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"Plus apud nos vera ratio valet, quam vulgi opinio."

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Considerations concerning the Functions of the Bowels.

AN extraordinary prejudice prevails concerning the necessity of frequently acting upon the bowels by aperient remedies in health, or on the occurrence of any slight derangement of the body.—We shall endeavor to show that this is fraught with serious injury to the constitution in certain temperaments, and especially under certain circumstances.

In many cases a tendency to constipation is natural to the system, and is required for the continuance of its well being. It is altogether a mistaken idea to suppose that it is desirable that the bowels should be acted upon daily.—Where a large quantity of food is taken, and of mixed quality, such will generally be the effect, if nature be left to her uninterrupted operations; because the quantity and quality of the aliments received furnish an abundance of what is called excrementitious matters—that is, matters resulting directly and indirectly from the process of digestion, which must be removed, and this is readily accomplished from their irritating influence upon the nervous surface of the bowels.

Persons who indulge their appetite—who in fact live to eat—and are active in their habits or occupations, very seldom suffer from constipation, except from the disturbance of the system bordering on disease, which their excesses create. This class of individuals will scarcely come under our consideration. We may safely leave them to nature. Our remarks will apply more particularly to those whose powers of consumption are much less, whether from the delicacy of their tastes

—the refinement of their habits—or from constitutional peculiarities, we shall not determine in this stage of the inquiry.—Where comparatively little food is taken, and is slowly acted upon by the digestive organs from their natural or induced inability to perform their functions efficiently; here, as a rule, it is always injudicious to disturb the bowels by aperient remedies, and yet it is practised to a lamentable extent, aggravating the evil it is intended to correct; and in addition seldom fails to produce organic or functional mischief—enfeebled powers of digestion—weakness and derangement of the lungs—palpitation of the heart—distressing head-aches—affections of the urinary bladder, and a long train of nervous symptoms. Some of these consequences are inevitable. We interfere with nature in her struggling efforts to discharge her duties. We presume to assist her—to force her into inordinate exertions when she is laboring to do her best according to the measure of the vital energies which she possesses. What is the result? We compel her to expend more power in the direction of the bowels than she can adequately spare, either in reference to them or the well being of the animal economy at large.

There is a common stock of vital energy—a certain capital with which the system is endowed. It has many outlets, issues, or escapes. Wherever vital action is carried on there is a source of expenditure. Where this stock is small or extremely limited, as in those who are naturally delicate, or who become so from sedentary pursuits or other causes, the study should be to economise it, which