

AN  
INAUGURAL DISSERTATION

ON

*Menstruation*

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# Menstruation

The female, after she has attained to a certain age, is subject to a periodical sanguineous discharge from the genitalia, which has its source in the womb and is called variously the menses, menstrua, Catamenia, &c. and the function is called menstruation.

It is a physiological function peculiar to the human female.

It is common to all women in all countries, in all climates and in all conditions of society, from the most barbarous to the most highly civilized.

Its appearance denotes that the female is capable of being impregnated.

It is sometimes ushered in suddenly, but, for the most part, it is preceded by certain precursory signs.

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The young girl, having attained to a certain age and having the other usual marks or signs of puberty, finds herself the victim of lassitude and weariness, of weight and fulness in the lower part of ~~of~~ <sup>the</sup> abdomen, of pain in the lumbar and sacral regions and sometimes of various nervous disturbances.

These symptoms, having continued for a week, more or less, are followed by a discharge at first mucus, but soon becoming sanguineous and after continuing for a few days gradually disappears, becoming less sanguineous until it assumes the character of mucus and then ceases - this constitutes her first show or menstrual epoch.

Menstruation, having once occurred,

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returns very regularly, generally every twenty-eight day, or once every lunar month, for a period of thirty years, unless interrupted by pregnancy, lactation or disease. It is accompanied at each period by the same phenomena (less marked) which first ushered it in.

The age, at which the function of menstruation is set up, is about the fourteenth or fifteenth year, in this country.

The precise time, however, at which it appears, is subject to some variation, even within the limits of health. It frequently occurs as early as the twelfth, or thirteenth year. Indeed, instances of occurrence in infancy and childhood are recorded by good and reliable authority. These latter cases are very rare. On the <sup>other</sup> hand it may be postponed or retarded to the eighteenth, or, even to the twentieth year.

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Climate is said to exercise some influence upon this Discharge, both, with regard to the ~~time~~ time of its appearance and the quantity at each period. It is held that the warmer the climate, the earlier the Menstrua appears and the greater the quantity. But, perhaps, the customs prevalent in warm climates have more influence upon this function than the mere climate. Luxurious and indolent habits accelerate its appearance, while those of contrary habits retard it. The custom of early marriage will, also, hasten the appearance of the menses. So, also, I believe, will continued association with the opposite sex.

But having once become regular, Menstruation continues with great regularity until (unless interrupted by the causes before mentioned) the fortyfifth year, about which time it finally ceases and with it the aptitude to become fecundated.

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This period has been termed the critical time of woman's life, but it is now known that the female is not any <sup>more</sup> subject to disease at this time than she is for a few years immediately preceding or succeeding it.

The period of the cessation of the Catamenia is also subject to variation. Frequently it ceases much earlier and as often postpones a few years. The earlier a woman begins, ~~so~~ the earlier, as a general rule, she ceases and vice versa — her menstrual years being about thirty. The quantity of the discharge is different in different females. The average amount is from three to six ounces.

The discharge continues from three to eight days at each period. As before remarked, menstruation occurs once every twenty eight days. But the interval is, also, different in some women. Some have a show every two, or

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three weeks, while others, again, have a show every five, or six weeks. But whatever may be the length of the interval, the periods are regular when once established.

Thus we see that each female has a law of her own - i. e. she has a time to begin to menstruate, a time to cease. She observes a certain interval - throws off a certain amount at each period. The law of periodicity is general - it applies to all.

What is the efficient cause of menstruation?

This is a question, about which there has been much speculation among writers upon this subject. Some have ascribed it to lunar influence and others to general plethora. But, <sup>it</sup> is plain that the moon exercises no such influence; for if it did, then we should expect to find all females menstruating during some particular period of the moon, whereas we know that no such

Law obtains, but that some are just beginning  
- others ending their show throughout the whole  
month, so that there is no day, perhaps, in the  
which, there is not some female menstruating.  
It is equally plain that general plethora has  
no determining influence, since we see that  
some of the most delicate females perform  
this function with great regularity.

And, again, we know that venesection does  
not prevent the return of the menses, even  
though blood is abstracted in pretty free  
quantities a short time before the expected  
return.

The efficient cause of menstruation is  
inherent in the ovaries. This is confirmed  
by the fact, that the absence of the ovaries  
is in every case attended with the non  
appearance of the menses. All the other  
organs of generation may exist in the

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fullest perfection, yet if the ovaries are  
absent, there will be no menstruation.

This is proof indubitable in <sup>the</sup> nature enough  
to satisfy any mind capable of conviction.  
A short time before the appearance of the  
menses, the ovaries become the seat of an  
affluxion of blood, which affluxion is  
extended to all the reproductive organs,  
causing an engorgement, and of which  
engorgement the womb partakes largely, as  
is evinced by the increase weight, fullness  
and even pain in the hypogastric region,  
of which most women complain at this  
period. For the relief of this engorgement,  
nature has devised a means of depletion, viz;  
that of permitting the affluxed blood to  
escape on the internal surface of the womb.  
By this means the engorged organs are  
gradually and effectually relieved and

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allowed to resume their previous characters. It is believed and taught by many able writers that an ovum is thrown off at each menstrual period, and that menstruation is nothing more than the outward sign, that the physiological act of the maturation and discharge of an ovum, is performed or in the act of being performed. In proof of this ~~fact~~ theory, they assert that the examination of the ovaries of women, who died while menstruating or shortly after, has revealed ~~a~~ ovum either either already matured and discharged or as far advanced towards this condition. This is sufficient proof of the theory or fact, to my mind, provided, subsequent autopsies confirm those already made. I am inclined to this belief, notwithstanding high authority to the contrary— authority too, for which

I have the highest regard.

According to the above theory, we have a good reason, I think, for the engorgement of the reproductive organs; for when the Graffian vesicle comes to press against the tunics of the ovaries, a point of irritation is set up and according to the old maxim where there is irritation, there will be a flow of blood.

And, perhaps, it is owing to this source of irritation that bloodletting has so little influence in preventing the discharge making its appearance at the regular period.

It does not remove the irritation - hence the engorgement remains until relieved by local bleeding, or by menstruation.

This seems plausible to me. But it may not be worth much.

Is Menstruation a hemorrhage or secretion?

This is a question, about which there has been much discussion.

Some able writers contend that it is a secretion, while others, equally talented and of as great experience and observation, contend with the same tenacity that it is a hemorrhage.

The solution of this question depends upon the nature of the menstrual fluid. If it is blood there can be no doubt of its being a hemorrhage.

On the other hand if it differs from blood, in its constituent properties, then it is not a hemorrhage.

Recent analyses prove the menstrual fluid, as obtained directly from the internal surface of the womb without admixture with mucus, to be ~~and~~ identical in its component parts with blood, therefore

as blood is never secreted it must be a  
 hemorrhage, or, as some say an exhalation  
 or an elimination. But as these latter  
 terms are applied to processes, whereby certain  
 fluids are separated from the blood and  
 differing from it in its properties, I think  
 they <sup>are</sup> calculated to mislead the mind, and  
 therefore I prefer the term hemorrhage, as  
 it conveys with it the nature of the discharge.

Menstruation occurs vicariously sometimes  
 i. e. proceeds from other surfaces than that  
 of the womb, as from the ears, eyes, nose, &c.

The system during the flow of the menses  
 is more irritable and more easily impressed  
 by morbid causes than during the intervals;  
 hence exposure to cold and damp and too  
 great mental and corporeal agitation  
 should be scrupulously avoided.

Like all the other functions of the human organism, Menstruation is liable to many Derangements and serious Disorders, a knowledge of which ~~is~~ is of vast importance to the practitioner of Medicine.

Such is a brief and imperfect account of that physiological function of the female, the <sup>occurrence</sup> ~~appearance~~ of which, makes known to her the fact that she is capable of fulfilling that high and noble prerogative for which she was destined, that of propagating the human race  
I close with the wish, <sup>that</sup> this Thesis, imperfect as it is, may meet the approbation of a kind and talented faculty, the labors of which have been generously given to impart useful knowledge to those desirous of learning.