

CONTRIBUTED ARTICLES.

SPECIAL HYGIENE FOR WOMEN.

BY CHARLOTTE L. HOULTON, M.B., B.S. (LOND.).

THERE are certain periods in the life of women which, under normal circumstances, are purely physiological, but which may easily become, unless due care is taken, pathological and lead to much discomfort or even actual ill-health.

These critical times, of which I wish to speak this evening, are those known as Menstruation, Pregnancy and the Climacteric, or "Change of Life."

In the time at my disposal, it is impossible to discuss fully, all these subjects, but I will take each in turn, and give a few practical hints on its hygienic management.

Menstruation is a periodic hæmorrhage from the lining of the uterus, which usually first appears at puberty, and continues throughout the fertile period of life, *i.e.*, until the climacteric has been reached.

Each menstrual period lasts on an average four to five days, but many individual variations, both in the duration and the amount of hæmorrhage are met with; less than two or more than seven days, may be regarded as abnormal. No definite standard of amount can be applied, but for practical purposes, increase or diminution, from what is usual, in any given individual, is of more importance, than the actual quantity of blood lost. As a rule, menstrual blood does not clot, the formation of clots of large size, is only seen, when bleeding is excessive and should be looked upon as abnormal. The menstrual cycle averages about twenty-eight days, but here again variations are encountered; in many healthy women, it is twenty-one days only, in others, it may be five weeks. Departure from the rhythm, normal to the individual in question, is the more important point. The due and regular occurrence of this function is an indication of good bodily health. From the first onset, a year or two frequently elapses before the rhythmical character of the process becomes established. During this period, the intervals are usually prolonged, sometimes, however, the early periods come too frequently and are profuse and very painful Menstruation, though a natural process, is one which readily passes the borderline and becomes abnormal.

At Puberty, care is accordingly called for, until the menstrual function becomes properly established, and its rhythm defined. Especially to be avoided, under these circumstances, are overwork in school tasks, physical fatigue and exposure to wet or cold during a menstrual period. At the same time the girl should be taught that menstruation is a natural function and not a malady, that the natural and right thing is, for a girl to feel quite well during her period and to be free from pain and unpleasant sensations. If the conviction could be brought about, that menstruation is normally painless and that pain

or discomfort is an ailment, that should be treated and not suffered in silence, much avoidable suffering would be prevented. Our grandmother taught that inactivity should be the rule, during the first three days of the period. This teaching was quite wrong, as inactivity tends to increase the congestion of the pelvic organs and so leads to increase of discomfort. Exercise, sufficiently vigorous to promote a good general circulation of the blood, is the best permanent cure for pain and discomfort, due to this condition. It does not matter, if the exercise be in the form of work, either in the house or garden, or games, riding or walking. Exercises involving swaying movements and trunk bending are most efficacious. Cycling is not so good. In a recent enquiry I made, amongst medical students, I found them universally agreed, that active exercise during the period, especially during the first day, was the best means of avoiding pain and discomfort at this time. Of course, I do not suggest, that exercise is a cure for that severe type of spasmodic pain which completely incapacitates the unfortunate sufferer. Fortunately this type is comparatively rare and usually requires medicinal treatment.

Secondly, during the period, the ordinary rules of cleanliness should be observed, as at other times. There is no risk in the use of soap and water, in spite of the common prejudice against it. I believe, the notion that it is dangerous to wash below the neck at these times, is still prevalent. A warm bath should be taken every day throughout the period, as the immersion in hot water, will relieve, if it does not put a stop to any slight headache, or feeling of local discomfort. The only precaution necessary is to avoid getting chilled after the bath.

Finally, it is very important that there should be a daily action of the bowels, throughout the period and it is advisable, if there is any tendency to constipation, to take a mild aperient daily, two or three days before the expected period.

The next subject, about which I wish to speak is Pregnancy.

Pregnancy represents the highest function of the female reproductive system and should be considered a normal physiological process. But, when one realises the manifold changes which occur in the maternal organism, as a result of pregnancy, it is apparent, that the borderline between health and disease is less distinctly marked during gestation, than at other times and derangements, so slight as to be of but little consequence under ordinary circumstances, may readily give rise to conditions, which seriously threaten the life of the mother or the child or both.

It, therefore, is necessary that pregnant patients should be under medical supervision, during the whole period of pregnancy, so that, should adverse symptoms arise, they may be promptly treated.

A woman, especially in her first pregnancy, generally stands in need of a certain amount of reassurance, with regard to the dangers of parturition, and the knowledge that, she can appeal to a competent person for advice, when anything occurs to worry her, will contribute largely to her peace of mind, as well as to her physical well-being. A very usual custom, unfortunately, is

for her to appeal to women friends, in this time of doubt and anxiety. When one hears the tales of horror which are recounted to the expectant mother, by these sympathetic, if misguided ladies, one pities the poor woman, who still has her time of trial before her. My first advice, then, in the management of pregnancy, is to engage the services of an obstetrician, as early as possible, and to report to him, at once, should any adverse symptoms arise.

During pregnancy, very little change should be made in the former mode of living, provided a healthy normal life has been previously led. As much out-door exercise as possible should be taken. In individual cases, it is often difficult to specify the exact amount, but a safe rule is, to desist, while still feeling, that a little more could be done without weariness. Exercise should consist of walking or driving; riding and cycling are best avoided. Violent and fatiguing exercise should be refrained from, also anything likely to cause sudden joint strains *e.g.*, running downstairs or down a hill quickly. Tennis and similar games are not advisable. Special exercises are also necessary, to strengthen the abdominal muscles, as these muscles, if they are strong and well-developed help, during labour, to expel the child.

Müller's exercises are excellent, for this purpose. These exercises are described in Müller's book "My System for Ladies." The most important ones are (1) Breathing exercise, (2) Trunk raising, and (3) Trunk circling. They should be done slowly, for about ten minutes, twice a day. The *Diet* of the expectant mother, should be simple and nourishing. It should not be more abundant, than at other times, and meals ought not to be taken more than three or four times a day. Highly seasoned and indigestible articles of food must be abstained from. As a rule meat should be taken only once a day and water or barley water should be freely partaken of, in order to flush the kidneys effectively. Alcohol is best avoided, and tea and coffee should only be taken in moderation. Cravings for unusual articles of food, ought not to be gratified, as indulgence in them, will set up indigestion. Eating between meals is also very bad. During pregnancy, *constipation* is sometimes very troublesome. It is most important, that the bowels should be moved daily, as the waste products of both mother and child have to be got rid of. The use of strong purgatives, like Epsom Salts, etc., must be avoided, but any of the following aperients can be taken without harm:—Liq. Paraffin, one tablespoonful, once or twice a day, Conf. Senna, one teaspoonful o.n., Pil Cascara gr. ii, or Infusion of Senna pods.

Castor oil is not advisable, as a routine aperient, as it causes an increase of the constipation afterwards. By eating an abundance of fruit, vegetables, stewed figs, prunes, whole meal bread, drinking plenty of fluids and taking suitable exercise, in the majority of cases, this constipation can be prevented. The *Clothing* should be worn loose, and so arranged, as to exert, as little pressure as possible, upon the waist. In the later months of pregnancy, corsets should either be entirely dispensed with, or replaced by a suitable maternity belt. Suspenders should be used for the stockings and not garters, as there is a tendency to varicose veins.

The question of *Sexual intercourse* during pregnancy is important. In healthy persons, in moderation, it usually does no harm, but, if there is any tendency to miscarriage, it must be strictly forbidden. It should be abstained from altogether, during the last six weeks of pregnancy. I know of at least one case, in which puerperal fever followed, as a result of intercourse, just before labour.

The condition of the *breasts*, and more particularly the nipples, requires attention, as by appropriate preliminary treatment, nursing may be rendered easier and the occurrence of cracks and the consequent danger of inflammation of the breast, in great part, prevented. For this purpose, a little pure olive oil gently massaged into the nipples, once a day, after the bath, is most effective. During the first two or three months of pregnancy, *Morning Sickness* is frequently troublesome. It may often be prevented, by taking a cup of hot tea and dry toast, half an hour before rising. If there is more than the usual morning sickness, medical advice should be obtained without delay. *Heartburn and acidity*, sometimes, make the life of the expectant mother a burden. To prevent it, care should be taken, to eat at regular hours, to masticate the food well and to avoid drinking at meal times. Sometimes it is necessary, to refrain from sweets, tea and coffee, and to reduce the amount of starchy food. Half-a-teaspoonful of Bicarbonate of Soda in a wine-glass of warm water, will often give immediate relief.

Malaria seems especially liable to attack pregnant women, or possibly it gets a firmer hold upon them, because of the common superstition that Quinine should not be taken during gestation. This drug, in moderate doses, will not produce miscarriage, but, if its use is postponed too late, miscarriage will occur, as a result of the malaria present. The pregnant woman, therefore, should not hesitate to take Quinine at once, if the malady overtakes her. Quinine hydrobromide is a suitable preparation and five grains may be taken three or four times a day with impunity. *Salivation*, or great increase of the fluid secreted in the mouth is sometimes a troublesome, though not usually dangerous complication of pregnancy. As a rule it only lasts a few weeks and can be kept in check by frequently washing the mouth and gargling with an astringent mouth wash *e.g.*, glycerine of tannic acid, one ounce added to half-a-pint of water. In some cases the only treatment that avails is a strict milk diet.

Dental Caries and Toothache. Many women suffer during pregnancy from dental caries which may be associated with severe toothache. It is a popular belief that pregnancy predisposes to this condition, as is evidenced by the saying "For every child a tooth."

It is very necessary that a dentist should be consulted, as septic teeth may be a source of infection which may lead to child bed fever. There is much less risk in having a bad tooth extracted than in leaving it to poison the system.

The safest time to have a tooth removed is from the end of the fourth month to the seventh. In healthy women there is very little risk of miscarriage taking place during these months.

Varicose Veins are very frequent in the legs or about the external genitals, owing to the pressure of the pregnant uterus upon the veins returning from the thighs. When they occur in the legs, marked relief is often obtained by the use of firmly applied bandages or elastic stockings.

Diarrhoea must be treated with great care by the expectant mother, because of the danger that it may become chronic. It is often started by some indiscretion in diet and frequently is relieved by taking a dose of castor oil. It is wise to remain in bed until cured. The diet should be milk, mixed with lime water or soda water. If milk is not retained, albumen water or whey may be tried. The feeds should be small and taken every three hours. If the condition is not quickly relieved a doctor should be sent for.

Urinary troubles. In the early months of pregnancy, owing to the pressure of the enlarged womb, upon the bladder, urine is frequently passed and is not a sign that anything is wrong. If, however, there should be difficulty in passing urine during the third or fourth month, a doctor should be consulted, as it may be a sign that the womb is displaced backwards. The urine ought to be examined once a month during the first seven months and then once a week, until the end of pregnancy. The condition of the water will show, if the kidneys are doing their work properly.

Hæmorrhage. There should be no bleeding during pregnancy, as the monthly periods should cease from the time conception takes place, until the child is born. Occasionally for the first three months, there is a slight blood stained discharge at the time, when the period should have come in, but usually bleeding means a miscarriage is threatened. The patient must go to bed at once and send for a doctor.

Finally, if any of the following symptoms are present, medical advice must be sought, (1) Scanty Urine, (2) Persistent headache, (3) Disturbance of vision, (4) Swelling of the face or feet, (5) Loss of blood, (6) Persistent constipation, (7) Excessive vomiting, (8) Fainting or other nervous symptoms.

My last subject, the *Climacteric*, or "Change of Life," can only be briefly dealt with.

The Climacteric is that time, in a woman's life, when her sexual activities come to their natural termination. The most prominent symptom is the cessation of the menstrual flow, but the influence of this period of life, is not manifested by the sexual organs alone, but by the entire organism.

From ancient days down to the present time, a widespread belief has prevailed, that especial danger to a woman's life, is threatened, by the climacteric age, and this time is, even now, looked forward to, with great dread, by a large proportion of womankind. It cannot be denied, that the widespread changes which occur, tend to bring numerous dangerous influences into play, but undoubtedly these dangers have been greatly exaggerated.

The age at which the "change of life" occurs is a very variable one, but is most often between the ages of 45 and 50.

The *duration*, during which local and general disturbances are noted, also varies greatly, but the average length of time is from two to two-and-a-half years.

It must be borne in mind, that the cessation of the menstrual function, is only one of a whole group of symptoms which occur at this time. Of these, the commonest are flushings of the head and neck, accompanied by a sense of heat, and often followed by copious perspiration. Changes of temperament are frequent, evidenced by unusual nervousness, irritability and depression. Digestive disturbances, constipation of flatulence are common. In the majority of cases, there is also a tendency to the accumulation of fatty tissue, sometimes amounting to actual obesity. There is a common idea prevalent among the laity, that irregular bleeding is a constant symptom of the change. Undoubtedly hæmorrhage may occur at this time, in the entire absence of any disease of the womb, but it cannot be too strongly emphasized, that irregular bleeding at this time, very often is the only symptom of cancer of the womb and it is most urgent, that in all such cases patients should be examined internally by a doctor, without delay. Cancer is curable in the early stages, but hopeless in the later ones. It is most important, therefore, that this symptom which may be a danger signal of cancer, should never be neglected.

The Hygiene of the Menopause. The higher the standard of health and resistance with which a woman enters upon the "change," the better the chance of passing through it, with the minimum of discomfort. Certain hygienic factors are, therefore, of the utmost importance *viz.*, suitable diet, proper sleep, regular bathing, avoidance of constipation and especially of worry and anxiety of any sort. If these hygienic measures are carried out faithfully, much of the suffering of the woman, who is passing through this trying period will be mitigated.

The *Diet* should be mixed and very moderate in quantity, the amount of meat and fats especially being restricted. Cereals, green vegetables and fruit may be taken in moderation. Two or three pints of water, should be taken daily, alcoholic beverages of all kinds, ought to be avoided, also all indigestible, rich highly spiced food.

If there is any tendency to obesity, the amount of food must be further reduced, especially fat and starchy foods.

Regular and methodical bodily exercise is very necessary. Its good effects are shown in the improvement of the functional activity of all the organs, also, by increasing the amount of blood through the muscles, it diminishes the congestion of the brain and relieves other troublesome congestive symptoms which are liable to occur. Regular daily walks, Müller's exercises and massage are beneficial.

By means of baths, we are able to exert a stimulating influence upon the skin which helps to lessen the congestion of the womb, exercises a sedative influence upon the nervous system, which lessens the general irritability and also allays the cutaneous irritation and other skin troubles.

A daily warm bath at blood heat, lasting 15-20 minutes, taken immediately before retiring to rest, will often succeed in inducing both local and general repose, leading to quiet and restorative sleep. Especial attention must be paid to the care of the skin—it must be dried very carefully, irritating soaps

must be avoided and if there is extreme dryness of the skin, a lanolin ointment should be applied. Cleanliness of the external genital organs is most important, for neglect in this respect may lead to the onset of severe irritation—a most distressing complication after washing the genitals, either powder or ointment should be applied, the former, in cases in which the skin of the parts tends to be damp, from excessive secretion, and the latter in which the skin is dry and tends to crack.

Whilst regulating the physical side of the climacteric woman, the psychological must not be overlooked. A woman's mind is very powerfully affected, by the process of the change. Her fears are stimulated, by the thought that she is entering upon the "critical age" and she is mentally depressed by the knowledge, that she is about to lose, her feminine attractions and that her reproductive capacity is at an end. It is good, therefore, for women during the "change" to have some kind of employment which fills their time, occupies their thoughts, and above all, keeps them from brooding upon their ailments, real and imaginary. At the same time, the work should not be too strenuous, and most important of all, should not cause severe mental strain or worry.

The use of sedatives, alcohol, etc., is to be discouraged, for drug habits are readily acquired, under these conditions.

Lastly, I must impress upon you, once again, that bleeding at or after the climacteric, must, in all cases, be regarded, as an indication, of the possible occurrence of cancer, and expert medical advice must be sought without delay.

SIMLA, 16th October 1923.

THE CAVE OF AMAR NATH (LORD OF LIFE, IMMORTALITY).

By M. B.

One needs to be out in India to realize how much the thought of a holiday to the hills sustains through the trials of hot days succeeded by hot, oppressive nights. The Cave of Amar Nath, the home of the god Shiv, was the goal to which I looked for many months, through trying moments at work would flash across my mind phrases from the guide book "ascend steeply over a precipitous spur, then drop to the snow-bedded Amarwati stream"; or there'd come a vision of the map with its snow peaks and red dotted paths. But what of the realization of all these hopes? what lessons learnt?—what refreshment received?

Amar Nath is sacred to the Hindu; for thousands of years Sadhus and Hindus have walked the length and breadth of India on a pilgrimage to the cave in the month of August. I was told by the headman of our camp that two months before the appointed time the Maharaja of Kashmir sends 2,000 (?) coolies to make a path; juniper shrub is carried to the greater heights for fuel, light wooden bridges thrown across the swollen streams. The pilgrims (the official in charge of transport informed us that there were about 9,600 pilgrims this year) meet at Pahlgam, and the procession, led by the priests, winds its way in and out of the mountain sides up the East Lidder Valley,