

Correspondence.

ON CIRCUMCISION.

To the Editor of the CANADIAN PRACTITIONER AND REVIEW :

DEAR SIR,—It is one of the most curious things in human history, and it is of course an historical fact, that this singular mutilation should have been ordered and prescribed by Divine authority, for the "Chosen People." Nevertheless, there is a reason, indeed many reasons, for this singular custom. There is, to use a time-honored expression, "much method in this seeming madness."

The most obvious advantage of the removal of the foreskin, is that it promotes local cleanliness. This is of real importance in childhood. In adults the habit of withdrawing the skin and washing the glans has usually been learned, but with children and young boys it is not, as a rule, even thought of. It would indeed be injurious to the morals of a child, if the practice were taught and insisted on. The accumulation of smyrna, however, and its decomposition, is a source of annoyance and of irritation to many boys. Any irritation of the glans penis is liable to produce reflex excitement, precisely of the character which it is most desirable to avoid in young boys. It is very undesirable, and cannot but be prejudicial, to have this part of his person kept in a state of irritation. Anything which draws attention to it is injurious to any young lad.

In middle life, seborrhea, balanitis and herpes are common, and are often very troublesome. The majority of both middle-aged and elderly people would be better off and safer if they had been circumcised in infancy.

The real argument in favor of the general practice of circumcision is that it would greatly tend to reduce the prevalence of syphilis. It would be difficult to contrive an appendage more likely to facilitate the implantation of the syphilitic virus than the pressure. Folds of delicate mucous membrane are (by its means) kept constantly in the most suitable condition for the retention and absorption of any infective virus. The objections to any system of legal inspection and examination are notorious; but these very reasonable and right objections are not at all applicable to circumcision. Effected in early infancy, it might easily be made the means of preventing the prevalence of a loathsome and misery-producing disease. The gain would be without any drawback.

It ought not to be forgotten that in the case of a contagious disease of this kind, every case may become the focus for further spreading, and that the prevention of one case may mean the prevention of many.

These are, no doubt, in a sense "home truths." They are at the same time both interesting and important. R. D.

MONTREAL, January 1st, 1901.