

CHAPTER XLII
OF COSTIVENESS.

WE do not here mean to treat of those astrictions of the bowels which are the symptoms of diseases, as of the colic, the iliac passion, &c., but only to take notice of that infrequency of stools which sometimes happens, and which in some particular constitutions may occasion diseases.

Costiveness may proceed from an excessive heat of the liver; drinking rough red wines or other astringent liquors; too much exercise, especially on horseback. It may likewise proceed from a long use of cold insipid food, which does not sufficiently stimulate the intestines. Sometimes it is owing to the bile not descending to the intestines, as in the jaundice; and at other times it proceeds from diseases of the intestines themselves, as a palsy, spasms, tumors, a cold dry state of the intestines, &c.

Excessive costiveness is apt to occasion pains of the head, vomiting, colics, &c. It is peculiarly hurtful to hypochondriac and hysteric persons, as it generates wind and other grievous symptoms.

Persons who are generally costive should live upon a moistening and laxative diet, as roasted or boiled apples, pears, stewed prunes, raisins, gruels with currants, butter, honey, and sugar, &c. Broths with spinage, leeks, and other soft pot-herbs, are likewise proper. Rye bread, or that which is made of a mixture of wheat and rye together, ought to be eaten. No person troubled with costiveness should eat wheat bread alone, especially that which is made of fine flour. The best bread for keeping the belly soluble is what in some parts of England they call *meslin*. It is made of equal parts of wheat and rye, or more commonly of two parts of the former to one of the latter.

Costiveness is increased by keeping the body too warm, and by every thing that promotes the perspiration, as wearing flannel, lying too long abed, &c. Intense thought and a sedentary life are likewise hurtful. All the secretions and excretions are promoted by moderate exercise without doors, and by a gay, cheerful, sprightly temper of mind.

The drink should be of an opening quality. All ardent spirits, austere and astringent wines, as port, claret, &c., ought

to be avoided. Malt liquor that is fine, and of a moderate strength, is very proper. Buttermilk, whey, and other watery liquors, are likewise proper, and may be drank in turns, as the patient's inclination directs.

Those who are troubled with costiveness ought if possible to remedy it by diet, as the constant use of medicines for that purpose is attended with many inconveniences, and often with bad consequences.* I never knew any one get into a habit of taking medicine for keeping the belly open who could leave it off. In time the custom becomes necessary, and generally ends in a total relaxation of the bowels, indigestion, loss of appetite, wasting of the strength, and death.

When the belly cannot be kept open without medicine, we would recommend gentle doses of rhubarb to be taken twice or thrice a week. This is not near so injurious to the stomach as aloes, jalap, or the other drastic purgatives so much in use. Infusions of senna and manna may likewise be taken, or half an ounce of soluble tartar dissolved in water gruel. About the size of a nutmeg of lenitive electuary taken twice or thrice a day generally answers the purpose very well.

* The learned Dr. Arbuthnot advises those who are troubled with costiveness to use animal oils, as fresh butter, cream, marrow, fat broths, especially those made of the internal parts of animals, as the liver, heart, midriff, &c. He likewise recommends the expressed oils of mild vegetables, as olives, almonds, pastaches, and the fruits themselves; all oily and mild fruits, as figs; decoctions of mealy vegetables—these lubricate the intestines; some saponaceous substances, which stimulate gently, as honey, hydromel, or boiled honey and water, unrefined sugar, &c.

The doctor observes that such lenitive substances are proper for persons of dry atrabiliar constitutions, who are subject to astriction of the belly and the piles, and will operate when stronger medicinal substances are sometimes ineffectual; but that such lenitive diet hurts those whose bowels are weak and lax. He likewise observes that all watery substances are lenitive, and that even common water, whey, sour milk, and buttermilk, have that effect; that new milk, especially ass's milk, stimulates still more when it sours on the stomach, and that whey turned sour will purge strongly; that most garden fruits are likewise laxative, and that some of them, as grapes, will throw such as take them immoderately into a cholera morbus or incurable diarrhœa.

WANT OF APPETITE.

This may proceed from a foul stomach; indigestion; the want of free air and exercise; grief, fear, anxiety, or any of the depressing passions; excessive heat; the use of strong broths, fat meats, or any thing that palls the appetite or is hard of digestion; the immoderate use of strong liquors, tea, tobacco, opium, &c.

The patient ought if possible to make choice of an open dry air, to take exercise daily on horseback or in a carriage, to rise betimes, and to avoid all intense thought. He should use a diet of easy digestion, and should avoid excessive heat and great fatigue.

If want of appetite proceeds from errors in diet, or any other part of the patient's regimen, it ought to be changed. If nausea and retchings show that the stomach is loaded with crudities, a vomit will be of service. After this a gentle purge or two of rhubarb, or any of the bitter purging salts, may be taken. The patient ought next to use an infusion in wine of some of the stomachic bitters, as gentian root, Peruvian bark, or orange-peel. He may also eat orange-peel or ginger candied.

Though gentle evacuations be necessary, all strong purges and vomits are to be avoided, as they weaken the stomach and hurt digestion. After proper evacuations, bitter elixirs and tinctures with aromatics may be used. The patient may take, twice a day, a common spoonful of the stomachic tincture, or if he be costive the same quantity of the bitter tincture of rhubarb. Elixir of vitriol is an excellent medicine in most cases of indigestion, weakness of the stomach, or want of appetite. Twenty or thirty drops of it may be taken twice or thrice a day in a glass of wine or water. It may likewise be mixed with the tincture of the bark, two drams of the former to an ounce of the latter, and a tea-spoonful of it taken in wine or water, as above.

The chalybeate waters, if drank in moderation, are generally of considerable service in this case. The salt water has likewise good effects, but it must not be used too freely. The waters of Harrowgate, Scarborough, Moffat, and most other spaws in Britain, may be used with advantage. We would advise all who are afflicted with indigestion and want of appetite to repair to these places of public rendezvous. The

very change of air and the cheerful company will be of service, not to mention the exercise, dissipation, amusements, &c.

THE HEART-BURN.

What is commonly called the *heart-burn* is not a disease of that organ, but an uneasy sensation of heat or acrimony about the pit of the stomach, which is sometimes attended with anxiety, nausea, and vomiting.

It may proceed from debility of the stomach, indigestion, bile, the abounding of an acid in the stomach, &c. Persons who are liable to this complaint ought to avoid stale liquors, acids, windy or greasy aliments, and should never use violent exercise soon after a plentiful meal. I know many persons who never fail to have the heart-burn if they ride soon after dinner, provided they have drank ale, wine, or any fermented liquor, but are never troubled with it when they have drank rum or brandy and water without any sugar or acid.

When the heart-burn proceeds from debility of the stomach or indigestion, the patient ought to take a dose or two of rhubarb; afterwards he may use infusions of the Peruvian bark, or any other of the stomachic bitters, in wine or brandy. Exercise in the open air will likewise be of use, and every thing that promotes digestion.

When bilious humors occasion the heart-burn, a tea-spoonful of the sweet spirits of nitre in a glass of water or a cup of tea will generally give ease. If it proceeds from the use of greasy aliments, a dram of brandy or rum may be taken.

If acidity or sourness of the stomach occasions the heart-burn, absorbents are the proper medicines. In this case an ounce of powdered chalk, half an ounce of fine sugar, and a quarter of an ounce of gum Arabic, may be mixed in an English quart of water, and a tea-cupful of it taken as often as is necessary. Such as do not choose chalk may take a tea-spoonful of prepared oyster-shells, or of the powder called crabs-eyes, in a glass of cinnamon or peppermint water. But the safest and best absorbent is *magnesia alba*. This not only acts as an absorbent, but likewise as a purgative; whereas chalk and other absorbents of that kind are apt to lie in the intestines and occasion obstructions. This powder is not disagreeable, and may be taken in a cup of tea or a glass of mint-water. A large tea-spoonful is the usual dose, but it

may be taken in a much larger quantity when there is occasion.

If wind be the cause of this complaint, the most proper medicines are those called carminatives; as aniseeds, juniper berries, ginger, cannella alba, cardamum seeds, &c. These may either be chewed or infused in spirits or wine. One of the safest medicines of this kind is the tincture made by infusing an ounce of rhubarb, and a quarter of an ounce of the lesser cardamum seeds, in an English pint of brandy. After this has digested for two or three days, it must be strained, and four ounces of white sugar candy added to it. It must stand to digest a second time till the sugar be dissolved. A table-spoonful of it may be taken constantly for a dose.

I have frequently known the heart-burn cured, especially in pregnant women, by chewing green tea.

CHAPTER XLIII.

NERVOUS DISEASES.

OF all diseases incident to mankind, those of the nervous kind are the most complicated and difficult to cure. A volume would not be sufficient to point out their various symptoms. They imitate almost every disease, and are seldom alike in two different persons, or even in the same person at different times. Proteus-like, they are continually changing shape, and upon every fresh attack the patient thinks he feels symptoms which he never experienced before. Nor do they only affect the body; the mind likewise suffers, and is often thereby rendered extremely weak and peevish. The low spirits, timorousness, melancholy, and fickleness of temper, which generally attend nervous disorders, induce many people to believe that they are entirely diseases of the mind; but this change of temper is rather a consequence than the cause of nervous diseases.

CAUSES.—Every thing that tends to relax or weaken the body disposes it to nervous diseases, as indolence, excessive venery, drinking too much tea or other weak watery liquors,