated in the study of diseases of the *chest, throat, the eye and ear, the stomach, kidneys and bladder*. Each of these divisions of the human body has had its special devotee, who has not failed to make himself world-renowned by some new discovery or improvement in the treatment of disease, in the course of his investigations. It is thus that knowledge in the science of medicine is accumulated, general practice perfected, and suffering humanity relieved.

But to return to the subject of diseases of females, particularly of the womb, and its contiguous organs. It needs but slight observation to see that the fairest and best of God's creation, in our country, are becoming sickly and puny; the very contrast of our New-England mothers. If the refinements of civilization bring upon us incurable diseases, we had better at once go back to primitive habits. Perhaps there is actually no more disease now-a-days than formerly, according to the number of people; there may be less acute and more chronic diseases. And the professional as well as non-professional are more severe and exacting in diagnosis, as well as therapeutics. For the sake of the preservation of our species it is to be hoped that this same feeling will increase. Let us for a moment start the inquiry, why should we not expect to meet frequently with derangements of the uterus, ovaries, and their adjunct parts, the bladder and rectum; and also to have other organs sympathizing with these when any lesion of either occurs? Such is their anatomical relation to each other and to the whole system, and the very important part they play in the animal economy, that were we merely to study them in the abstract, we should readily conclude that such a delicate structure, governed by peculiar physiological laws, would become the seat of disease. Slight experience in the practice of medicine confirms us in the belief that no part of the human body is so liable to functional derangement and organic disease as the female genital organs. No class of diseases have remained in greater *obscurity*; and none, I affirm, are *more susceptible* of treatment.

What a wonderful metamorphosis the female system undergoes at the age of puberty! The playful school girl is accustomed to look upon all of her associates, both male and female, with feelings of indifference, while nature is gradually developing and modelling her for another life; when suddenly new and strange ideas fill the mind—unknown feelings are awakened—and the lively and sportive girl becomes taciturn and shy; avoids her former associates and childish pleasures, and seeks retirement or other modes of diversion. The child has arrived at that important era in her life when she is to become a woman. Both body and mind undergo a change. The genital organs, which were previously dormant, become suddenly developed, and take on an entire new character, to be governed by natural laws. The naturally delicate and susceptible constitution of the female is exalted to an acuteness not before known; the sudden transition of the sexual organs from a state of apathy to one of great activity, renders them *particularly liable to disease*.

It is at this period of life that so many make such sad mistakes in wholly neglecting the physical training, the proper clothing to be worn, and habits to be formed. Such would make a good subject to be treated of at some length, pointing out prophylactic measures; upon the principle of the old maxim that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. I should be highly gratified to devote a chapter to the pathology and treatment of diseases peculiar to this interesting period in the life of females, but such must be reserved for another occasion. The present is only intended to hint at the importance of this vast field of inquiry, and to excite a more lively interest in the subject, on the part of the profession in this region.

Dr. Bennet, in his admirable work on "Inflammation of the Uterus and its appendages, and ulceration and induration of the Neck of the Uterus," makes these remarks in the Preface to his second edition. *"Guided by the clinical experience of the last twelve years—during which period I have constantly studied uterine disease in wide fields, and with the advantage of more accurate means of investigation than those generally employed—I have endeavored to demonstrate the important fact that INFLAMMATION is the key-stone to uterine pathology, and that unless the phenomena which it occasions be recognized and taken into consideration, all is doubt, obscurity and deception."* The same author also says that ulceration and induration of the neck of the uterus, may be considered the most common of all uterine lesions.

Any one who has had any amount of experience in the investigation and treatment of uterine disease, will, I think, fully concur with Dr. Bennet.

What are the most common causes which give rise to these troublesome maladies? They are various; anything which disturbs their natural function, or interrupts, materially, the laws of nature, may kindle up disease. In the married state, the most frequent cause of inflammation of the cervix uteri and ovaries, is the physiological congestion and excitement attendant upon excessive *coitus*; especially in the newly married, in whom it not unfrequently happens that the inflammation thus established is followed by ulceration, chronic disease engendered for life, and barrenness may be one of its sequelæ. But, gentlemen, it will not do to be too positive in assigning this as the cause of the disease, upon making our speculum examination, for I assure you that I have often found quite extensive ulcerations, and a highly-congested condition of the cervix, with chronic inflammation of one or both ovaries, in unmarried females in whom I was obliged to rupture the hymen with the speculum, in order to treat them. A practised eye, however, will readily distinguish the difference of cause, on seeing the disease.

As a matter of course, such cases are of considerable standing, and more or less aggravated in their nature, for it is only by long sufferings and after every other means have been tried, that young ladies are driven to submit to the proper treatment. I mean my remarks here to apply to the cervix uteri, and not to ovaritis, for the latter disease I have found more common in the unmarried.

Dr. Coale has recently published some articles in the Boston Medical and Surgical Journal on "Uterine Displacements," wherein he lays

great stress on the present mode of ladies wearing their clothes suspended upon their hips, and across the lumbar region, and so pressing upon the contents of the lower portion of the abdomen as to cause displacement of the uterus. I have often thought of the same thing, but by taking considerable pains to ascertain the truth of this, I really have not been able to fully satisfy myself that this was the principal cause in a single instance; although it appears to me to be reasonable to suppose that the present fashion of wearing so many pounds weight suspended about the waist must have a deleterious influence on the health, and may act mechanically as well as physiologically upon the uterine organs. The old fashion of wearing shoulder-straps to the petticoats, I think, would be much better. It seems to me the fact is, some females are naturally peculiarly predisposed to uterine diseases; as we see it the case in other complaints, such as consumption, follicular disease of the throat, &c. It becomes us, however, as physicians, to endeavor to study how to cure disease, if we cannot always ascertain the exact cause.

That a structure possessing such vascularity as the womb and its appendages, governed more or less by moral influences; subjected to constant and varied excitements, either by the mind or in performing its natural functions; or by the different movements of the body in walking, leaping, dancing or lifting; being so intimately and peculiarly associated with other organs and their functions through the medium of the nervous system; and being suspended or supported in the most delicate and frail manner, and affected by the slightest deviation from its natural position, should very often become the subject of disease, is not at all surprising. And when once affected, its relative position invites an increase of disease, so that the doctrine of the *vis medicatrix nature* is less applicable here than in almost any other class of disease.

Constipation of the bowels may cause engorgement of the cervix uteri, and *vice versa*; for we generally have a torpid condition of the lower portion of the bowels, when uterine disease has been of long standing. Ulceration and prolapsus may follow an accouchement where proper care has not been observed in regard to the patient's standing on her feet or sitting up before the uterus and vagina have regained their tonicity and position; or where the bowels have not been properly attended to.

Pardon me, gentlemen, for giving a single illustration of the effects of neglecting the bowels after parturition. The case occurred in New York city, and is by no means an isolated one.

A lady of about 30 years of age, possessing a good constitution, had borne several fine healthy children, and had previously got along after her confinements without any difficulty. Her physician, a little past the middle age, who had attended her with all of her children, a short time previous to her last confinement became a convert to the infinitesimal theory of medication. (He now enjoys an immense practice, but did not formerly.) On the second day after delivery, the nurse asked the doctor if she should give madam a dose of castor oil? He replied "no"! Then what should it be—rhubarb and magnesia? "No."

Should she administer an enema? "No," said the doctor, "I have learned at last the *true theory in medicine*, which is not to interfere too much with the laws of nature; madam's bowels will be moved as soon as nature requires it." So the case went along a few days more, trusting to the *doctor's nature*. Both patient and nurse spoke to the physician again after waiting as long as they dared to, upon the same subject, and referred to her previous confinements, and how well she had got along under the "old-fashion" practice of taking a mild laxative after her confinements. The doctor now intimated to them that he fully understood his own business, and did not wish to be dictated to, and that all the uncomfortable feelings in madam's bowels would soon pass off if they would only exercise due patience; but he persisted in not allowing any physic to be given. The woman went just *fifteen days*, when the nurse gave, on her own responsibility, a large dose of oil, and in the course of a few hours afterwards administered an enema. Defecation was performed with the greatest difficulty, causing intense pain as the hardened fæces, which had been so long accumulating in the colon and rectum, came away in large masses. All this, as you would suppose, caused an *admirable* case of prolapsus and induration, which was followed by ulceration of the cervix, and chronic ovaritis. The attending physician received his *quid pro quo* of *twenty dollars* for causing the disease, and I charged *seventy-five* for curing it. So you see, gentlemen, we ought not to complain, so far as our pecuniary interest is concerned; but honesty towards ourselves as well as the public compels us to speak the truth, though the "heavens fall."

Homœopathy is an hypothetical fabrication in metaphysics which will only remain a *stupendous monument* to human folly. It has never given us a single improvement in the healing art, and merely tends to establish one practical fact, viz., that a peculiar hallucination in medicine may become epidemical in its character.

[To be continued.]

RESPIRATION SUBSERVIENT TO NUTRITION.

[Continued from page 457.]

WHAT, then, is the great end of respiration? Does it sustain any relation to nutrition? Is it indirectly or directly subservient to that perfect elaboration of the nutrient fluid by which it is fitted to build up the tissues, and sustain the organs in all their vital functions?

Indirectly, it is subservient to nutrition, in the higher animals, by the very maintenance of the appropriate degree of animal heat. It is not in inorganic chemistry alone that heat promotes energy and intensity of action. In vital chemistry, in living functions, the same phenomena are observed. While a certain degree of heat is best adapted to the healthy and vigorous activity of each animal, a lower degree will retard it, even to the stagnation observed in the hibernating state; and a higher degree will accelerate the vital functions to an extent incompatible with the preservation of life for any length of time. Animals under such circumstances