

We now come to the consideration of some of the constitutional causes of constipation, or of the differences observed among individuals with respect to the greater or less facility with which the bowels are accustomed to act. On one part of this subject a uniformity of sentiment prevails. The necessity of a daily evacuation is a universal opinion. It has been adopted without much thought, both by the profession and the public. To superficial observation it seems a legitimate inference. In a great number of instances it is the rule, and in many of these it is important that it should be so. The regularity with which the effect is produced in many originates in two widely different classes of causes. It is a natural result flowing from a state of health conjoined with generous living, or in other words where the appetite is freely indulged. When an abundance of food is taken, and readily acted upon by the digestive apparatus, the *residue* of the vital operations, which is designated excrementitious matter, will so affect the bowels as to lead to its daily expulsion. Habit will also greatly influence the functions of these organs. They may, in some measure, be trained to perform their duties at stated times. In this there is nothing singular, nor is the phenomenon difficult of explanation. The mode in which it occurs, or the physiological principles which account for it, are not generally understood, nor has attention been given to it. It is nevertheless worthy of investigation.

The regularity with which this effect takes place from what is considered habit, depends on a particular state of the *mind*, or in other words, on mental emotion. It is the brain directly operating on the nerves of the intestines—as directly as volition influences the nerves of the arm or hand in any of its muscular contractions. A feeling co-exists with the suggestions or promptings of nature, and this feeling is a peculiar condition of the cerebrum—of the whole mass of its nervous matter, which places the nerves extending from it and the spinal cord to the bowels, in certain *organic* relations with these important

nervous centres. The result is the action of the bowels.

The mental feeling plays an essential part in this affair. It must be kept in view that, like all other emotions, it implies a temporary change in the functions of nervous substance co-operating in the production of this effect. This feeling will be apt to arise from the occurrence of the hour or other circumstances, in which an uneasy sensation of the intestines is not included, and at a time when the necessity may not be urgent, nevertheless the *feeling* is capable of generating this necessity from what is called the laws of sympathy, by which the brain and spinal cord directly influence the nerves of the bowels, which sympathy, rendered into intelligible language, means a direct association between the nervous organs affecting and those affected—and the effects produced are as purely physical changes or modifications in the condition of nervous substances as any that occur in nature.—Habit, in this case, *depends on organic relations established between the nervous centres and the nerves of the bowels*—relations which become obvious and efficient when the mental *feeling* arises which is necessary to their manifestation.

The formation of such a habit is unobjectionable, but it is liable to abuse, and may in fact be injurious in its influence. It not unfrequently leads to the urging of nature, when from particular circumstances she does not at once respond to the induced mental feeling; and in this case there is a straining of the bowels, and ineffectually, which is one of those causes tending to produce *prolapsus ani*, or the protusion of the rectum, which is often observed in young children after severe purging. The habit, however, is prejudicial in another way. It begets an exaggerated idea of the importance of the daily action of the bowels, and when such action does not take place with its accustomed regularity, the individual begins to be mentally uneasy—nervously anxious—imagining that something must be extremely wrong, not from any painful or disagreeable sensa-