

CONSTIPATION HABIT.

The subject of constipation is so extensive, involving the discussion of so many diseases and remedies, and with its diarrhea of literature covering so much ground, that I forbear, for want of time, if nothing more, from entering into a full consideration of the subject.

That it is often a symptom of disease or a disturbance arising from disease, I need not discuss; but I wish at this time to call brief attention to it as a disease in and of itself, in order to elicit discussion, and thereby enlarge our ideas.

The constipation habit is certainly a perversion of an important function, and is often productive of great harm and suffering. The normal act of defecation, as a rule, occurs regularly once every twenty-four hours, and with a majority in the early part of the day, before or soon after breakfast. In health the call to evacuate the bowels is a peculiar sensation that cannot be understood. If not heeded it may soon cease, and the call not return for an indefinite length of time. Immediately preceding this sensation is the peristaltic contraction of the sigmoid flexure which ejects its contents into the rectum, from which arises the warning and call for voluntary muscular assistance, that is so often unheeded or put off to a more convenient season. But the rectum must be relieved, and if not in the natural way, then anti-peristaltic action takes place, and the load is sent back whence it came, a burden and a log, blunting that delicate sense of the bowels.

Women, I think, neglect the function more than men. This is often from a false sense of modesty, their natural delicacy leading them to endure while away from home, traveling or in society, rather than to withdraw with eyes upon them to a strange shrine devoted to *cloacina*. Even at their own homes, where there is a lacking of modern conveniences, the inclemency of the weather, the exposure to cold, and the foul breath of the vault cause so much dread of the simple act of defecation, as to lead them to procrastinate, to the utter demoralization of the normal defective act. I have no doubt that the trammels of fashionable clothing also interfere to some extent. The considerable straining which is sometimes required to complete the act, may be unattainable from the clothing limiting too much the action of the diaphragm and abdominal muscles.

Sedentary habits which deprive the bowels of the gentle stimulus of exercise is one cause of constipation; and when to the sedentary habits is added position of posture which cramps and crowds the bowels, as is the case with the shoemaker, habitual constipation is almost sure to follow.

The abuse of cathartics is a fruitful cause to induce and confirm this habit. What with the anti-constipation pill, wafers and pellets flooding the land to dredge the *prima via* on the first indication of its filling up, or to be used from the fear that it will fill up, it is a wonder that nature's *cloaca* is maintained at all.

Errors of diet, though not mentioned first, are not least in causing this habit, which is, perhaps, more prevalent in this country than in any other; and some one has said that it is because we eat too little soup. Water as a solvent and a diluent acts in the alimentary canal a very important part, and soup eating should certainly be encouraged in order to counteract the tendency to take our food too solid, and to favor the fecal current.

Whatever line of diet we are in the habit of taking, and the bowels are normal, if we make a sudden or marked change in our diet, it is often attended by bowel disturbances in one way or the other. I have been in a position to observe a great many persons who have made sudden changes, particularly from a mixed, generous diet, to a vegetarian diet, which, from its bulky nature, imposes more work on the bowels than they are used to, often beyond their working capacity, and the result would often be acute constipation. The next step then, was to use the much-abused water enema, which to the overworked bowels, seemed a God-send, but by frequent repetition proved a blight to their work, making them a sluggard in the human economy.

I give one case to illustrate:

Mr. S. had been a vegetarian for five years or more, and had adopted two meals a day. He was in fair general health for one of such habits, but his great difficulty was no natural action of the bowels, which had existed for the last five years. His sole reliance for a movement was the coarse food and water enemata, which he had come to take regularly.

He consulted me, ostensibly for hemorrhoids, which he said the doctor who had treated him told him he had had, and who had expected to operate on him. On making a thorough exploration of the rectum, I was not surprised to find no hemorrhoids, for he gave no symptoms of any. I found, however, a very large, pouch-shaped rectum, with flabby, relaxed and attenuated walls, which I attributed to the protracted use of the water enemata.

I changed his diet, stopped the enemata, gave him three meals a day, had him drink four or five goblets of water per day, and had him inject on retiring one third of a cup of cold water to be retained. Ordered daily massage and kneading of the bowels, with a mild faradisation of the same; also ten drops of *fld. ext. casc. sag.* four times a day. In four weeks' time he had natural stools, without the use of medicine or treatment of any kind.

A too concentrated diet may cause this habit, but I have observed no danger in this direction. A variable appetite, which makes extremes in quantity and quality of food, is sometimes a cause, but as this would lead us to discussion not intended at the time we desist. I have often observed that a long journey by rail will produce a severe constipation; and have wondered if the constant jarring of the cars have anything to do with it.