

Hebron Law
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ART. III.—*The Sanitary and Dietetic Laws of the Hebrews, as related to Medicine: A paper read before the N. Y. Medical Union, Feb. 24, 1859.* By MARK BLUMENTHAL, M.D. Resident Physician to the Jews' Hospital, N.Y.

GENTLEMEN: I appear before you this evening at the suggestion and request of some of my most highly esteemed friends and colleagues to occupy your attention for an hour in referring to, and explaining the Sanitary and dietetic Laws of the Hebrews, and their relation to Medicine. The desire to be informed, in some measure at least, in regard to the peculiarities of this people, and to know to what extent their Religious laws inculcate certain doctrines pertaining to food etc., is certainly laudable, and peculiarly interesting, even if not absolutely necessary to the physicians of this city, where the Israelites form a large and respectable part of the community, and among whom every practising physician has patients—in order (as a worthy friend expressed it), “to direct him in his conduct and advice, when treating a Hebrew—so that he may do nothing to hurt his patient's religious feelings, nor desire him to do anything contrary to the peculiar requirements of his religion.” All honor to such high-minded motives; I feel happy in being enabled, though in ever so small a measure, to

encourage this sentiment of toleration and liberality, which redounds no less to the honor of a good heart than a strong mind.

The subject, however, is one to which it is impossible to do full justice in the short time allowed me this evening, and it will therefore be barely possible for me to touch upon the most important ordinances or rather those which become of interest to the physician in his relation towards his patients. It may be urged by some, that they have seldom or never found any difficulties on this score; that they have for years attended Jewish families and do so still, without ever suffering, or even feeling the want of any more intimate knowledge of the peculiar religious or sanitary doctrines of their patients. This no doubt is true; but do or can these querists, conclude, from the fact that they have never been called to account, that *therefore* they have never offended their patients' religious convictions? Or are they sure that they have not induced their Jewish patients to commit acts contrary to their religious rites? The commission of which may perhaps have preyed at times upon their consciences and have caused them pangs of regret. But granted that such seldom occurs—would not every conscientious physician and gentleman of education and refined feelings prefer, not to take the responsibility of ordering anything forbidden, or wittingly to wound the feelings of any one? Certainly he would; and it is to these I offer the following remarks.

The customs of the Israelites at the present day, are altogether based upon the Biblical laws contained in the Pentateuch. They are of a religious nature; because they are conducive to the health and happiness of man. In fact, the preservation of health, corporeal and mental, being a religious duty among the Hebrews, all the regulations conducive to that object, become a part of their religion. It is in this sense that Moses says: (Deut. v. 33) "Ye shall walk in all the ways which the Lord your God hath commanded you, that you may live and it may be well with you *and that you may prolong your days.*" Many more passages might be quoted to prove that the tendency of the religious laws is conducive to the physical and spiritual welfare, the vigor of mind, and strength of body of the Israelites. It is consequently an admitted rule, that whenever a physician considers it absolutely necessary for the preservation of life, or the attainment of health, that any of the religious observances should be infringed, his advice is to be followed. Medical men however are recommended not to interfere unnecessarily with the established customs, unless they believe it really indispensable for the recovery of their patients;

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That the restrictions imposed upon the Israelites by their religion were, and still are, wise and useful, and conducive in the highest degree to the preservation of health, might be proven by a number of well-known and universally accredited facts. Thus they are remarkably exempt from the epidemic diseases which have from time to time swept over the earth and made such sad havoc among other nations. Scurvy and tapeworm are almost unknown among them and even syphilis is much less prevalent than among other nationalities. This comparative immunity is so well demonstrated that the Board of Health of Great Britain, in its report on the cholera prevailing there a few years ago, devotes a chapter to the elucidation of this remarkable fact, which is ascribed by it to the sanitary and religious laws which are observed by the Hebrews. It adds, that the same immunity prevails also in other countries among them, of which the report makes mention.

One more fact may be mentioned in this connection. During the dark ages, the Israelites, if at all tolerated, were compelled to live in the most crowded state and confined to the lowest localities in the various cities of Europe, under conditions undoubtedly every way favorable to the production of miasm, fever and pestilence. They nevertheless preserved their innate vigor of body and mind as their history, as well as their present state abundantly testifies. Having made these general and introductory remarks, I shall proceed to take up some of the special peculiarities, and whilst stating their existence, give at the same time such explanations for their existence as may seem satisfactory. I allude to this point more particularly and with emphasis—because the conviction is, it may be said all but universal among Christians, that their customs and prohibitions (particularly those in regard to articles of food and their mode of preparation) are ridiculous, and preposterous; and not only lacking the semblance of divine wisdom, but not even founded on common sense.

Gentlemen! nothing can be further from the truth. . . . Most of the ordinances have reasons assigned for their injunction; *why* certain articles are injurious and therefore forbidden, and where such reasons are not actually put down, a little research or study of the peculiarities of the circumstances and times under which they were ordained, will usually satisfy all impartial minds of their wisdom and necessity.

In many instances modern science has corroborated what was told us over three thousand years ago (a striking illustration of

the slow progress of the human mind as contrasted with divine wisdom and inspiration) and it is consequently doubly interesting to find boards of health and special commissions appointed at the present day,* to ascertain facts and recommend precautions identical with those ordained more than 30 centuries ago, by that great, unequalled legislator, Moses.

In elucidation of these statements, let us examine the ordinances of diet separately.

The Mosaic code divides all animals into two great classes, clean and unclean. The clean are declared to be useful and healthy as an article of food, but the unclean are forbidden. A more definite distinction, however, is superadded. In Levit. ii. 5, we read a list of the animals that are allowed and of those that are prohibited, "Whichsoever is cloven-footed and cheweth the cud, that shall ye eat." "Thus," says the Revd. John Townley (in his dissertation on the originality of the *Inst. of Moses*.—*Transl. More Nebuchim*, p. 56. (Doctor Perplexorum) "Religion directed the choice of proper articles of food both with the heathen and the Hebrews; but with the latter the most wholesome food was allowed, and nothing was forbidden for any reason which tended to nourish superstition. But no good reason can be given for the Egyptians abstaining from mutton; the Syrians from fish; the Hindoos from the flesh of cows, or the priests in some countries from the flesh of animals of any kind." The same author furthermore says, (Townley, p. 64) "Various reasons have been adduced for the legal distinction between clean and unclean animals, by those learned men who have made this part of the Jewish polity their peculiar study." It will be found by the candid investigator that there are some great and leading reasons for these dietetic distinctions, in which all the best writers are agreed and which we may therefore safely consider as sound and Scriptural as well as rational. The sum of these is that these distinctions were intended,

1, To prevent idolatry; 2, To promote the health and comfort of the people; and 3, To influence the *moral character* of the nation."

We will not stop to discuss at length the various ways by which the prohibitions of certain articles of diet affected the religious sentiments of the people, but simply point out one or two considerations which force themselves upon the mind.

The Hebrew nation had been chosen as a holy people, that was to be specially dedicated to the service of God; hence all means that would tend to produce or inspire idolatrous notions were to be carefully avoided, nay—even means were to be

* As in England—see *London Lancet*, 1858.

employed to different and first place by *the Egyptian* association that Israelites were daily in

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employed to convince the people of the folly of worshipping
different animals. How was this accomplished? In the
first place by *permitting the use as food of such as were adored*
by the Egyptians (a nation whose habits they had from long
association partly acquired) and certainly it was not very likely
that Israelites would regard with veneration animals which they
were daily in the habit of eating.

In the second place, by *being taught to regard with detesta-*
tion such others as were held in religious veneration by the
idolatrous nations.

"Most of the creatures" (says the erudite Lewis, "Antiquities
of the Heb. Republic") "which were pronounced unclean were
such as were in high esteem and sacred among the heathen—
as a swine to Venus, the owl to Minerva, the hawk to
Apollo, the eagle to Jupiter and even the dog to Hecate—
which gave occasion to Origen justly to fall into admiration
of the wisdom of Moses, who so perfectly understood the nature
of all animals and what relations they had to demons, that he
declared all those to be unclean which were declared by the
Egyptians and other nations to be instruments of divination
and those to be clean which were not so." (Origen contra
Celsum, lib. iv.)

Again,* "It is well known that the lion, wolf, dog, cat,
ape and even frogs, rats, otters, beetles and flies as well as
serpents and fishes, were held in idolatrous veneration by the
Egyptians and other nations, and for which they were satirized
by Juvenal—himself a pagan Roman.

The restrictions which were made with respect to diet had
also another object. Owing to the disparity of tastes and cus-
toms engendered thereby, the people could not eat with their
idolatrous neighbors, thus cutting off to a great extent social
and familiar intercourse and preventing matrimonial alliances;
in that way also evading the temptation to be led astray from
the worship of the true God—a consideration, it must be con-
ceded, of much importance when we remember that the Hebrew
nation was then the only one not borne down by idolatry
and destined to spread the true knowledge of God and his
attributes.

We all know how often prejudices and preconceived ideas
and resolutions not only *are removed* by intimate associations with
different nations, and with people holding different opinions;
but moreover how our religious convictions are sometimes
weakened when we are not thoroughly and perfectly grounded
in the principles of their truth and reliability. How much

* Townley, p. 66.

more is such companionship to be feared when the happiness of a people is involved just delivered from slavery and as yet but little used to liberty and independence of thought and action; a people that had lived for centuries amongst idolaters and thereby became in a measure reconciled to the follies of the Egyptian worship. The probability of such a state of the public mind is rendered more plausible by the fact, that the Hebrews saw their oppressors, though idolaters, seated upon the very pinnacle of fame and worldly prosperity. Judging from effect to cause, it would naturally mislead them, and hence the necessity of those various wonders and miracles wrought before and during the delivery of the Hebrews to convince them of the existence of an overruling Providence against whom the false gods of Egypt were powerless.

But I must hasten to the second reason given for these dietetic prohibitions, viz., "to promote health and comfort." The distinctions between clean and unclean appears to be based almost entirely upon their respective suitability or unfitness of articles of food. "While God keeps the eternal interests of man steadily in view," observes the learned Dr. Adam Clark in his commentary on the Bible (on Levit. xi.) "he does not forget his earthly comfort; he is at once solicitous both for the health of his body and his soul. He has not forbidden certain aliments because he is a Sovereign, but because he knew they would be injurious to the health and morals of his people. Solid footed animals, such as the horse, and many-toed animals, such as the cat, are here prohibited. Beasts which have bifid or cloven hoofs, such as the ox, are considered as proper for food and therefore commanded. The former are unclean, *i. e.* unwholesome, affording a gross nutriment, often the parent of scorbutic and scrofulous disorders; the latter clean, *i. e.* affording a copious and wholesome nutriment and not laying the foundation of any disease. Ruminating animals, *i. e.* those which chew the cud, concoct their food better than the others (which swallow it with little mastication), and therefore the flesh contains more of the nutritious juices, and is more easy of digestion and consequently of assimilation to the fluids and solids of the human body; on this account they are termed clean, *i. e.* peculiarly wholesome and fit for food. The animals which do not ruminate do not concoct their food so well, and hence they abound with gross animals juices, which yield a comparatively unwholesome food to the human system. On the same grounds he forbids all fishes that have not both fins and scales, such as the conger eel, etc., which abound in gross juices and fat which very few stomachs are able to digest." Mons. de Pastoret (Moyse, considéré comme législateur et comme moraliste, chap. vii. p. 528.

Paris 1788), a distinguishing one in which his ages gave laws to the health of the hare etc.; and all kinds of kid and of the try where the rendered digest able fact and or the exception of the Mosaic code of common diet to this exceptive direction corroborate the present day digestion, and his researches of and others have certainly not tried. Indeed by which this becoming deviate human organism is the fact of Hebrews goes abstinence.

In making diet there are some tions.

The method that followed in a bullock, for by a blow upon the Hebrews held that, they have of felling the expression of the stoppage of the heart, arteries

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Paris 1788), a celebrated French writer says: "One of the most distinguishing traits in the character of Moses as a legislator and one in which he was the most imitated by those who in after ages gave laws to the eastern world, was his constant attention to the health of the people. He forbade the use of pork and of the hare etc.; of fish without scales whose flesh is gross and oily, and all kinds of heavy meats as the fat of the bullock, of the kid and of the lamb; an inhibition supremely wise in a country where the excessive heat relaxing the fibres of the stomach, rendered digestion peculiarly slow and difficult." It is a remarkable fact and one certainly worthy of a passing notice that with the exception of the swine, none of the animals forbidden in the Mosaic code have become or are at the present day articles of common diet among civilized nations, and even with regard to this exception modern research is gradually laboring in a direction corroborative of the wisdom of the interdiction. At the present day, pork is considered as by no means easy of digestion, and the fact of its being so very frequently the possessor and habitation of the *Cysticercus* (which the interesting researches of Kuchenmeister, Von Siebold, Leuckart, Walther and others have proven to be rudimentary tapeworms), does certainly not tend to raise its value in the eyes of humanitarians. Indeed pork is without doubt the most frequent means by which this parasite is carried into the human body—there becoming developed to the great suffering and injury of the human organism.* Here then would seem to be a very palpable reason for placing the swine among the unclean animals, and the fact that tapeworm is almost unknown among the Hebrews goes towards justifying in a remarkable degree their abstinence.

In making dietetic use of the animals declared as wholesome, there are some peculiarities which I shall now proceed to mention.

The method of killing animals for food differs widely from that followed by other nations. Thus whilst death is produced in a bullock, for instance, even among the most civilized nations, by a blow upon the head, or in case of a calf or lamb by stabbing, the Hebrews have a certain method to pursue; and more than that, they have certain men appointed to do this duty. Instead of felling the animal with a blow producing concussion or compression of the brain, as the case may be, and thereby sudden stoppage of the heart's action, thus leaving the blood in the heart, arteries and veins, *the throat is cut* with a large keen-

* The mere allusion to the occurrence of the *cysticercus cellulosus*, in the brain, globe of the eye, heart, liver and muscles is sufficient to indicate that it may be of serious and sometimes fatal consequence.

edged knife, specially designated for such use and kept very sharp, thus severing the cervical arteries and veins and producing death by hemorrhage. The blood is thus discharged, as its use is interdicted in Levit. xvii. 22: "No soul of you shall eat blood, neither shall any stranger that sojourneth among you eat blood." And in Deut. xv. 23: "Thou shalt pour it upon the ground as water."

The reason for this prohibition I shall revert to presently.

And now comes that part of the process to which my allusions above when mentioning the Board of Health had reference. After the animal is killed (and I need hardly say that one evidently sick can not be killed for food) its internal organs are examined, especially the heart, the liver and lungs, the latter among other tests are inflated in order to discover whether the vesicles or air cells are all permeable; thus tubercles, emphysema, pneumonia, etc., are discovered. The intestines, too, must be examined for ulcerations, and the abdominal organs, such as the kidneys, spleen and mesenteric glands, and if the slightest traces of disease are found, the meat is declared unfit for food. Of course the person upon whom the duty of this examination devolves must be thoroughly acquainted with the anatomy and pathology of cattle. To prove his capacity he must pass an examination. Until he has declared the animal as healthy, its meat must not be sold for food.

Thus far then it would seem as though every necessary precaution had been taken; but before the meat is ready for cooking it undergoes still other processes. It is laid upon a board and sprinkled with salt in moderate quantity; after remaining so for 30 minutes it is washed and laid in water so as to dissolve and remove the salt. This process it is evident is simply a completion of the first step, namely to abstract all the blood before eating the meat.

As a logical consequence of the foregoing, no animal, whether mammal or fowl or fish, may be used that has perished by violence, whether such violence be caused by animals of prey, by accidents or by shooting. The products of the chase, therefore, are prohibited.

I am sure that many will coincide with me when I express my regret that some sanitary supervision, even if not so complete in all its parts as the foregoing, is not *universally* adopted. Its necessity is undeniable. Meat of all kinds is offered in our markets. No one has a legal right to examine (or if there be such ordinances we never knew them enforced) if it be pure and wholesome and to confiscate it if otherwise. It is a notorious fact that diseased animals are often slain, (just on the point of perishing from disease) both in the city and country, in

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order to dispose of the meat, when the living animal could no longer have found a buyer. How much disease may be ascribed to such unhealthy food it may be difficult to ascertain, but that such meat must necessarily be injurious and prejudicial to health may be confidently assumed.

The question will naturally present itself—why is blood so specially interdicted and so studiously and perseveringly sought to be avoided by the Hebrews.

Various reasons have been given for this prohibition by the learned Rabbis or doctors of ancient times. Moses Maimonides, who flourished during the latter half of the 12th century, and who is regarded not alone by his own nation, but by the learned of all creeds, as one of the brightest luminaries of his age, and probably the best informed man of his time upon the subject of the laws of Israel and the reasons thereof—after stating the abominations, cruelties and idolatrous practices to which the nations surrounding Israel at that time were addicted by reason of the blood which they used as food, or gathered in order to offer to demons, says (ch. xxi. on the Causes and Reasons of Precepts of the Eleventh Class): "For this reason, therefore, the divine law, which renders those who know it perfect, was given to eradicate those inveterate diseases, by prohibiting the eating of blood, and as in the case of idolatry, enforcing the prohibition by an additional sanction."

One of the principal reasons for prohibiting the eating of blood was then without doubt to prevent idolatrous practices. Rabbi Moses bar Nachman (better known as Ramban), also a very learned Spanish Israelite, who was born in 1194, and who like unto Maimonides and others united with a profound knowledge of religion, a knowledge of jurisprudence and physic, says of those idolatrous nations surrounding Israel, "They gathered together blood, for the devils, their idle gods, and then came themselves and ate of that blood."—*Townley More Neb.* p. 76.

Similar practices obtained among the Romans, since Horace thus satirizes the superstitious rites of his countrymen:

"Canidia with dishevelled hair,
(Black was her robe—her feet were bare—)
With Sagana—infernal dame—
Her elder sister—hither came.
With yellings dire they filled the place,
And hideous pale was either's face.
Soon with their nails they scraped the ground,
And filled a magic trench profound—
With a black lamb's thick streaming gore,
Whose members with their teeth they tore.
That they may charm the sprites to tell
Some curious anecdotes from hell."

FRANCIS'S *Horace*, Sat. 1, B. I.

The second reason why blood was not to be eaten, appears to have been that the Israelites might by this means be deeply impressed with the important truth that God is the sole author and disposer of life; and thereby maintaining a constant sense of dependence upon him, and of gratitude for his providential mercies.

The learned Calmet says, "God reserved to himself the blood of all sacrifices—as absolute master of life and death." "Blood being regarded as the organ of life, was therefore sacred to him from whom life was derived."* "For blood is the life, and thou mayest not eat the life with the flesh."—Deut. xii. 23, 24; Levit. xvii. 10-14.

A third, and perhaps the most interesting and important reason to the physician, is that the prohibition of blood served to check cruel and savage customs, and prevented the unrestrained indulgence of barbarous and ferocious inclinations. The Jewish rabbins assert that the injunctions against the use of blood were originally designated to suppress a practice, which they say obtained even in the time of Noah, of eating raw flesh, and especially of eating the flesh cut or torn from living animals, and devouring it whilst yet reeking with warm blood. † Plutarch, in his discourse on eating flesh, informs us, that it was customary in his time to run red hot spits through the bodies of live swine; and to stamp upon the udders of sows ready to farrow, to make their flesh more delicious; and Herodotus assures us (b. iv.) that the Scythians, from drinking the blood of their cattle, proceeded to drink the blood of their enemies. Dr. Patrick Delaney ‡ says, "There is a practice sufficiently known to obtain among the poor of the kingdom of Ireland. It is customary for them to bleed their cattle for food in years of scarcity;" and as a proof that these barbarous customs have scarcely yet ceased, the Analytical Review (vol. xxviii. July, 1798), says: "It will scarcely appear credible at a future time, that at this day, towards the close of the 18th century, in the islands and some of the Highlands of Scotland, the natives, every spring or summer, attack the bullocks with lances, that they may eat their blood, but prepared by fire." The celebrated traveller Bruce relates a scene he witnessed near Axum, the ancient capital of Abyssinia, where the Abyssinian travellers whom he overtook, seized the cow they were driving, threw it down, and cutting steaks from her, ate them raw *and then drove on the poor sufferer before them.* (Bruce's "Travels," vol. iii. pp. 332, 334). Sir John Carr states that the natives of the Sandy desert (between Memel and Koningsburg) eat live eels

* Townley, p. 78.

† Townley's Trans., p. 80.

‡ Doctrine of abstinence from blood defended, London 1784.

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dipped in salt, which they devour as they writhe with anguish round their hands. (Can's "North Summer, or Travels round the Baltic in 1804," p. 436, Lond. 1805.) And it is a well known fact that the savage natives of New Zealand continue to quaff the blood of their enemies when taken in battle.

It is to prevent such cruel and barbarous customs that the Jewish law enjoined, that animals destined for food should be killed with the greatest dispatch, and their blood poured out upon the ground and not eaten. Thus, unnecessary cruelty to animals is evaded, and the deleterious effects of blood as an article of food avoided. For it is certain that all animals feeding on blood are more furious and violent than the ruminantia, and it can hardly be a matter of doubt, that its use by man tends to brutalize him—to arouse his more violent passions and brutal instincts—making him cruel and unrelenting, whilst the better feelings and emotions, for want of cultivation and practice, are sunk under the weight and force of his animal passions.

"Drinking of blood," says Michaelis in his "Commentaries on the Laws of Moses," vol. iii. p. 252, "is certainly not a becoming ceremony in religious worship; it is not a very refined custom, and if often repeated might probably habituate a people to cruelty and make them unfeeling with regard to blood; and certainly religion should not give, nor even have the appearance of giving, such a direction to the manners of a nation."

There is one other point under this heading that may receive a hasty notice. Israelites who live strictly in accordance with their faith, never combine at one meal meats with milk or butter. This observance is based upon the verse in Exod. xxiii. 19, and Deut. xiv. 21: "Thou shalt not seethe a kid in its mother's milk." No kind of meat or fowl can consequently be boiled in milk or fried in butter. Instead of the latter, other fats are used—particularly the fat of geese; and in countries where olives abound, as in France, Italy, Spain and Turkey, olive oil is used almost exclusively to replace fats in the cuisine.

Of fowls it may be said in general terms that all birds of prey are interdicted; and of fishes—all that are not possessed of scales and fins are prohibited. All animals living in the water and not possessing these are forbidden—hence oysters, shrimps, lobsters, crabs, eels, cockles, etc., should not be eaten. The reasons given above as causes for the prohibition of meats of difficult assimilation, appear to apply also here.

In contrast with these laws on food, let me here introduce the ordinances on abstinence.

One day in the year, called the day of Atonement, is set

apart by the law and generally observed as a fast-day. From evening to evening, every Hebrew abstains from food and is engaged with acts of penitence and prayer. But though this command is general (Levit. xxiii. 27-30) it is understood to apply only to adults in health.

Thus, boys under 13, and girls under 12 years of age (the ages when they are respectively said to become responsible), are exempted therefrom. Indeed if children under that age even desire to abstain all day (*i. e.* 24 hours), they are not permitted to do so.

The humanitarian spirit of the ordinance goes even farther. Thus, a woman is not permitted to fast during the first three days after her accouchement. After that period it depends upon her state of health. Should it be considered prejudicial to her or her infant, she must not be allowed to fast.

In cases of sickness or debility from disease or even age, the command is not to be enforced. In fact whenever the physician declares that it is dangerous to life or even specially prejudicial to restoration, his advice or order—supposing it to be based upon his honest convictions and not prejudice—is to be followed.

It is perhaps necessary I should mention that by fasting, the Hebrews understand abstinence from drink as well as from food.

Let us next look at the laws of cleanliness.

Purity of body as well as of mind and heart, is one of the cardinal principles laid down in the Old Testament. Bathing and washing are frequently commanded, and hence we find that in the description of the temple of Solomon, the lavers for bathing are frequently and repeatedly mentioned. Let us remember that these ordinances were given long before advancing civilization and science had taught the world the supreme excellences of water, and that its frequent employment must have contributed in no small degree to the sanitary condition of the people. Indeed the habit of washing and cleansing the body had become so impressed into the national character that it has descended to our generation as a religious custom; and well it might; for the preservation of health, and thereby of life, is certainly an essentially religious duty. To what extent this habit of frequent lavations has tended to preserve health, it is impossible to ascertain, since other hygienic means were in common use at the same time, but I believe it only fair to presume, that it was not without its good effects.

The ancients practised, and even the modern oriental nations to this day preserve, the laws and habits of frequent bathing and washing. The frequency of eruptive and skin diseases, rendered

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such custom especially applicable, and in order to enforce it the better it was made with most of them a religious ordinance.

When, therefore, we recollect that these laws were more especially made for Palestine, situated in a hot climate, though equally adapted to other lands, they strike us as eminently wise. The fact that many of the secretory and excretory organs act more energetically in hot than in temperate and cold climates—particularly the skin, and that this excretion, especially when occupying the feet, is very often exceedingly offensive—is so well known as to require only its simple mention to remind us of the benefits of bathing. Manufactures and commerce had not then reached that universality which they now enjoy, and it is fair to assume that the mass of the people could not or would not supply themselves with such an abundant supply and change of garments, as is common in our day. Frequent ablutions, therefore, became the more necessary, both of body and garment. Indeed, we all know that the admiration of water, by the civilized world has in modern times so strengthened and grown that a school has arisen, namely, the Hydropathic, which claims to cure all diseases to which the human frame is liable—by water. Those however (with but few exceptions perhaps) who have studied the human economy, its anatomy, physiology and pathology with care, and have devoted strong intellect and life-long application to its diseases, though admitting its great utility and good qualities, deny, and in my opinion deny with justice, the extravagant eulogia bestowed by specialists upon water as a remedy. The Rational School of Medicine of the present day, which may be termed the eclectic, or better, perhaps, the school based on our knowledge of the natural laws, physiological facts and clinical observation, is ready and willing to give water its proper place in the class of remedial agents, and frequently indeed, I hardly dare say frequently enough, is it employed in congestive and inflammatory diseases not only, but in its different states and forms as a positive remedial agent for diseases of the skin, rheumatic and gouty affections, and chronic diseases of internal organs.

The vapor, the douche, spout and the sand baths are proofs, (from their very existence), of the extensive application to which water is now put.

At this day, no man or woman in Israel commences his or her day's labor without first washing hands and face, at least; indeed it may be said that not even a child is left unwashed every morning among them; for as persons are considered unclean until washed, and as it is not permitted to offer up

prayers to Providence unless clean (and to pray daily is as usual among them, even among the poor class, as it is uncommon among the same class of some other sects) washing has become a part of their religious rites. Thus when going to meals also, hands are cleansed, with the double object of cleanliness, and as preparatory to saying grace thereafter.

During the independent nationality of Israel more particularly, but even now also, bathing was obligatory after any disease of the skin, after sexual intercourse or even pollutions; after the cure of a gonorrhœa, after the menses, an accouchment, or the touching of a corpse. Not only was it customary to bathe in rivers, but wealthy families, even then, had baths in their houses. 2 Sam. ii. 2; (Wund. Talm. Med. p. 37). Thus both hot and cold as well as vapor baths were used. A point of interest however is, that even at that early day (I refer to the time of the glory of Jerusalem), the method now pursued in the so-called Russian baths was employed, namely the dashing of cold water over the bather immediately on emerging from a warm bath. Thus the Talmud in its allegorical style says: "He who takes a warm bath and is not directly after showered with cold water, is like unto iron, which has been treated by fire, but not hardened by water afterwards." Let me include under this heading one other important ceremonial law relating to the sexes. I allude to the operation of circumcision.

This command laid down by the patriarch Abraham (in Gen. xvii. 10-13.) and reënacted by Joshua upon the whole nation of males born in the desert on their way from Egypt to the Holy Land, has been adhered to by his descendants, the whole people of Israel, even unto this day.

It is foreign to our purpose this evening, however, to look upon the ordinance in its religious bearings; it is in its sanitary relations that it has interest in this connection, and as the first step in its elucidation, I will proceed first to describe the operation as performed by persons who are specially educated in its manipulations.

All anatomists know that the integumentary tissue covering the penis is very elastic and distensible, and that it naturally passes forwards over the glans penis, entirely covering it, just leaving in the central point a corrugated opening, through which the urine escapes, and being then reflected back as mucous membrane *under* the first layer and *over* the glans to its corona, where it is circularly inserted.

In circumcising (the tissues as already mentioned being very elastic and loose) the entire portion of skin covering the glans is drawn forward with the fore finger and thumb of the left

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hand and a section quickly cut off; the traction being thus taken off, the skin retracts and leaves the glans covered with the mucous reflection exposed. This is taken up between the fingers and thumbs of both hands, torn up to its insertion and reflected back of the glans. The integument is then drawn to meet it and thus it is allowed to heal. The effect of the operation is to entirely denude the glans of its præputial covering, and being thus left uncovered, its mucoid surface hardens by the contact of air, water, etc., and takes on the appearance and functions of integument.

The operation is completed by stopping hemorrhage if any exist, and by retaining the cut edges in their proper places by means of strips of lint, burnt sponge or linen. In the course of two or three days the wound is generally entirely healed by first intention. The reasons given for the institution of this ordinance by the rabbis, are various. I will add a few which seem to carry the most weight with them, and certainly are very plausible.

1. As the Biblical covenant, made by God with Abraham, to be observed by him and his generations forever, and which is to express the idea of the perfect devotion with soul and body of the circumcised to God and his service.

2. As a symbol of sanctification in the manner of the Christian baptism, in which sense Paul in his Epistle to the Romans (ii. 28-47) appears to have taken it.

3. As negation by an actual bloody protest against the Phallus worship of the heathen nations of that day, who worshipped the genital organs (Lingum and Phallus) as the symbols of creative power. (See Wunderbar, Talmud Med. p. 24.)

4. Circumcision was a condition of citizenship among the Israelites and a proof of nationality.

5. From its social import, as it is believed that circumcision tends to increase the procreative power.* And finally,

6. As a strictly sanitary or prophylactic measure, inasmuch as the organ can be kept much cleaner, which is really of some importance in regard to the fact that there is a sebaceous secretion between the glans and prepuce in the uncircumcised, which in hot climates is often the cause and seat of diseases which are prevented or at least much lessened in virulence by the excision of the prepuce.

In the East, as well as in other hot climates, there is a disease affecting these parts of which we here know nothing or very little at best. From an accumulation of this sebaceous

* See Schneider and Henke: Zeitschrift für Staats Arzneykunde, 1825, vol. iv. p. 223.

matter, an inflammation of one or more of the sebaceous follicles before referred to occurs, which enlarge, indurate, become painful, and finally produce troublesome abscesses or carbuncloid sores.* Circumcision would prevent such disease.

Flavius Josephus states (Flav. de ant. Ind. Contr. Apion l. ii. 13) that Apion, an Egyptian, who wrote against the Jews and ridiculed them on account of their being circumcised, was himself finally forced to undergo that operation, for a very virulent carbuncle of those parts, but that the operation being performed too late he succumbed to the disease amid the most torturing pain.

Philo (Opera ii. p. 211) refers to this also in the following language: "It would therefore be better to abandon this childish sarcasm and to examine understandingly and seriously the causes which lie at the foundation of this operation; but there are reasons for maintaining this custom of the ancients; in the first place the prevention of a violent disease, and one very difficult of cure, which is called anthrax, and occurs easily with such as have a prepuce."

I have already mentioned above that by reason of the exposure of the glans, its mucoid surface becomes hardened and takes on the character of epidermis, thereby also becoming less liable to infection, a circumstance which may in a measure explain the comparative infrequency of syphilis among Israelites as compared with others—a fact believed by many physicians, and sustained particularly by Collin and Mombert.

It is here to be noted that both phimosis and paraphimosis, are affections from which those properly circumcised can never suffer. Many persons will not understand why we should be born with a prepuce if it is to be excised after birth. To them the following opinion may give satisfaction; and I am sure no words of mine can be so appropriate at the conclusion of this part of my subject as those of the great Maimonides once more. He says (Doct. Perplexorum, ch. xiii.): "In our opinion also the principal reason for circumcision was of a similar nature (that is, tending to purity and virtue), and intended not as some have conjectured, to supply a defect in nature, but a defect in morals; not to remove what was superfluous, but to restrain what was impetuous, and by a painful rite check an evil propensity, for our father, Abraham, was the first who commenced the practice, of whom it is recorded how much he feared sin and how holy and pious and chaste he was in all his conduct."

And now, gentlemen, let me detain you a few minutes longer in order to remove a false impression which has gone abroad, and which, I regret to say, received a new impetus perhaps by

* Wunderbar, Bb. Talmud Med. p. 16.

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some remarks made by one of my predecessors in this course of lectures. The hymen was made the subject of a lecture or paper read here some two months ago, and all of you who heard it must have been both pleased and profited thereby. It conveyed to us, I dare say, all that is known at this day of its anatomy, pathology and importance in medical jurisprudence. No one here was more gratified than myself, excepting that in the course of the lecturer's remarks on the value of the hymen as a test of virginity, he spoke of its non-existence as being considered by the Jewish law as a proof of immorality, and that its absence would entail the punishment of death by stoning upon the poor maid. Far be it from me to blame the author of that paper for coming to such conclusions; on the contrary, I will demonstrate to you that, although wrong in his conclusions, they were necessarily wrong because based on false premises, for which he is not responsible. The opinion expressed by the lecturer was perhaps justified by the text—but the text itself is incorrect. The English version is, in this case, as in many others, not quite reliable, because the translators frequently disregarding the idiomatic expressions of the Hebrew language, gave a version very different from the original Hebrew text, in its meaning and explanation. The text as given in the English Bible is as follows, Deut. xxii. 13, etc., "And if any man take a wife and go in unto her and hate her, 14 And give occasion of speech against her, and bring up an evil name upon her, and say I took this woman and when I came to her, I found her not a maid: 15 Then shall the father of the damsel, and her mother, take and bring forth *the tokens* of the damsel's virginity unto the elders of the city in the gate; 16 And the damsel's father shall say unto the elders, I gave my daughter unto this man to wife and he hateth her; 17 And lo! he hath given occasion of speech against her, saying, I found not thy daughter a maid, and yet these are the tokens of my daughter's virginity, and they shall spread the cloth before the elders of the city; 18 And the elders of that city shall take that man and chastise him; 19 And they shall amerce him in a hundred shekels of silver and give them unto the father of the damsel, because he hath brought up an evil name upon a virgin of Israel; and she shall be his wife; he may not put her away all his days. 20 But if this thing be true and *the tokens of virginity* be not found for the damsel," etc.

You will observe in examining the 15th and 20th verses that the words *the tokens of* are in italics, and all words printed in italics are interluded to make the sense, by the translation, and are not found in the original. Again the Hebrew word

"Bethulim" which is translated in the 14th verse a "maid" is rendered in the 15th and 20th verses *the tokens of virginity*. If the interpretation of this passage were as stated by the lecturer, it would have been expressed in a very different way. It would have stated that if the husband does not find any signs of blood after the first sexual commerce, *he is to come before the judges and make a complaint. But this the text does not say.* Neither the hymen nor blood are mentioned. It is not the husband against the wife or her parents, but the parents of the wife, that bring the complaint against the husband for defaming their daughter.

The case then is this. If the husband after marriage takes a dislike to his wife, and as an excuse for his neglect maintains that he does not believe her to have had a good character before her marriage, then the parents are to come before the judges and bring witnesses to testify to the good and virtuous character of the girl; whereon the judges are to chastise him by fining him one hundred shekels and compelling him to keep her as wife—losing the right of divorce.

But in case the parents cannot bring witnesses to testify to the good character of the girl, but the husband proves by witnesses that she has been guilty of whoredom, then she is subject to the penalty of death, as chastity is a fundamental virtue in the Hebrew community.

The Talmud (from which this interpretation is taken, and which, as is well known, contains the authentic and original interpretations of the Biblical Laws as compiled from tradition about the third century) remarks that the word "bethulim;" (which in the English version reads "tokens of virginity") means, "the witnesses of her virginity" or as we should say in English "witnesses of her chaste conduct." And the expression "spread out the cloth," or as the original Hebrew text says, "spread out the garment," is an idiomatic Hebrew expression, corresponding with the words "clear her character." As if her character were exhibited even as a garment without stain, every trait and act being spread out for examination. *The Talmud does not make the hymen or blood a test of virginity;* on the contrary, it mentions the fact (and let modern critics remember it) that there are women, perfectly chaste, who owing to some disease or accident have not this sign of virginity, and mentions a family in which this organ was congenitally absent.

If then we were to translate said Biblical verses freely, according to the idiom of the English language, they would read thus;—If a man take a wife and go in unto her and take a dislike to her and give occasion of speech against her, and

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bring up an evil name upon her saying, I took this woman and married her, but now find people (or witnesses, deny her chastity. Then shall the father and mother of the girl, take and bring forth witnesses to testify to the character of the girl to the elders of the city in the gate. And the father of the girl shall say to the elders, I have given my daughter to this man as a wife, and now that he has taken a dislike to her he speaks against her slanderously, saying, I have found witnesses to deny her chastity, and here now are the witnesses (or proofs not tokens) to testify to the good character of my daughter. So shall they clear her character before the elders of that city. Then shall the elders of the city take that man and chastise him; and they shall fine him a hundred shekels of silver and give them unto the father of the girl, because he hath brought an evil name upon a virgin of Israel, and she shall be his wife; he may not divorce her all his days. I will only remind my hearers that our courts at this day decide the character of a female upon the same proofs.

As my highly esteemed friend, the Rev. Dr. Fischell of this city, to whom I owe the above Talmudical extract (for which I heartily thank him), says: "The women's rights women themselves could not demand greater consideration for their sex, than does the Mosaic Law."

I trust, gentlemen, that I have succeeded in showing that the Jewish statutes in their spirit, no less than in their practice, do not deserve condemnation. Whilst punishing outrageous crimes with death, they protect the innocent. The hymen was never believed by the judges in Israel to be a positive token of virginity nor its absence proof of vice. It excites our admiration that more than 2000 years ago, medical jurisprudence among the Jews upon this point at least had reached a point of perfection to which science in the latter half of the 19th century, labors to bring it, among the most enlightened nations of the earth.