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THE PUBESCENT AND ADOLESCENT PERIODS OF GIRLHOOD.*

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The first object I ever beheld in my life was a woman. It seems that the physician who was awaiting my coming had promised that I should be a girl, but when I arrived on the scene of action, he was a little disappointed that his prophecy was not fulfilled. He looked very ugly at me, whereupon, if my memory serves me aright, I twisted up my little mouth and yelled at him as loud as I could. This little defence on my part brought him around—for he apologized, said I was a fine boy, and handed me over to the nurse, to have my first toilet made. From that day until now I have been on friendly terms with women. The fact is, I had such a fondness for them, that early in my professional career I became convinced that it was not the proper thing to be a bachelor. You will believe me then, when I tell you I have their best interests at heart. This paper is written with the hope that I may be able to awaken the profession to a realization of their duty in advising mothers how to rear and point out to their daughters the unknown intricacies

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of womanhood. The mother should be admonished to acquaint her child, modestly and in plain terms, with a knowledge of the ordinary signs of menstruation, as a preventive measure against the evils which may follow from undue exposure; so also, should she impart to her daughter a few plain facts regarding constipation and the many discomforts which follow—congestion, displacements, and inflammatory affections of the uterus, a source of discomfort as well as an insidious factor in the production of various nervous disorders.

The law of growth in the human body is one which has not been always considered in relation to the development of girls. The energies of the body rise and fall in each individual with a certain rhythm. Each swell of the physical growth is designated to bring about certain morphological and functional conditions; and when these conditions are not secured at the time nature is accustomed to bring them about, there is absolutely no possibility of their completion and perfection in subsequent years. The maturity of the sexual apparatus and its function in the girl must be at that stage of development known as puberty. It is of all periods to the woman the most important, for her future health, both physical and mental. All the intelligence and care that is possible for mothers and physicians to bestow upon her should be given at this time. Not only motherhood and subsequent health, but sanity and life-long happiness are dependent upon the perfection of pubescent growth and function. It does not seem unreasonable, therefore, that the customs and prejudices for the time should be laid aside in considering the proper training of the girl in and before pubescence.

Just before reaching the pubescent period the girl is at the threshold of an ordeal marked by its vicissitudes of development and characterized by the most important metamorphosis in the physical, intellectual and moral nature of female existence. It is a period paramount to all others in a woman's life. The environments surrounding her at this time reflect her future destiny. Here are sown the seeds which bear fruit in womanhood. Here is the soil in which is to be nurtured the embryo of succeeding generations. Here are gathered the basic elements

upon which the superstructure of maturer years is founded. It is the physician's duty as well as his honored privilege to guide such an one through the most critical period of her existence.

From careful study and close observation of this subject, I am led to the conclusion that many radical changes ought to be instituted in the care, rearing, and education of young girls. My observation also leads me to assert that a girl should not be sent to the school-room before eight years old, and then kept in school until twelve years old. It is at or about this age that the average American girl begins budding into womanhood, and progresses with great rapidity until the period of adolescence is complete, which is usually about the eighteenth year. During the pubescent period, from the twelfth to fifteenth year, she should be taken out of school; or have her instructors so plan her studies that she may have light tasks, light duties, and music lessons, which require hours and hours of daily practice, should be stopped. At this period the girl's moral and physical nature needs more care and attention than her mental and intellectual faculties. She should not be overworked, but have light literature and be constantly under the careful instruction of a mother, who has been previously advised by the family physician of her duties to her daughter.

The girl at twelve may be slightly below the average age at which puberty begins, and again she may bloom into womanhood at the age of ten years. Many have become mothers at the tender age of twelve, and some even at earlier periods. This is a lamentable fact, a reflection upon good morals, and a stigma upon civilization.

The reason for a more careful scrutiny of these cases are manifold. Higher civilization demands better education from a physical, intellectual standpoint.

While the girl is undergoing a physical change she needs such exercise as will cause an equable development of her entire system. Calisthenics, dancing and the various exercises of the gymnasium are to be recommended. Violent exercises—as heavy lifting—are contra-indicated as they tend to, and are etiological factors in, the production of uterine displacements. The cloth-

ing should be worn loose about the abdomen and hips, allowing freedom of the muscles in these regions. The skirts should be supported from the shoulders. Corsets should be interdicted as they cramp the muscles and embarrass respiratory movements and distort the abdominal and pelvic organs. I will not discuss this point in detail, as it was pointed out to you in a paper, "The Evil Effects of Tight Lacing," at our annual meeting in 1893, and published in *The Georgia Journal of Medicine and Surgery* in May of the same year.

During the period of adolescence, which begins at the completion of puberty, the girl can be put down more closely to intellectual work; but no more mental work should be required of her than will enable her to enter college at eighteen. At this age the mind is more active and receptive and acquires knowledge more readily. In no case should the brain be developed at the expense of the physical organization. The late Dr. Alexander J. C. Skeene once said: "Usefulness should lie at the foundation of a girl's education, and that education should aim to make a woman in all that the name implies; that a knowledge of how to be attractive and agreeable is a power of great value to a woman who wishes by charming and attracting those who are to guard her, and that music, art, and the modern languages are far more necessary to a woman than to man; that personal beauty and becoming dress are too often obliterated from the girl educator's calendar."

Instead of allowing the mother to rear an over sensitive hot-house plant, that must be nervous in the extreme, encourage her to strive to raise a sturdy plant that can hold its own amid the storms of life. The child should be sent to the country or seashore, for several months each summer. Another cause of undermining the healthy tone of the nervous system is the intricate dances taught very young children, and then placing them before audiences for exhibition where they are wrought up to the highest pitch, causing too great a strain on the nervous system. From a purely medical standpoint, therefore, children should not be allowed to take dancing lessons until after the eighth year; then dancing, and more especially the Delsarte system in well-ventilated rooms, is a most wholesome exercise. Children's

parties lasting until late at night belong to the same category and should be tabooed. Children's evening functions and dancing at night, immoral associates, reading improper literature, are all too exciting and cause an over-stimulation of the nervous system and a precocious childhood and puberty.

Overwork in school and the too early participation in social pleasures, produce congestion and predispose to a premature establishment of the menstrual function. Child labor from overwork in factories, stores, and sweat-shops is a curse to our country which many legislative bodies at last have recognised and are enacting laws to suppress.

A good farmer will not allow a colt to be worked until it has reached a certain stage of maturity, but on the other hand—the merchant or manufacturer never stops to consider the delicate female child which he prematurely harnesses and works from six o'clock in the morning to six o'clock in the evening. It is wrong to impose such a task upon a boy, and to allot such a task to a girl is a downright sin.

During menstruation there is pelvic hyperæmia—a condition requiring absolute rest, and loosely fitting garments, yet the child is compelled to work right on from four to six days out of every month, her waist tightly encased in a closely-fitting corset. Headaches, backaches, anemia, pelvic inflammation, and other evils are the result. That matters not, they will "lose their job" if they rest. Show me such a girl with a few years of such work and I will show you one who has no appetite, no ambition for work, who has become pale and anemic, and who has arrived at a period where she is unfit to perform the functions intended for her sex.

In my observation of these young working girls, I have noticed that they sit or stand for hours in strained positions, breathe vitiated air, eat cold lunches, and live in unsanitary tenement apartments, where the conditions are far from being conducive to health. Besides, these girls are shut up in shops and stores at a period of their lives when the brain is most receptive and active, and, therefore, to the detriment of their progeny, deprived of a proper education.

The girl at the period of pubescence requires especial care in

her moral education. That element known as moral character is the "*sine qua non*," the corner stone in the monument of woman's usefulness. This is the time paramount in her youthful career when advice, teaching, and example should be based upon the fundamental principles of morality. No one knows more about the mistakes and wrongs incident to this period than the physician; and he alone, being in closer touch than any one else, may do much to counteract these evil influences. The girl at this period is filled with a full share of modesty, and is unacquainted with the human microbe ever-present and ready to infect her virtue. She is sympathetic, nervous, impulsive—her very nature flexible and susceptible to persuasion and environment.

The homes for friendless girls and the private and public lying-in hospitals and the sealed lips of the medical profession could bear me witness. If you make inquiry into the history of these unfortunate girls frequently you will listen to the history of a gay ball-room, décolleté dresses, the thrilling spark that electrifies her nature when whirling through space in the arms of a conscienceless partner, and alas! the pathetic wail of a soul wrapped in the stifling garments despair!

If I were undertaking to institute a new plan of reform, I would send fewer missionaries to foreign lands, and try to concentrate the combined influence of the moral element of society upon our young American girls, who are to become the mothers of succeeding generations.

The more I study the functions of the generative organs at this period of life, the more do I deplore the giving of "emmenagogues," and I am sure that the cases requiring digital and instrumental examination are few and far between. I recall a case, which occurred early in my professional career, where "medical tinkering" produced disastrous results, the daughter of wealthy parents who had been over-indulgent with their only child. Too many social functions, too many late hours, and too much excitement, and resulted in precocious puberty. She menstruated at the age of ten years, the periods appearing for four consecutive months, and at the age of eleven (no flow having appeared in the interim) her parents had a physician called. Em-

menagogues were administered without the desired result. A digital, and later an instrumental examination brought negative results. A recital of this case (the details coming from a perfectly reliable source) is to show that examination and useless "medical tinkering" produced in this beautiful girl the habit of masturbation, which in the judgment of a council of consulting physicians was the cause of epilepsy from which she afterwards became a sufferer. If it is necessary to make a digital examination, in a young maiden, by all means make it through the rectum and leave the hymen—which is the only absolutely certain sign of virginity intact. The doctor who would carelessly destroy this is unfit to treat the diseases of women.

The physician's advice is almost daily sought relative to abnormal conditions pertaining to the female sex. Occasionally we are confronted by the mother and her daughter, who has called to consult us about the latter's not "coming around regularly." More tact and skill than usually obtain should be observed in these cases. Sometimes the trouble is the result of nervous break-downs, due to over-work in school. Sometimes the decline is coincident with an insidious tubercular development. Sometimes the cessation may be due to sitting too long, and too late, on "picnic" grass; or there may be adolescent anemia. Again, but rarely, there may be organic disease of the uterus and appendages.

Not long ago, I was consulted by a mother, whose daughter had not "been regular" for some time, though she had been treated by three good physicians consecutively for about twelve months. The girl had taken enough "emmenagogues" and other medicines to stock a small woman's hospital. She had been confined to her room for three months, and had grown so morose, so melancholy and so bashful that it was next to impossible to have an audience with her. I found her mother hyperindulgent, and a monomaniac on the subject of disease and medicines. Fortunately for the girl, at least, the mother was called away on account of the death of a sister. I advised the daughter to visit an aunt living a short distance in the country, which she did. Her surroundings were made as cheerful as possible, and she was kept out of doors a greater part of the time. Her mind

diverted to the changed surroundings, fruit, flowers, and other interesting country objects. The only medicine ordered was iron and manganese in combination (Pepto-Mangan, Gude) three times daily. After the first month, there was a noticeable improvement: and after three months with her aunt she was so entirely recovered and so well that she re-entered school, from which she had been absent for twelve months.

Why are the women today more prone to diseases of the genital tract, and to deficiency of lactation, both evidences of an inferior genetic power, than were their mothers and grandmothers, unless from some change in environment? I see in it evidence of defective pubescent nutrition, and trace it, in part at least, to the high pressure of modern life which today throws upon growing children new social duties, and even new physical labors, with constant diversion of energy into channels of immediate activity, which should be potentialized. An objection which will at once be raised is, that the gynæcologist is concerned with disorders of an infectious origin, and that the organisms which affect the adult could hardly be much affected by attention to their hosts during puberty and adolescence. Directly, certainly not, but the soil can be, and in the infectious disorders it is the soil or nutritive element—which is much more in need of study than the invading organisms themselves. The ideal life of the child is one in which she comes in contact from necessity and pleasure with all the things which go to make up the physical necessities and comforts of the common life.

It is the duty of the profession to teach their patients, and the parents of their patients especially, that they are to keep their bodies clean, and when clean, they will have clean functions to perform. It is as necessary for a young girl to menstruate as it is to breathe, and she should be educated to breathe properly, and also to menstruate properly. It can be done and it is false modesty not to teach her such things.

The girl at this period of her life, as I have viewed her from various standpoints, is one of the most interesting objects of study in human nature. She is earth's angel, poised upon the pedestal of innocence and virtue. She is the passion flower of youth, just budding out from the stems of infancy and child-

hood, enriched by the gentle showers and warming sunshine of maternal influence. If the flower wither in its growth or degenerate into an inferior species, it is due to the deteriorating effect of unwholesome environment. Nurtured in the balmy atmosphere of domesticity, and developing into the fulness of maturity under the ripening influence of American institutions, if it fall prematurely and lose its beauty and splendor, the florist having it in charge has failed to perform the functions of his office. If its petals be broken and its tender form bent so low as to kiss the earth from which it sprang, then its admirers have lost their interest and permitted rank weeds, and plants of coarser nature to crowd it out until its charms and fragrance are irrevocably lost.

To the noble women of our country, I would urge the adoption of prophylactic measures to preserve the youthful form and normal purity of your sex, ere the insidious moths of society carry their work of devastation beyond repair. Also to encircle the arm of sisterly charity around the slightly tarnished unfortunate, and cast her not, as some are wont, irrevocably into the pool of social leprosy.

To the educators of our girls, I would urge that you spare the girl just entering the pubescent period from the direful influence of mental over-taxation and excessive culture, which dazzles the brain, undermines the nervous system, and wrecks a life.

To the profession—the guardians of the physical, mental, and moral nature of mankind! Lend a helping hand and aid in solving this problem of transporting the girl through the stormy seas of puberty and adolescence to the ideal shores of true womanhood, where truth and virtue are twin sisters—the home of all the elements essential to the development of the purest type of motherhood.

To the woman's clubs of temperance and reform, I would urge that you guard the youthful maiden from the pestilential hand of unwholesome toil, that is indiscriminately sapping her physical strength to the detriment of her usefulness—unfitting her to perform the functions intended for her sex.

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