

EDITORIAL.

MALE CIRCUMCISION IN ITS RELATION TO GYNÆCOLOGY.

While we work unceasingly to cure disease by discovering and attacking its *immediate* cause, while our literature teems with earnest suggestions in regard to *immediate* prophylaxis, it still is comparatively few, (and these are found rather in the ranks of philosophers than of physicians), who seriously consider those *mediate* and ethical causes which make many forms of disease a logical sequence. We occasionally hear of the ignorant short-sightedness of our grandmothers and great-grandmothers in the matter of tight lacing, insufficient under-clothing and lack of general hygiene, but how often do we hear of the habits of life and ethical surroundings of their husbands and sons as a factor in the condition of gynæcological disease to-day? Very clearly do we appreciate how unjust to the health of woman are the demands of modern social life, and very general are the efforts made to make women heed this fact. We must not, however, overlook the other fact that the man's physical condition plays an important part in the causation of woman's disabilities and that any means by which this evil influence can be lessened is at once a prophylactic measure in Gynæcology. Such a measure, if it came into general use, we believe *circumcision* would be.

The great Covenant which God made with His Chosen People, by the terms of which the prepuce of every male child must be circumcised, was no mere arbitrary ruling nor childish mystery. The more we read the history of the primitive Jewish people in the Old Testament the more impressed must we become with the Wisdom which guided them in their ignorance and safe-guarded them by mysterious and stringent laws, which alone could have restrained and saved an unthinking, fickle, and passionate race as were the ancestors of the Jews. In this very matter of the rite of circumcision, which to them was only a divinely ordained mark of their superiority to all other nations, we can now see in the light of modern knowledge a Providential means for the preservation of a race. Among the great nations of antiquity, which surrounded them, every species of sensuality was freely indulged in and many forms of venereal disease were universally prevalent. It is known beyond peradventure that gonorrhœa and bubo, chancroid and, probably, syphilis were almost as general then in the East as they are with us to-day. Among the Jews, whose constant tendency was to amalgamate with the surrounding Gentiles, in spite of race prejudice and stringent laws, the fact that every male had been circumcised in infancy was a most potent factor in saving them from wide-spread venereal disease and the consequent deterioration and decimation, which befell their more cultivated and luxurious neighbors. In hot climates, among a rude and agricultural folk, cleanliness has never been a distinguishing trait, and the early exposure of the glans penis hardened that member and saved them from the results of unwise sexual exposure, as well as from the effects of retained smegma with its train of evils, such as balinitis, urethritis, abrasions, and a thin and sensitive mucous membrane; all of which would otherwise have been incidental to their manner of life and are most favorable conditions for more serious venereal invasion. It is a recognized fact that mucous membrane when long and constantly exposed to the air partakes almost of the nature of true skin in its toughness and ability to resist injury. This fact is also recognized by all civilized nations of the East to-day, except Christians, for circumcision is of universal application among them.

Although our remarks so far have been largely of an archaeological nature, the application of our observations lies not in the gynæcology of the primitive Jews but in that of our own day. Venereal disease is far more common now than in the past, because communication among peoples is easy, poverty and luxury are greater, thorough

cleanliness, except among the few, in no greater favor, and vice as prevalent. The wretchedness of married women from the effects of gonorrhœa contracted from their husbands is a shame to manhood and a disgrace to medical knowledge. To say nothing of the innumerable lives sacrificed by Tait's and kindred operations for purulent salpingitis, of the many cases of peritonitis and of pelvic abscess equally traceable to this origin who have died without operation, we need only consider the suffering entailed by long-endured pelvic peritonitis, vaginitis, cystitis, and inflammation of the vulvo-vaginal glands, constantly relighted by marital intercourse, to realize fully the widespread results of gonorrhœa in man.

Accepting human nature as it is, then, why do we not more strenuously endeavor to anticipate the serious effects of man's acts where they entail physical punishment? If we cannot eradicate uncleanness and gonorrhœa, can we not do something to minimize the effect of the former and to lessen man's chances of contagion? Does not circumcision meet fully these indications? Have not physicians a grave responsibility in this matter and should they not urge upon parents the importance of male circumcision?