

**Constipation : its causes and consequences with some hints for its prevention and cure / by a country clergyman.**

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Country clergyman.

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**CONSTIPATION:**

ITS

CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES;

WITH SOME HINTS FOR ITS

PREVENTION AND CURE.

BY

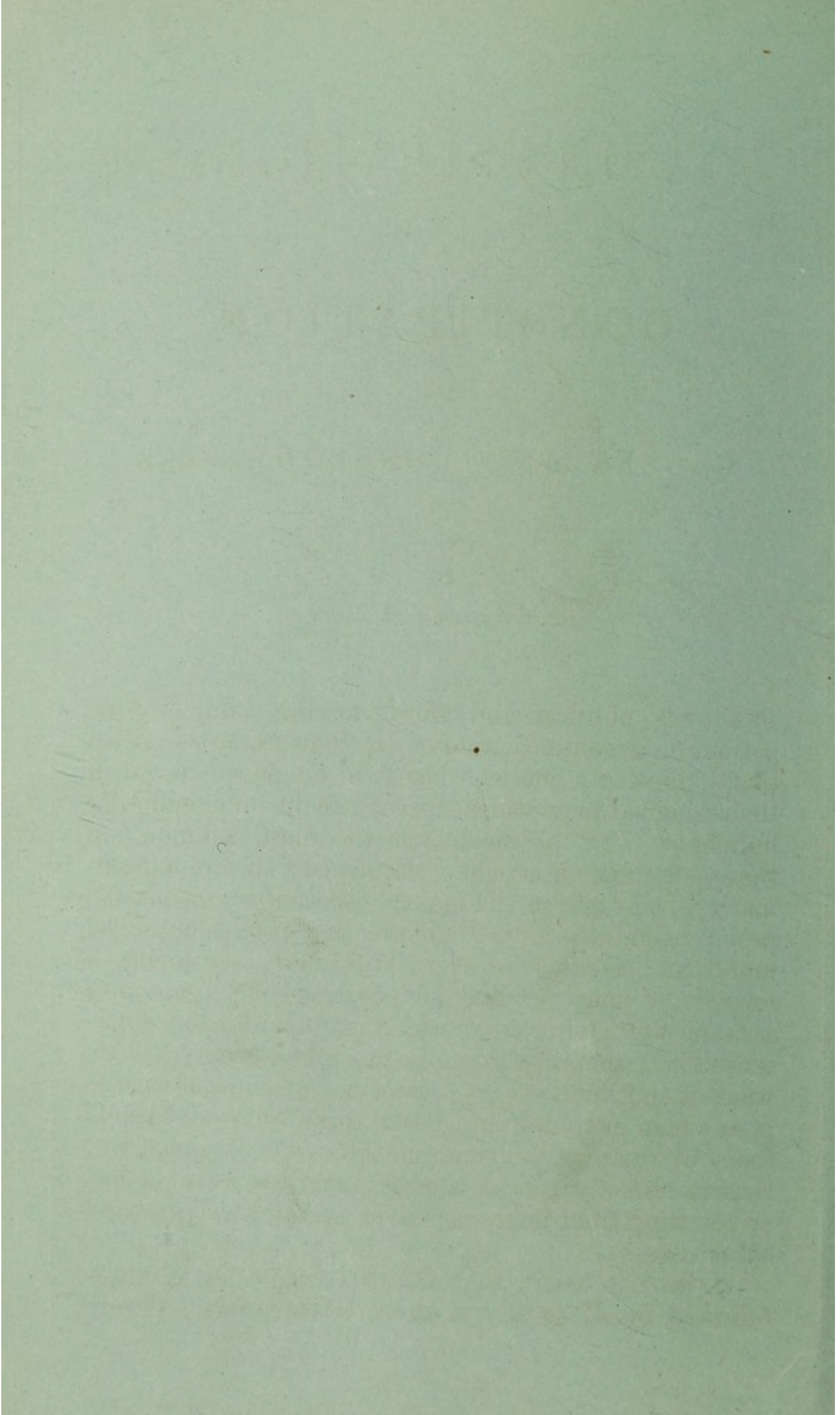
A COUNTRY CLERGYMAN.

LONDON:

BAILLIÈRE, TINDALL, & COX, 20 KING WILLIAM STREET, W.C.

1871.

*One Shilling.*





# CONSTIPATION,

ITS

CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES,

*&c., &c.*

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THE evils, physical and moral, arising from Constipation, or a confined state of the bowels, are so great, that I think any one who has it in his power to aid in their removal may confer a great benefit upon suffering humanity. Of physical evils the most common are these—frequent headache; flatulence; disordered stomach; bad taste in the mouth, especially after meals; prolapsus-ani; piles; foetid breath; toothache. The moral and mental evils are still more distressing,—lowness of spirits; despondency, resulting in absolute assurance of having committed the unpardonable sin—sensuality; inability to apply the mind to any study; want of spirit and energy; utter hopelessness of success in any plan or undertaking,—all these, followed in some cases by insanity, are some of the evil consequences of confirmed Constipation, whether inherited from parents, or resulting from improper use of aperient medicines, or other causes.

I do not assert that Constipation is, in all cases, followed by all or any of these fearful evils. Consti-



tutions vary, and while some may be found capable of going several days without a call of Nature, who seem to suffer no inconvenience thereby, others cannot go for a single day without evacuation of their bowels. I believe, however, that it is only the very aged who can allow Constipation to exist for any length of time, without suffering sensibly from their neglect of Nature's laws. I need not dilate further on the consequences of this evil, as I presume those who read these pages have done so from a sense of the danger of suffering it to go on unchecked. I was, in my boyhood, a great sufferer from this very cause, owing, I believe, in great part, to the existence of worms (ascarides) in my interior. These well-known creatures often cause either Constipation or Relaxation of the Bowels ; in my own case the irritation they caused about the anus, especially towards night, when they seemed to be roused into unusual activity, made my evenings fearfully miserable. The best remedy for these little tormenters, I may remark in passing, is a liberal use of salt, especially to vegetables, which should be used but sparingly, never in an uncooked state, and *sweets* should be strictly forbidden. After some years battling with this great enemy of my peace, Constipation, I remember an old navy-surgeon, who was on friendly terms with our family, suggesting a remedy, to which my parents, after applying almost every medicine to no purpose, gave their consent, and to which, whether willing or no, I was compelled to submit. Invited to his house to spend the day, I was regaled after breakfast with a condiment which had always great attractions for me, a lump of sugar ! upon which had been poured one drop of croton oil (enough by the way, to kill a dog), the effect of this was rapid and complete—a day of successive, or rather alternate, vomiting and purging, was the immediate result of the well-timed dose, which I believe, did me great present and lasting benefit. I should hesitate to advise this course in ordinary cases, but I should think that in



severe cases of costiveness, such as mine was, after all other remedies had been tried in vain, a similar dose might be most effective, if not too powerful. Some of the simpler means to *avoid*, rather than cure this most serious and sometimes fatal ailment, may now be enumerated; the results given will mostly be the fruits of personal experience: one most simple, yet frequently recommended, method of ensuring a regular diurnal visit to the temple of Cloacina, is the drinking a tumbler of cold water at bed-time, followed by another in the morning. With some persons so large a body of liquid is apt to create flatulence, and other disturbance, and in my own case I don't think it has proved successful, the result may depend in part upon the *quality* of the water, which if impregnated with chalk or iron, as is the case with *hard* water, may cause the evil it is intended to remedy. A better, and certainly more palatable remedy, is one of which I can speak hopefully from my own experience, confirmed by that of an old clergyman, who first recommended it, and that is a cup of hot tea taken very early in the morning, the effects of which were sometimes so inconveniently rapid that I often had to make a hurried toilet. I may add here that the cup of tea is a most valuable remedy for cold, especially in its earlier stages. Whenever you have reason to fear, from being exposed to severe draughts, after being very hot, or from sitting still in wet clothes, or sleeping in a damp bed, that you have caught cold—a fact which makes itself known by chilliness of body, sneezing, running at the nose, &c.—you cannot do better than retire early to bed, after putting your feet in hot water, as hot as you can bear it, for the space of twenty minutes, then taking some sweet spirits of nitre or other sudorific, followed by a bason of oatmeal-gruel the last thing before going to sleep, and a cup of hot tea in the morning, which last has the most powerful effect in promoting the efficiency of the sudorific remedies made use of the previous



evening. I need hardly recommend what now I believe is a most usual part of the furniture of the dressing room—the sponge bath, followed by a vigorous application of the rough towel or horse-hair glove. I believe this to be a most effective tonic; a preservative against cold, rheumatic affections, and indeed most of the ills to which flesh is heir. In cases where it really agrees with the constitution, there results from its use a pleasant glow of warmth over the whole body, cheerfulness of mind, and various good effects “too numerous to mention.” When a chilly feeling follows upon its use, or languor and want of energy, or a sense of weariness, the bath had better be discontinued, or a tepid bath substituted at first for the cold.

I would advise those suffering from confined bowels to use in moderation vegetable diet, especially greens of all descriptions, thoroughly boiled (cabbages and other kinds of vegetables are too often eaten in a half-cooked, “cranchy” state), ripe fruit in its season; but the effects of these vary so much, that no law can be laid down which could apply to every case. I have often known fruits to produce the very opposite effect to that which they were expected to confer. The common dried currant, as used in plum-puddings, cakes, &c., I have found most efficacious, while three or four figs eaten at night, followed by a tumblerful of hot water, has often ensured a timely visit to the family cloaca on the ensuing morning. Stewed prunes are another favourite remedy, and when combined with senna, do not often fail of the desired effect. Baked apples I can also strongly recommend, also treacle in its various forms and combinations, as, *e.g.*, toffee, gingerbread, the Yorkshire Parkin,—a kind of gingerbread with but little of the ginger, composed chiefly of flour, treacle, and oatmeal. Coarse or brown sugar will be found more relaxing than white; honey suits some persons. It is difficult, however, to lay down any rules with regard to diet that shall be suitable for



all constitutions. I remember a time in my own life when I never dare partake of cheese in consequence of its binding effect. On speaking of this to a medical man, he said that in his case, where cheese disagreed with him, it had just the opposite effect! Now, however, I do not find that cheese partaken of, however freely, has any pernicious consequences.

One most important method of securing a regular evacuation of the bowels is to have some regular fixed period for visiting the closet, which should, if possible, never be departed from. It often happens that from sheer idleness, or sloth, or self-indulgence, the feeling which prompts one to seek relief is disregarded, the desire to go on reading to the end of a chapter in some interesting book, the wish to finish a letter, or the visit of a friend, may have interfered with the customary visit to the w.c. at the usual hour. The natural promptings once disregarded do not always repeat themselves; and the postponing what ought to be done as soon as the desire is felt to a more convenient season often proves the commencement of a habit of Constipation, which it is far easier to contract than it is to cure. A feeling of delicacy also on the part of the female often leads to very pernicious consequences. The place of resort is apt to be pre-occupied by others, or placed in so prominent a situation as to be difficult of access without being witnessed by others; and they who would secure the health of their families ought, when seeking a change of residence, either permanent or temporary, to make every inquiry about the situs of the closet, and to see that it be so placed that it may be made use of without the risk of being seen. A good arrangement is to have a kind of ante-room or vestibule leading to the more private apartment, in which boots and shoes may be kept, great coats, umbrellas, and the like, so that persons may be seen going to or coming from it without any knowledge being given of the object for which they resorted thither.



Another hint may be of use. On first adopting the habit of regular use of the w. c., it may be well to spend a certain time—say a quarter-of-an-hour—in the position favourable to the expulsion of the alvine contents. Excessive straining should be carefully avoided, as liable to lead to so many evils. Let not the mind and thought be given too exclusively to the particular object for which you went there : a certain fear lest you should not succeed in your endeavour often brings about the very result which was dreaded. In order to avoid this, it may be well to read some amusing book, which may tend, in a measure, to divert the thoughts. I remember once, while staying in the house of a physician of some experience, to have noticed in his w.c. a shelf of books of a light and amusing character, and a small table placed within reach of the occupant of the tribunal, upon which books were placed. The only evil likely to result from this is, that some who resort thither may be tempted to occupy the seat rather longer than is good for themselves or convenient for the other inmates of the house. A “run upon the bank” is often attended with unpleasant consequences. Among the causes which may bring about a torpid, sluggish state of the bowels may be named indulgence in sleep, or lying in bed late. The use of indigestible food, such as pastry, cheese, new or underbaked bread, hot buttered rolls, are a luxury which had better be avoided, also hard-boiled eggs, jellies, want of exercise, too warm or ill-ventilated rooms, impure water. To remedy this last evil, the use of some really effective filter may be strongly urged ; and rain water, after passing through it to rid it of any particles which may have fallen into it, will be found the best for general use. Hard spring water, though more palatable and, probably, to some constitutions more wholesome, is to the sufferer from Constipation, a deadly enemy. As to the use of brown bread, about which there is much difference of opinion, it may be



generally recommended as tending to promote the peristaltic movement of the bowels. Indeed, some persons suffer so much from relaxation after its use, that they are obliged to discontinue it. When there is any tenderness in the interior from piles, I think the particles of bran in the brown bread tend to produce irritation. The same may be said of the various preparations of oatmeal,—porridge, oatcake, puddings, &c., which, but for this, would be valuable agents in promoting healthful condition of the bowels. As an enemy to smoke in every shape, and tobacco, whether chewed, snuffed, or smoked, I would not willingly say a word in praise of that stinking compound. I cannot, however, blind my eyes to the fact which is, I believe, acknowledged by all, that a whiff or two after breakfast does tend very materially to enforce the necessity of the morning call. I have little more to add to what I have said already as to the evils consequent upon Constipation, and the remedies prescribed for its removal. It is so closely connected with our bodily ease, our physical comfort, our spiritual life, that its importance can hardly, I think, be overrated.

The constitutionally irritable, the despondent and gloomy, those who take a dark view of everything that happens to them, owe much of their unhappiness and discomfort to a neglect of the ordinary methods to ensure a regular evacuation of the bowels. As many a true thing is often said in joke, so is it true that a dose of castor oil or other aperient has often been the best cure for ill-temper or moroseness. Graver evils still, such as I have glanced at briefly already, and which a false delicacy hinders me from enlarging upon, often owe their origin, or at any rate are fostered and increased by inattention to this fertile source of evil. Any how, at the risk of offending ears polite, I feel bound to say that *physical* purity such as cannot always be secured even when the mind is free from all thought of impurity, can best be ensured by regularity



in the worship paid to the goddess Cloacina. While no doubt a great deal may be done by the use of attention to diet, regular exercise, cold bathing, and the like, we must not forget that much injury may be done by our endeavouring to cure ourselves in extreme cases without the aid of the medical practitioner. Often too delays are dangerous, from too long dallying with the evil; it sometimes gains such a hold, that it is difficult to resist it successfully. It is a most mistaken economy which prompts us to defer "Sending for the Doctor."

I have no desire to add to what I have said by giving a list of the various specifics prescribed for the prevention or cure of the disease which I have made the subject of my little *brochure*. In all difficult cases where Constipation cannot be removed by one of the ordinary means, such as I have named, recourse must be had to a duly qualified medical man. I cannot, however, refrain from giving my most hearty recommendation to a remedy at once pleasant and effective, to which my attention has recently been directed, and which I have found beneficial in my own case, and in that of another, who had been a greater sufferer than myself. I had always a great prejudice against what are called "Quack," or Patent Medicines, but the "Tamar Indien," as it is called, is so palatable to the taste, being made in the form of a confection coated with chocolate, and besides so beneficial in its effects, that I feel my advice on the subject would be very imperfect if it did not include a strong recommendation of this remedy. I have no idea what it is made of, but I believe that it is a mild, safe, yet effective aperient, containing no irritating or injurious drugs, and as such especially suited to weak stomachs and patients suffering from hæmorrhoids or piles. I shall esteem it a favour if those who have tried this remedy would acquaint me with the success which has attended the use of it.



One word, in conclusion, to those who may imagine that, because as yet no sensible, harm has resulted from their neglect of the interior, they may safely "let well alone." Happily for most persons, the effects of Constipation are so soon experienced, that they are almost forced in spite of themselves to seek a remedy, and ensure themselves if possible against a return of the evil, just as a foul smell warns us of the escape of gas in some part of our dwelling, and forces us to seek some remedy before so large an accumulation of the obnoxious flavour has occurred as to endanger the safety of the inmates. So tainted breath, foul moisture exuding from the pores of the skin, headache, dulness of the intellect, low spirits, and laziness of body, and other ills, may give us timely warning of the danger to which we are exposed, and yet when these do not exist, we must not suppose there is no poison permeating through our whole system, emanating from the load of corrupt and foetid matter which we carry about with us, and which obedience to Nature's laws would lead us to get rid of as soon as it is in a fit state for expulsion. As a Minister of Christ, I should be unfaithful to my trust, if I did not warn those who would keep themselves pure, and glorify God both in their bodies and their spirits which are His, and who remember that their bodies are the Temples of the Holy Ghost, the dwelling places of the Triune God, that one great help towards physical or bodily, as well as mental purity, is not only to restrain the eye from gazing on objects which may excite improper desire, but also by fasting and moderate diet, by strict attention to the laws of Nature, which require imperatively regular daily expulsion of food we eat when converted into fæces, "To keep under our bodies and bring them into subjection, lest by any means we should become castaways." If any doubt that the attention to the state of the bowels is so closely connected with our moral and spiritual



condition, as I have asserted, I would refer them to an excellent little work by Dr. Brown, of Edinboro', who tells us among much of a very interesting and improving character, for which I would refer my readers to the book itself, that "Many years ago, an odd old man at Greenock, left at his death a number of sealed packets to his friends, and on opening them, they found a Bible, £50, and a box of pills, and the words 'Fear God, and *keep your bowels open.*' It was good advice, though it might have been more decorously worded. If you were a doctor, you would be astonished how many violent diseases of the mind, as well as of the body, are produced by irregularity of the bowels. Many years ago an old minister near Linlithgow, was wakened out of his sleep to go to see a great lady who was thought dying, and whose mind was in dreadful despair, and who wished to see him. The old man, rubbing his eyes and pushing up his nightcap said, 'And when were her ladyship's bowels opened?' And on finding, after some enquiry, that they were greatly in arrears, 'I thocht sae; rox me ower that pill box on the chimney piece, and gie my compliments to Leddy Margaret, and tell her to tak the twa pills, and I'll be ower by-and-bye mysel.' They did as he bade them. *They did their* duty, and the pills did *theirs*, and her leddyship was relieved, and she was able at breakfast time to profit by the christian advice of the good old man."

Although this does not pretend to anything like a complete treatise on the subject to which it refers, I could not well omit all mention of the enema or clyster which often proves such an invaluable assistant when aperient medicines are required. A simple injection of warm water thrown up by means of the instrument, and retained for a few moments, will generally result in a free and copious relief, and laxative medicines of various kinds are often applied in this way with immense benefit. The use of this



means, however, I should advise to be restricted, if possible, to the evening, as some little local uneasiness sometimes follows, which renders a recumbent position and rest in bed very acceptable.

One more hint in conclusion. Those who are inclined to Constipation, will find it advantageous to employ the same posture when in the Temple of Cloacina — alias the w.c., as they would perforce employ when retiring to some sequestered spot, sub Jove, for the purpose of evacuating the bowels. This seems to give great power over the sphincter muscles. (I am no anatomist, but I believe this to be the correct word.) This reminds me of an anecdote once recorded by one who is now a learned divine. He was with a reading party in some out-of-the-way spot, I think, in Scotland, and one of the number being desirous of paying his diurnal visit, after much hesitation enquired of the lassie who waited upon them (there being no male attendant)—“Where was the house of convenience?” the girl, in reply, pointed to an open court or back yard, and said, “Anywhere there! anywhere there!” I am not sure, that after all, this is not the most healthy, if not the most decorous method; it is certainly Scriptural, of complying with the demands of Nature. You avoid thereby the horrible stench always to be inhaled in closely confined privies, where there is no means for the disgusting aroma to escape. “Take with you your paddle upon your weapon,” and cover up with dry soil what you have deposited— somewhat after the manner of Moule’s earth closets— and you preserve the air from infection, you treasure up instead of throwing away what may prove of untold benefit to the farmer, and besides, as I have said, the *posture* will be more conducive to the due performance of your daily duty, than the more easy position of a sitter upon the perforated board.

The inhabitants of the Celestial Empire who, in this respect are wiser than we are, carefully treasure up



every fragment of the human excreta. We throw away thousands of pounds of the richest fertilizing matter every year by the use of the w.c. in our houses.

Those who are curious on such matters, I would refer to a singular treatise, crammed full of all kinds of learning, entitled : "Tricænum Christi ; or, The Threefold Supper of Christ on the Night that He was Betrayed." Explained by Edward Kellett, D.D., Canon of Exeter. London, 1641. He takes occasion from speaking against the profaners of Churchyards, to enlarge upon the highest of the authorities in Exeter in allowing filthy deposits to pollute the sacred enclosure. I could not quote his language on the subject without offending grievously against modern delicacy.

If it be needful to defend myself as a clergyman from using somewhat free language on the subject, and, indeed, from publishing my thoughts upon such a matter at all, I can safely appeal to Holy Scripture itself as a sufficient justification for the step which I have taken in the interests of suffering humanity.\* A clergyman of the Church of England invented the well-known earth closet system, which goes by his name ; and a great and well-known Divine of our Church has not shrunk from naming it as one powerful incentive to lowering the pride of our hearts that "our body is weak and impure, sending out more uncleannesses from its several sinks than could be endured if they were not necessary and natural, and we are forced to pass that through our mouths which, as soon as we see on the ground, we loathe like rottenness and vomiting."—JER. TAYLOR, *Holy Living*.

Good Bishop Hall uses language not unlike that of Jeremy Taylor, which I have quoted above: "When I consider my soul, I could be proud to think of how divine a nature and quality it is ; but when I cast

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\* See Deut. xxiii., 12, 13.



down my eyes to my body, and see what loathsome matter issues from the nostrils, ears, pores, and other passages, I am justly ashamed to think that so excellent a guest dwells but in a mere cleanly dunghill.”—“Meditations,” 67.

I believe that there is no class of men so subject to the distressing complaint of which I have ventured to write as the clergy, often compelled to lead sedentary lives, spending much of their time in their libraries, and their minds engaged on their studies, or those in large towns often called away by some sudden emergency, so as to neglect *regular* attention to the duty which I have spoken of in these pages. I believe there are none who more stand in need of hints as to the better way of performing this duty, the neglect of which may lead to so many, and such varied evil consequences. Should any into whose hands this little work may fall, be desirous of making any improvements or addition to it, I can only say in conclusion that any hints or suggestions will be most gratefully accepted by the author.

“Si quid novisti rectius istis Candidus imperti,  
Si non his utere mecum.”

Ministers of Christ, if this little *brochure* should fall into the hands of any of your number, let me earnestly and affectionately intreat you to pay attention to the advice I have endeavoured to give you as the result, for the most part, of my own actual experience. There is great need for you, above all other men, to maintain at all times a free, genial, and cheerful deportment towards all with whom you may have to do. A constant depression of spirits, want of energy, and life in carrying on your ministerial duties, and outward appearance of austerity and gloom, will prove a great obstacle to success in your pastoral work, and will prejudice others against the religion which you profess; and while the state of your own heart which you know better than others, or the apparently hopelessness of



influencing for good many of those over whom you are placed, in the Lord, must tend to lower and depress your spirits, very much of that depression may be prevented by use of the advice here given you. Health of body will be secured to you, the liver, the stomach, and the brain, and all the complex, yet beautifully arranged machinery of the inward man, will be doing their work, according to the plan of the Great Master builder. This will lead to that evenness of temper, that cheerfulness of spirit, that firm assurance of hope that can alone make the sorrows of life tolerable, and may form some feeble foretaste of that never-ending happiness which is in store for God's people hereafter.

It may be that in your intercourse with your parishioners in that diligent visiting of the sick, and the whole, to which you are pledged, you may meet with some who need sound advice on the subject upon which this pamphlet treats. When there is much spiritual depression, there may be great need to search narrowly into the causes for such distressing symptoms, to see if there be not some sin unrepented of, and so unpardoned, that may be at the bottom; yet after all it may be unwise to overlook causes of a mere physical nature, to omit making some enquiry into the bodily health of the victim to low and desponding thoughts, and to see whether remedies, such as those which I have suggested, may not be successfully applied to the removal of that miserable dejection of spirit which goes far to make life itself a burden, and to which the most severe bodily pain is but a trifle.

I must not omit to mention that constant, regular exercise of some kind must be resorted to by those who would enjoy a cheerfulness of mind resulting from a healthful state of body. Find time in the course of every day, if possible, for some walking exercise. Have your home at some little distance from the scene of your daily labours, so as to make the exercise essential in order to carry on the business on which you are



engaged. It is not altogether conducive to health in the clergy to have, as is so often the case, the house, church, and schools all so closely united together, as that little or no walking is required in order to perform the duties necessary in each. The daily "constitutional," which, in their College days, most men regularly indulge in, should not be neglected in after years. When this cannot be had, an hour's good hard work in the garden or field, such as digging, a row on the water (if this be available), horse exercise, or a game at cricket with the choir boys, may be found a more agreeable and not less effective substitute. Any how, have *exercise*. The temptation to men of literary habits, and who have the great luxury of a well-furnished library or study, to spend their whole time by the fireside, should be resisted *vi et armis*. We are pledged, solemnly pledged to be "diligent in prayer, and in reading the Holy Scriptures, and in such studies as help to the knowledge of the same;" but it is no less a duty incumbent upon us to look to the health of our bodily frames, in order to the more efficient and cheerful performance of our daily business, that we may not only not do what our hand findeth to do in a lifeless, mechanical spirit, but may do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men; and, being kept from *all things that may hurt us*, may be ready, both in body and soul, to *cheerfully* accomplish whatever our Divine Master would have us to do.

One hint may be of use as to the intimate connexion between the nerves and brain, and all that complex machinery of the body which has to do with Constipation. For myself, being of a somewhat nervous temperament, the weekly recurrence of that day which, to us of the clergy at best is as far as possible from being a day of *rest*, always brings with it a (sometimes inconveniently) relaxed state of the bowels; and the anticipation of a railway journey almost invariably induces in the early morning an early visit to the resi-



dence of Mrs. Jones, which was the *sobriquet* given in my childish days to what I have heard others call the "coffee-house!" This nervous affection may be seen in cases of children who, when punished with the rod, are known sometimes to meet with an accident; and it is said of King James, that in witnessing the play called *Ignoramus* he was so delighted that "*spectando and ridendo tantum non cacatus.*" It is but natural that this should be followed by a reaction for which it is well that we should be prepared. I remember once consulting a chemist for some remedy for Constipation, after a long journey into a distant county, and he said that the journey and the change together were quite sufficient to account for the change wrought in the interior; another hint which I have learned from another knight of the pestle and mortar may be worth knowing; I went into his shop for the purpose of taking a dose of some medicine which I required, and upon asking, as I usually do, for some water to drink in order to take away the nasty taste out of my mouth, he cautioned me against diluting in this way the medicine I was taking, as he assured me it would interfere with its operating upon the system. I have ever since carefully acted up to his suggestion and borne with the temporary unpleasantness rather than lessen or destroy the effect of the medicine.