

LIBRARY
ROYAL COLLEGE
OF PHYSICIANS
4653

ON CAUSES OF ILL HEALTH AMONG WOMEN.

BY MISS DR. A. E. TYNG,

*Member of the Rhode Island Medical Society, the Providence Medical Association,
the American Medical Association, the Gynecological Society of Boston,
and of the Alumnae Association of the Woman's Medical
College of Pennsylvania.*

Many of the causes of ill health among women having their origin in the fashions and customs of the day, are supposed to have but temporary effects, as may sometimes be the case, but even these may be inherited. The things which are truly only of the present, will change whether they are attacked or not; to get at and to prevent evils, we must work now for the next generation, looking upon each child as a future grandparent, and teaching it that it owes a duty to its posterity, and through them to the world, which they have the power to bless or to curse.

Each man and woman should consider the pre-natal influences of offspring, and endeavor to make these as perfect as possible, according to the best intelligence and information they have. The health of women during the child-bearing period, both the mental and moral, as well as the physical condition, their work and recreations, their surroundings and their thoughts are reproduced in their children, and while some attention is given to the so-called and much mis-called mother's marks, through frights and whims, which often only show the weak-mindedness and lack of self-discipline of that mother, little attention has been paid to their prevention, or to the good that might be wrought out by the well-trained mind and disciplined character of *both* parents.

Immediately after the birth of the child there begins a mismanagement which affects its health and longevity. Through ignorance and superstition, every hygienic law of food, clothing, bathing and sleeping is broken. Then when nature demands active exercise for growth and muscular development, repression is the only idea—the convenience of the adult considered of more importance than the well-being of the child. The primary public schools, presided over chiefly by young girls who have not themselves learned self-government, enforce repression and confinement to one position for a length of time difficult even for adults. Until puberty, the sexes are about equal mentally and physically, but at this time the idea of

repression shows itself more forcibly upon girls. The study of anatomy teaches of the growth and development of bones in the growing child. The pelvic bones, which have had several centres of ossification, begin to unite at about the thirteenth year, three bones joining into one. The sacrum also ossifies more perfectly, completing this process at about the twenty-fifth year. During these years, when the whole future health of the woman depends upon the perfectness and completeness of this pelvic development, and when girls should be allowed, therefore, the greatest freedom of muscular movement, *repression* is most enforced. She must not romp, must have quiet manners, must be shut up indoors, until her vital powers are reduced. When she does go out she must be dressed to form such a figure as is demanded by the ignorance of fashion. Long dresses, with the weight at the bottom furthest from the point of support, the weight and heat of which falls upon the growing pelvis with excessive and unequal pressure, change the natural gait. She must wear close-fitting if not too tight corsets, misnamed supports, which impede respiration, circulation, digestion, and the peristaltic action of the intestines, thus producing one of the chief causes of constipation, with all its recognized train of evils, so much more common among women than men; these weaken the power of the muscles which aid in child-birth; pads over the breasts impede their natural growth, and deprive them later of one of the privileges of maternity. No thought is given to preparing the body to facilitate future child-bearing. The spine is heated and distorted, and though women have and wear more clothes now than did those of the last century, they are ill protected just where most clothing is needed. Cold feet and a hot head is the general condition: the feet and limbs are not warmly dressed, while the head is heated by false hair and by wearing the bonnet indoors. Much has been said on dress, and efforts made at reform so far as underclothing is concerned, yet even our wealthiest women, who have least excuse, are insufficiently clad. Efforts in this direction have had some effect in regard to the size of the waist, but there is still too much compression.

The excitements of social life are greater in this country than in Europe, and girls are allowed them at an earlier age; the late hours and insufficient sleep during the hours authorized by nature, all tend to induce early and excessive menstruation, to disturb the nervous system, and to derange the function of every organ, making us notorious among nations as a people of nervous temperaments and more subject to nervous diseases. It is not merely going to places of amusement and excitement, as concerts, theatres, halls, etc., but the too early participation in them themselves, and in exhibitions of all kinds. Our public schools set a bad example in this respect.

Fictitious literature gives girls romantic and unreal ideas as to marriage and domestic life; later, when they come to find the reality different, they grow to hate these cares and become restless for excitement, "Si votre fille lit des romans a dix ans elle aura des vapeurs a vingt." Among the poorer

classes hard work is begun at this time of life, combined with ill-ventilated homes, especially sleeping apartments, and such food as does not help in the healthy development of bone. Among the wealthier classes, indulgences in too rich and overstimulating food develop those national diseases, dyspepsia and catarrh. Dyspepsia was entailed upon us by our grandparents, with their salt pork and fried meats eaten by them even through the summer season; now we are passing it on to the next generation by our pies, doughnuts, and highly-seasoned food; even our school-girls must have sweet-meats, cakes, and pickles. Out-door pursuits and games calculated to create muscular power, are discouraged because they do not accord with the general idea that an appearance of delicacy in form and complexion is more suitable for women. Here, also, we present a contrast to European women. The imperfectly performed light gymnastics drearily gone through with in our schools, are supposed to be sufficient to develop all the muscular power needed. One might as well teach children to play and laugh by rule, so far as any real development of muscle or mental relaxation is obtained. A more healthy performance of natural functions would promote efforts for the prevention of disease, and secure more regularly established menstruation with more ease in its performance. "As the importance and relative value of a living being may be estimated by the time it takes to attain perfection, I may reasonably infer that the longer the reproductive apparatus lays dormant in women, the stronger will be their constitution; the more harmoniously will its functions be performed, and the more favorable will be the influence of this apparatus on the whole system."* Owing to the various excitements and stimulations above mentioned, first, menstruation occurs early in this country, and earliest among the higher classes than in the poorer. Unfortunately ignorant of these conditions, many mothers adopt a forcing system of medicines, baths, etc., often thereby destroying good health; while others allow girls to grow up in ignorance of this coming change, and when taken by surprise, the shock, the fright leads them into imprudences which result in hysteria. Many diseases are thus traced to the bad management of girls at puberty. "The effects of a badly passed puberty are seen in over excitable circulation, excessive nervous susceptibility, dysmenorrhœa, sterility."† * * * becoming at last victims of consumption or other disorders of which the foundation had been laid in an improperly conducted physical and moral education.‡"

Physiology is taught only in the high schools, which a large portion of the future mothers never reach, and there it is taught only partially, with much positively needful for the youth to know, carefully culled out. They are thus left to learn, and continue to hand down to posterity, through the ignorance and superstition of servants, or from the vulgar among their asso-

*"Preservation of the Health of Women," E. J. Tilt, M. D., England.

†"Diseases of Women," C. D. Meigs, M. D.; Philadelphia.

ciates, and from the obscene literature which is being thrown broad-cast among our schools, what they should learn only of parents, or of teachers capable of making them respect the highest functions of human nature. If the half-time system, which has worked so well in England and Germany, could be introduced into our public schools, at least in the primary and intermediate grades, and the remainder of the time applied to systematic training in industrial work for and by both sexes, the working classes of our population would be better prepared for self support; have a more healthy physical development, and become better citizens.

The graduates from our high schools are crowded with studies which they have no use for in private life, and which they soon forget, because crammed only to get their averages and percentages of rank, to obtain a diploma, that being the highest and often the only goal and without which they will not easily get situations as teachers, and they are fitted for no other career. They cannot all be teachers, the supply is greater than the demand, meanwhile other fields are waiting for laborers.

I place ignorance among the chief causes of evils, although I am frequently met with the argument that women have had time and opportunity to learn differently. Time is not so much needed as encouragement, or rather the *cessation of discouragement*. Women often see evils before them, know that they are evils which could be and should be remedied, but do not know how to remedy them. Complaints are met with the argument that duty lies in making the best of and being satisfied with what is. It may be suggested here that one remedy lies in the dissemination of *proper* knowledge by authoritative bodies, such as the Boards of Health in the various states. I say 'proper,' because there is so much of worse than useless trash learned through almanacs, newspapers, and the advertisements of empirics so often circulated even in the streets.

Women have generally been taught that they are to marry, to be mothers and housekeepers. They have not been taught how to make marriage beautiful, and neither sex is taught the value of cultivating within themselves a power of adaptation to the other's character, and when the fruit of an inharmonious marriage is nervous and ill-tempered, the blame is laid upon Providence instead of where it rightly belongs, on the want of knowledge of the laws which that Providence made and meant should regulate marriage and procreation. But it is not only with the inharmonious marriages; in the best marriages there exists an ignorance of child-bearing and its results; a forgetfulness that *motherhood* is the *crowning glory of womanhood*, and as a consequence of this forgetfulness an infinity of methods for the prevention of conception, not necessary to refer to more directly; for those who are ignorant of these are blessed and rewarded in their ignorance,—for those who do use them there is always the punishment which nature awards to her broken laws. I have frequently given my opinion for years past that this prevention of conception leads to a large part of the diseases peculiar to women. Poor little Pip, in "Great Expectations,"

spoke as the representative of a numerous class when he said, "I was always treated as if I had insisted on being born in opposition to the dictates of reason, religion and morality, and against the dissuading arguments of my best friends."

I quote from an address by Prof. Maudsley, of University College, London, the following, because I want these views more widely known and meditated upon: "Take notice how little people ever think of the power which they have over their own destiny, and over the destiny of those who spring from them! How amazingly reckless they show themselves in this respect! They have continually before their eyes the fact that by care and attention the most important modifications may be produced in the constitution and character of the animals over which they have dominion; that by selective breeding an animal may almost be transformed in the course of generations; they perceive the striking contrast between the low savage, with whom they shrink almost from confessing kinship, and the best specimens of civilized culture, and know well that such as he is now such were their ancestors once; they may easily, if they will, discover examples which show that by ill living people may degenerate until they revert to a degraded state of barbarism, disclosing their former greatness only in the magnitude of their moral ruins, and yet seeing these things they never seriously take account of them and apply to themselves the lessons which lie on the surface. They behave in relation to the occult laws which govern human evolution very much as primeval savages behaved in relation to the laws of physical nature, of which they were entirely ignorant,—are content with superstitions where they should strive to get understanding and to exert intelligent will. They act altogether as if the responsibility for human progress upon earth belonged entirely to higher powers, and not at all to themselves. How much keener sense of responsibility and stronger sentiment of duty they would have if they only conceived vividly the eternity of action, good or ill; if they realized that under the reign of law on earth sin and error are inexorably avenged, as virtue is vindicated, in its consequences; if they could be brought to feel heartily that they are actually determining by their conduct in *their* generation what shall be pre-determined in the constitution of the generation after them! For assuredly the circumstances of one generation make much of the fate of the next." Thus it is that people pay no regard in marriage to the evils which they bring upon their children, or in their lives to the sins by which the curse of a bad inheritance is visited upon them, and neglect to apply knowledge to the improvement of the race. When through more enlightened education, parental responsibility shall be placed on higher grounds, not only disease but crimes will diminish, and in time we may "produce, if not a higher species of beings than we are, a race of beings, at any rate as superior to us as we are superior to our primeval ancestors."* Too much

* Maudsley.

cannot be said on the subject of heredity until it is believed, understood and acted upon, for we have only just entered upon research in this direction. As there cannot be good wine without fermentation, so every new movement has its opposers to raise discussion, and thus "agitation of thought is the beginning of wisdom." The objection has been raised that the belief in heredity is used too frequently as an excuse for various wrong doings and criminalities. This, so far as true, is not because the laws of heredity are too well believed and understood, but rather the contrary; and that there is a neglect of their proper application, and these cases seem to illustrate that the inheritance was not recognized early enough in the individual and care taken to eradicate it, or to stimulate the power and duty of self-control, and such qualities of mind and body as tend to oppose the natural bias. By such care one of the most fruitful sources of disease and crime may be diminished, for many things harmful to health and character, sound body and sound mind, are under human control. "When deviations or violations of the normal standard of physiology, perfect in structure and healthy in function, are continued through two or three generations, their effects become more marked and intensified. As all these changes are brought about by human agency, the remedy is lodged in the same hands."* "So to observe nature as to learn her laws and to obey them, is to observe the commandments of the Lord to do them."†

As to housework, with all its monotony of routine, its confinement, often to ill-ventilated rooms, its constant wearying muscular movements, its long hours of work, its lack of change of thought and scene, and not one of these conditions changed even during the periods of child-bearing; what wonder that women break down and wear out? What other fate could be predicted for them? These influences cannot be salutary either to bodily or mental health. Here, also, ignorance plays a large part. Many persons who consider themselves good cooks would be astonished to be accused of being the cause of indigestion, of diseases of the skin, of the blood, of the nerves, etc., etc., in their families. There is now a movement at work in several of our large cities for the training of cooks. There are cooking clubs of ladies in training, not for servants, but for their own improvement. These schools are not for the teaching of making doughnuts, pastry, and such already too common mixtures and compounds, but to teach healthful cooking and chemistry, and such principles of physiology that in the generation to come we shall know what materials should be eaten by each individual for the necessities of his or her harmonious and equable growth and development. Such training schools should be encouraged by the whole community; also for teaching the preparation of proper nourishment for the sick, to take the place of the wretched slops now too frequently used. Also training for other kinds of house-work, that by more orderly method

* Dr. N. Allen. "The prevention of Disease, Insanity, Crime and Pauperism,"

† Maudsley.

time and steps and backaches may be saved. Much that is valuable has been said and written by practical women on the organization of household labor. When these ideas meet with more understanding and encouragement, so that they can be acted upon, we shall see fewer worn-out women, consequently healthier ones, and healthier offspring.

However good the training, it cannot be properly carried out until there is more improvement in the building and arrangement of houses, and for this we need women architects, who will best know the necessities of women in this respect. There are in this city thousands of bed-rooms which cannot be ventilated thoroughly, which are not properly lighted, where work of any kind cannot be done to the best advantage, and which are choked by the fumes of tobacco and sink-drains, and the odors and smoke of cooking. Many an over-worked woman into whose life few bright hours ever come, has thought seriously, deeply, broadly on these subjects, but feels helpless to change anything. She has no time to study, scarcely time to converse with others, and in the attempt to draw her out to take part in some fresher, newer ideas and actions, one feels that so long as the daily life is a perpetual struggle for existence, efforts to rouse the mind to other considerations seem unavailing. While speaking of cooking, I cannot forbear quoting a few sentences from an interesting and ably written paper by Mary G. Ware, for the Woman's Education Association, on "Prevention of Crime among Women." "Foul air nauseating the stomach, bad cooking irritating it, insufficient food exhausting it, want of sufficient clothes and fuel chilling the circulation, each or perhaps all together, stimulate the appetite for some kind of intoxicating drink." "Another efficient influence would be schools where women could be taught to cook in such a way that the family table should be a comfort and satisfaction. The dissatisfaction of the stomach which follows the eating of badly cooked food produces a desire for intoxicating drinks, so that the good cook promotes not only health, but morality." "The opening of diet kitchens in several cities is a movement in the right direction," where regulated so as to not to encourage idleness and pauperism, "for the prevention of intemperance by the suppression of its causes." With the brain clogged by foul blood because the lungs are clogged by foul air, how can we expect high or even intelligent moral action? How much do the higher classes do to prevent, how much to encourage these evils? It has been said that it is easy to be a good christian for one who has a sound spine and a sound stomach, so it is easier for one with bodily wants well supplied to resist the temptations of liquor and to refrain from crime.

In addition to cooking schools, there is needed instruction on the importance of well ventilated and clean houses, and especially among the poorer classes, of the necessity for the removal of all *effete* matters, and of the need of a good blood and bone making diet, in place of the half-starving diet of bread and tea, which unfortunately has made its way among our

working classes of all sorts, but especially of sewing women, as the popular diet. It is not wholly, if at all, a question of means to obtain better food, for tea is not cheap, but to the ignorance of cooking and of what is suitable and wholesome for them.

A cause of ill health among the women who work in mills, besides those included in what has already been said, are injuries to the digestion and the nerves, by the habit of tobacco "dipping," not confined to the South, but practiced largely in this state; these women also suffer from over-heated air, whether dry or laden with moisture; in cotton mills by dust from the carding process, (less since the modern improvements than it was a few years ago.) Among shop-girls there is confinement in over-crowded, badly ventilated shops, deficient sunlight and out-door exercise, air exhausted by gas and heated over repeatedly; by so much standing, infrequent and irregular meals. After standing several hours, exhausted and needing good food, they are allowed often too short an interval at mid-day, that there is not time to go to their cheap boarding place or home, and being too poorly paid to afford a meal at a restaurant, they only too soon learn what affords the most stimulus for the least money. Said an older shop-girl to one recently from the country, "Don't waste your money on pie, get a glass of gin, it's cheaper." Those who do not reach this degradation, partake inordinately of tea or patent tonic medicines. "If the temperament be nervous and the work mental, there is much more danger from the use of stimulants than when the avocations are manual."* "As a rule people are underfed. This is especially true of women. The tone of the system is thus lowered and local congestions of different parts of the body are produced."† Diseases of the digestive organs, consumption and uterine irregularities prevail with this class of women.

The wealthier classes do not escape disease because of not being obliged to work. "In a discourse upon the consequences of employments, the case of the unemployed has really no place; yet this negative condition of doing nothing has its consequences, and very serious ones too, in connection with the health of its possessors. The lack of definite occupation, or of occupation satisfying the mind and conscience, and which is fraught with blessing, is especially the misfortune of women, more particularly so in the case of unmarried women in so-called 'easy circumstances.' Among them may be seen the bad consequences of a purposeless, useless, selfish existence. What a lamentable array of disorders is their lot! a group of nervous ailments largely associated with the ill defined and ill understood condition called hysteria. "It is a praiseworthy feature of the present day that great endeavors are made to find employment for women to enlarge the bounds of pursuits calculated to arouse their interest, and to foster physical exertion."‡ "In young women with-

* Rachel B. Gleason, M. D. † Wm. A. Hammond, M. D. ‡ Address of Dr. J. T. Arlidge, before the British Medical Association, 1878.

out useful occupation, the moral nature becomes perverted in addition to derangement of bodily health. The mothers's sympathies too often only foster the morbid proclivities by insisting on the delicacy of constitution and the necessity of various artificial methods for restoration. Such a girl is not the victim of high pressure or mental strain in her own person, but she may inherit a susceptible brain from an over-worked parent. The remedy is work, not rest; occupation, not idleness; a luxurious life is her curse. Insanity as well as hysteria is developed by such a mode of existence. Life must have an aim, although to achieve it there ought not to be prolonged worry.* "Skilled industry of the hands makes the brain more orderly in action. The child taught to use the hands skillfully is more apt to become an industrious citizen, and the habit of industry is the basis of orderly life."†

Of causes directly affecting mental health, in addition to those already mentioned, among the working classes there is *worry* from small wages, and intensity of anxiety night and day, causing sleeplessness. This also extends to all classes of women; the married from never having any sum or purse of their own, and consequently the utter misery that cannot be conveyed to the comprehension of the other sex; the ingenuity to make ends meet, the contrivances to avoid asking, especially when the need of economy is pressing upon them, even where the husband is generous and kind; all these, where the strain has been long continued, the same set of ideas maintained in exhausting recurrence, the same part of the brain is kept continuously at work, and a weakness results which may end in insanity.

It is said that insanity is on the increase, especially among the ignorant classes, and that only ten per cent. of these are cured. If this be correct, it is necessary that its causes should be searched for, and something done for its prevention. It is not an exclusively nervous disease, but may and does originate in deterioration of the body through intemperance, dissipation in all its forms, over-work, mental and physical, insufficient food, lack of ventilation, and neglect of moral culture. All these factors apply to both sexes, but bear more severely upon women, who have, in addition to their greater nervous susceptibility, the care and anxiety of children, menstrual irregularities, miscarriages and the consequent diseases of the pelvic organs. Absence of rational employment of the mental powers leads to indulgences in vices, drinking, etc., especially favorable to insanity, in addition to the inheritance from parents who indulged in like habits, for "by free indulgence in stimulants and in tobacco, the parents debilitate their own constitutions and transmit feeble ones to their children."‡ A superintendent of one of our New England Hospitals for the Insane has said that "the dissemination of more correct views of the true way of living, and a more rigid observance of the laws of health and nature,

* "Insanity and its Prevention," D. H. Tuke. † Mary J. Ware. ‡ Tuke.

would greatly diminish insanity." The Commissioners in Lunacy in Scotland, in a recent report said, that "Insanity is, to a large extent, a preventable malady; that it is always attended with some bodily defect or disorder, of which it may be regarded as one of the expressions or symptoms; preventable diseases will be diminished in amount when education is so conducted as to render the people both intelligent and dutiful guardians of their own physical, intellectual and moral health." "A study of the relation between modern life and insanity shows that it is of a many sided and complex character; that a large amount is preventable; that beer and gin, mal-nutrition, a dreary monotony of life, muscular exhaustion, domestic distress, misery, poverty and anxiety, account largely not only for the number of poor who become insane in adult life, but who from hereditary predisposition are born weak-minded, or actually idiotic."* "Insanity in women rarely takes place without the concurrence of both physical and moral causes."† Physicians have known for a long time that much insanity results from ignorance of the laws of life and health, or a disregard of them, and that it might be prevented by an avoidance of such habits as exhaust nervous power, but the community in general do not know this, and should be instructed. It is also well known to physicians that there are abnormal mental changes in women suffering from various diseases peculiar to their sex, and chief among the causes of these should be placed forced abortions.

To the increase of this evil, attention was called by Dr. D. H. Storer, in 1855, then Professor of Obstetrics at Harvard, in his public address introductory to the annual lectures. In 1857, the American Medical Association appointed a committee to report upon criminal abortion with a view to its general suppression, with Dr. H. R. Storer as its chairman; and in the volume of its transactions for 1858 will be found a series of resolutions by which the Association present the subject to the attention of the several legislative bodies of the Union, desiring that the laws on this subject may be revised. In 1860, Dr. H. R. Storer, published a volume entitled, "Criminal abortion in America," in which he set forth the evils resulting, its increase in this country more than abroad, and the weakness of the laws in those States in which there were any laws. At that time Rhode Island had no statute, and here, as in some other States, in the absence of special statute, the crime could only be reached at common law, and this only if the death of the woman occurred; no thought being taken for the death of the child, or of the ill health of the woman for the remainder of her life. Thus, in States where a definite statute does exist, it is practically useless, and is often evaded because legislators and the public fail to recognize the true character of the crime, as, for instance, here in Rhode Island the statute passed in 1872 takes cognizance of the murder of the child, or if the mother die in consequence of the drugs or local injuries done to her, the penalty

* Tuke. † "Insanity in Women." Dr H. R. Storer.

is imprisonment for a term varying from five to twenty years. "How inconsistent to punish by hanging, murder, attempted or committed, if by injury to the throat or heart, capitally, and if by injury to the womb, by only temporary imprisonment, especially where this latter case always necessitates the slaughter of a second human victim."* The R. I. statute says, whoso "shall aid, assist or counsel any person so intending to procure a miscarriage, shall incur the same penalties as the principal." What a change might soon be effected if these words could be carried forcibly into every household! not a day passes but they would apply to some one. The ignorance as regards the guilt, and the morale of the community on this subject, are so perfectly appalling, that the boasting of repeated and successful accomplishments passes unreprieved; and the press, such a power in the land, that if it choose, it alone could almost annihilate the crime, apparently openly encourages it, by the advertisements of quack doctors, of medicines and even of so-called private hospitals, where the secrets of the victims may be buried with their mortal remains. In 1866, Dr. Storer wrote an essay entitled, "Why not?" to which the American Medical Association awarded a prize with an order for its general circulation. This book should be read by every woman and every man. Aside from all which a law, however wise or however strictly enforced could reach, are the cases which occur in private, through the ignorance of the laws of life and health, ignorance of her own anatomy, of her duties to herself, her child, the community, and to her maker, cases known only to woman herself.

An erroneous idea prevails that in the early months of pregnancy there is no sin, and little danger to the woman's life in producing an abortion. This is the reverse of the truth; for the earlier its occurrence in pregnancy as a general rule, the greater is the danger to life or to subsequent health, the greater the physical shock, the liability to hemorrhage, the liability to subsequent uterine disease, even to the much dreaded cancer, the active symptoms of which may be delayed until the climacteric,—the liability to repetition from habit, or the production of sterility, bringing oftentimes disappointment when afterward children are desired. Those who do not look deeply into these causes and effects, say that women are less fruitful now than formerly, and wonder why it is so. The answer is, because they will not let themselves be so. But women are not alone to be blamed for this crying sin of the day; they have also to bear a mental suffering from the discontent of the father, far more acute than that from the fear of, or care for the personal pain and discomfort, often amounting to the temporary insanity of despair, and therefore are driven, as it were, to abortion as the only relief, and often encouraged thereto. Interference with the laws of nature is always productive of disease, and this sin is confined to no class of persons; it prevails among the married and educated, even more

* "Criminal Abortion in America," Storer.

than among the ignorant, the poor, the unmarried. The latter might be supposed to have an excuse, if an excuse for a crime could ever be offered. The same argument applies here as was used by Dr. Gerrish,* in speaking of the social evil, "the chief of these causes is ignorance. That while a lack of ordinary information and learning is conducive to depravity, it is an ignorance of the laws of our being which is chiefly responsible for the mischief; that the proper and competent teaching of physiology and hygiene to the young would result in such improvement of morals that, in time, prostitution would largely disappear for want of support and patronage."

"The limited number of occupations to which women are admitted; their less pay than men for equal work; the obstacles thrown in the way of their learning those kinds of business most desirable for them—these stand as deep and shameful blots on our social system. As the first step in the right direction, we should have the study of physiology, and hygiene taught in our schools. To this public instruction of physiology, objection has been made that it should be left to the private judgment or tact of individual parents, and to this I reply that it cannot be, for the parents themselves are too ignorant as I have seen in several instances, and also the terrible results of such ignorance. Parents should be able to teach their children early in life, the wisdom of subjugating appetites to morality, and to cultivate a regard for the rights of others.

That so many women should have no definite occupation throughout the best years of their lives; no aim or purpose; their faculties and talents unexercised or lost, are evils which are fruitful causes of unhappiness and ill-health, the effect of which is to be seen in society, and is not felt by women alone. "Statistics show that the evil diminishes as means of employment are open to women," and in those cities where most employments are open to them the lowest proportion of those who lead an abandoned life is found. Every endeavor which is made to open new fields of labor to women is a direct blow to this social evil. The moral elevation of women of the lower classes implies and involves the men also; they must rise or fall together." Girls should be taught useful industry and skilled handiwork to save them from ill-health and crime; to prevent them from becoming a burden to themselves, their parents, husbands, and at last upon the charities of the community and the state. Another cause of this social evil is strong drink, in both sexes—stimulants appear to be necessary to keep up the strength for the life of excitement. The prohibitory law of Maine closed many houses of prostitution; this should be a clew to the management of this evil. They could not keep up this life under the prohibitory law, and therefore many were driven from that State, and for some years past, in my efforts to work among them, I had observed, before I found the cause, that many came from that Maine.

*Prof. Mat. Med. Bowdoin. Address before Maine Medical Association, October, 1878.

As to the causes of the diseases peculiar to women, the immediate and direct are to be sought in each case; the predisposing causes which are avoidable, and are incurred from ignorance and a disregard of the laws of health, are thus enumerated by one of the latest authorities:*

- “ Neglect of out-door exercise.
- Excessive development of the nervous system.
- Improprieties of dress.
- Imprudence during menstruation.
- Imprudence after parturition.
- Prevention of conception.
- Induction of abortion.
- Marriage with existing uterine disease.”

To these should be added, Marriage with existing disease in the other sex. This list serves as a recapitulation of the chief topics of this paper. “ No one will doubt the conclusion, that if in cold weather the feet, legs and abdomen of civilized women were clad in some woollen material; if they understood the necessity of caution during the period of menstruation and after labor; if they allowed the uterus to hold its proper place in the pelvis, uninterfered with by pressure; if they kept the sanguineous and nervous systems in their normal state of vigor by exercise, fresh air, and plenty of good food, and at the same time avoid any habits which directly produce disease by injuring the genital organs, (including the breasts), much, very much less of uterine and kindred disorders would be seen by the physician. All these reforms would probably bring forth results in one generation, but it would require many generations of reformers to restore woman to her proper physical sphere.”† Before much result can be obtained in the physical improvement of women, a change of tone in public opinion is needed. Delicacy must not be confounded with refinement, or thinness and paleness admired for beauty, rather than a comely shape, well rounded by the full development of muscle and a due proportion of fat. Sickness should be considered as allied to sin—the sin of breaking the divine laws of nature; a person should be as much ashamed of avoidable sickness as of falsehood and stealing. When women can be made to appreciate these things, and to believe that whatever interferes with the full and proper exercise of any function is likely to produce irregularity in its performance, and eventually organic disease, then will they cease to be invalids and sufferers. “ If we compare the present state of women in refined society over the world with that of the working peasants of the same latitudes, or with the North American squaws, or the powerful negresses of the Southern States, we can with difficulty believe that they all sprung from the same parent stem, and originally possessed the same physical capacities. Observation proves that women who are not exposed to depreciating in-

* Dr. T. G. Thomas, of N. Y.

† Dr. T. G. Thomas, of N. Y.

fluences can compete in strength and endurance with the men of their races, and in savage countries they are sometimes regarded as superior to them."* These remarks apply to animals, the female is as strong as the male.

Knowledge of the causes of disease ought to help in the prevention, but does it? And why does it not, but because ignorance and selfishness rule both men and women, and women have in the past been taught that they must do nothing to help themselves. Now that they begin to realize that the regeneration of the world must come through them, they are aroused to form various clubs and associations for study and for practical efforts in all questions affecting the moral and physical condition of women, the effects of which will be seen clearly in the next generation.

I have here expressed my belief that *ignorance* is the first chief cause, at the foundation of all causes, and that therefore the responsibility should be taken up earnestly by those who have charge of public education and public health. It also concerns legislators who have to deal with questions of laws for crimes, to which ill health leads in either sex, to look more deeply into the preventable causes. My work will not have been ill done if any word herein shall elicit food for thought and action by and for women, for the improvement of the physical condition of the race.

* Dr. Thomas.