

PERIOD OF PUBERTY IN WOMEN.

MANY years ago I was consulted in the case of two sisters, the one seventeen, and the other eighteen years of age, who, though apparently in health, were supposed to be suffering from retention of the menses, for which they had been taking some popular herb medicines. They were tall, more than commonly muscular, of a blooming healthy hue, and without any sign of enlargement of the mammæ. In other respects their appearance was perfectly feminine. Finding that they had no symptom of disease, I recommended that they should desist from medicine, on the ground that, to all appearance, they had not yet arrived at puberty, although in age they had certainly passed what is considered to be its usual period. Instances of an opposite description afterwards came under my notice. In one, where a girl menstruated at twelve, her mother and grandmother had, I found, become regular at the same age. In another, five sisters in one family menstruated at the age of eleven. These, and other cases in no respect morbid or irregular, but perfectly in the order of nature, led me to doubt whether the period of puberty was nearly so uniform as we are taught in books to consider it. This doubt, which may often have occurred to others, induced me to institute an investigation of the subject at the Board of the Lying-in Hospital of

this town. The result appears in the table which follows. The question as to the age at which they began to menstruate, was put indiscriminately to a certain number of the pregnant married women, on their coming to the hospital to deliver in their letters of recommendation as home-patients. These women are generally in health, as appears by their walking, in an advanced stage of gestation, from considerable distances to the hospital, the remote situation of which, is in the highest degree inconvenient to such patients, they being chiefly inhabitants of our widely extended and scattered suburbs. The circumstance of pregnancy is a guarantee, as regards the whole of the cases examined, of exemption from serious disease of the generative system. Owing to the great number of females who resort thither weekly affording abundant source for inquiry, no hesitation was felt at rejecting every answer which evinced either a doubtful recollection of the fact, or that the information was reluctantly afforded.* I may therefore affirm, that this table furnishes as accurate data as the nature of such an inquiry allows. And let it be remembered, that concerning the catamenial sign of puberty the word of the woman herself is, on any extended scale of investigation, the only testimony to be obtained.

The following are the ages at which three hundred and twenty-six women began to have the catamenia.

Table.

In their 11th year	6	In their 16th year	54
" 12th "	12	" 17th "	50
" 13th "	31	" 18th "	19
" 14th "	60	" 19th "	18
" 15th "	72	" 20th "	4

One very obvious corollary I would draw from this table, namely, that the natural period of puberty in women occurs in a much more extended range of ages, and is more equally distributed throughout that range, than authors have alleged. And another, which claims particular attention, is, that did religion and our social institutions permit and encourage, in England, that early and unrestrained intercourse between the sexes, which, with the sanction of both, obtains in eastern and in almost all intertropical countries, it is to be supposed that we should witness instances amongst us of women becoming mothers at as early ages as eleven, twelve, and thirteen years. Other inferences that might be deduced from the table, I leave to the reader's ingenuity, as they would be foreign to the scope of my inquiry.—*Mr. Robertson, in North of England Med. and Surg. Journal.*

* Perhaps it ought to be mentioned that the question relating to the period of puberty was put to each of the women along with other questions usual on the occasion, as, concerning the age, the occupation, the number of children, &c.; so that it did not appear as if put out of curiosity, or for a private end, but as one of the queries necessary to be answered, in order to her admission as a patient.