

WHAT CONSTITUTES SEXUAL INTEMPER-  
ANCE?\*

By W. J. S. STEWART, M. D.,  
ACTING ASSISTANT SURGEON, UNITED STATES ARMY.

THE statements with regard to the customary brutality of man in general, in his sexual relations with the partner of his earthly joys, as published in your issue for January 5, 1901, in an article entitled Sexual Intemperance, by Jennie G. Drennan, M. D., of St. Thomas, Ontario, Canada, which I have just read, while interesting, are certainly worthy of a passing comment or two.

It is not by any means absolutely clear to the one who reads, just what the writer of the article means by "sex-

\*A comment on an article entitled Sexual Intemperance, by Jennie G. Drennan, M. D., in the *New York Medical Journal* for January 5, 1901.

ual intemperance." From the text, however, on page 20, it would seem to be implied that only the period when "the physiology of the female generative organs points" to sexual intercourse is the fitting time for sexual union; in other words, that time best fitted for the propagation of the species, and as the author is arguing from analogy with lower animal life, it is presumable that the term sexual intemperance is meant to designate cohabitation at any other time than during ovulation on the part of the female, and certainly during the periods of pregnancy and lactation.

I have no desire to criticise the statements made with regard to sexual union during pregnancy, more especially during the later period of pregnancy described. I only trust that the average husband has more respect for his partner's pleasure and health than thus to risk destroying either. The advice and information on this subject afforded by reputable physicians to-day living, and those long dead, has always been given when asked for, and has been either followed out or rejected. Even in the latter case, I doubt if the asserted results of sickness, insanity, deformity, and imbecility have been very widespread. There is in the majority of men, even when uncivilized, a certain sense of fair-mindedness and decency which is a factor in such matters.

In regard, however, to the propriety or necessity for abstinence of this character during the period of lactation, it would appear that this subject has assumed undue proportion in the eyes of the writer, carried away, as she is, by her principle that ovulation in the female is the only *raison d'être* for cohabitation. What possible injury to the wife or harm to the husband can arise from the rational use of their mutual privileges during this season? I advisedly employ the word use, as I do not imagine any one is speaking of any great sexual abuse; and certainly there is no reference to any sexual perversion in the writer's paper.

The cessation of ovulation in the average woman during the period of lactation was probably originally designed so that she might have, as it were, a space for recuperation and enjoyment after one gestation, before beginning another, and the nature of the human animal—male and female—being, even in those early days, much as it is now, probably it was deemed safest to insure this period of rest by causing sterility, in most cases, in the female during this time.

Allowing, in accordance with the wishes of Dr. Drennan, that married people should abstain from sexual union throughout the woman's pregnancy and the period of lactation following, in all say twenty consecutive months, at the least, does she not think that such periods of debarment from the sexual privileges conferred by marriage would be more than trying to mutual fidelity and affection and would fill the bars of the divorce court even more full than they are at present?

It is possible, perhaps, that I have misunderstood Dr. Drennan when I imagine that she means that the period

of lactation should be one of abstinence from sexual intercourse. She implies that it should be abstained from until the infant is "capable of subsisting on other than mother's food"! After all, this period does not literally mean that of lactation and may be said to be at an end as soon as begun. Children, fortunately, are always capable of subsistence by other means than that of a woman's breast.

Dr. Drennan overlooks something when she says: "If in the lower animals there is a time for sexual union, why not so with man?" The genus *homo* is not quite physiologically and psychologically the analogue of the lower animals. In the females of the lower animals—let us take the common domesticated animals for example—there is certainly a well-marked period during which the subject submits or responds to sexual union with her mate (and in the majority of cases fecundation is the result), but it only needs a very casual observer to perceive that there is no such fixed period on the part of the males of the same species. They apparently resemble their human relatives in this respect.

This is a case of the female at certain periods submitting to, allowing, and perhaps responding to, the advances of the male, although it is fair to presume that by both parties the act is attended with—as the writer puts it—"a certain amount of satisfaction," even among the beasts.

In regard to this period—that of ovulation—in women being the proper time for sexual union, it is only necessary to recall the contrary opinion of peoples the world over, *e. g.*, the provisions of the old Mosaic law, although physiologically, and also from analogy with lower animals, this is the most favorable period for the propagation of the human species. However, the world has been well peopled so far, and a due regard to the inviolability of women at this period fairly well observed.

But laying aside, in the consideration of the specified period for sexual union of the females of the lower animals, the question of that being the only period when the female will receive the male, the lower animals show another marked difference from the human species, in that this time is also for them the period when the female and the male are most attractive to each other. The courtship of birds and many animals is not at all one-sided, as naturalists know well.

This has, however, no true analogy in the case of men and women, for the woman is at all times, speaking broadly, a subject of sexual attraction for the man, and at all times—save usually at that period of ovulation referred to above, and this by reason of custom and knowledge of the fact that fecundation is more apt to occur then—willing to receive his sexual company; that is to say, that, save in certain not well-defined degrees in sporadic cases, she is equally ready at one time as at another, so far as any physiological process may be concerned, to enter into sexual union with him.

It seems to me, therefore, that it is mainly the *abso-*

lute refusal of the female, together with the lack of attraction on her part for the male, when not ovulating (both reasons may be really essentially the same), which is the barrier to sexual union among the lower animals at other than the fixed periods of the female. Well-regulated morals, superior intelligence, and thoughtfulness for the partner's welfare are certainly not factors in this practically enforced continence.

As stated above, we mortals are, alas! not constructed on these lines. The human female was created with, or has advanced by evolution to, the ability and willingness for sexual union at other than ovulation periods. Why this is so, it would be impossible to conjecture, unless it be that sexual union in the human family might be imagined to have for its purpose more than the one object of the propagation of species.

To the ordinary thinker this would seem to be the case. Dr. Drennan compares the sexual function to that of digestion—functions to be used only for their usefulness in producing certain results; in the one case, offspring; in the other, nourishment.

The taste buds and sense of taste are certainly not necessary to the function of digestion, although pleasant adjuncts thereto. Digestion could have been carried on just as well without them, but a great deal of harmless pleasure would thus have been lost to men and women the world over. Gormandizers and epicures from the earliest days may have abused this pleasure, as the drunkard has abused his taste for spirits, but that is no reason why we—the great majority after all—should hesitate before partaking of our "hot bird and small cold bottle" (when we are lucky enough to be able to satisfy our taste), on the plea of palatability not being necessary to digestive procedures.

And in the same way, in the majority of cases, the sexual privileges afforded by marriage, while often not indulged in for the express purpose or with any intention of propagating the species, ought to be quite as harmless morally or physically as the pleasure afforded by the repast referred to. It is a grave mistake to abuse one's digestion, and it is quite as grave a one to abuse one's own reproductive organs or those of others; but it is more than probable that they are hardly abused by either party, or the woman injured, to the extent inferable from the wording of the article under consideration, although as an average thing these same marriage privileges are enjoyed at times other than that designated by the writer, and probably more frequently.

The inference that women are forced—made slaves sexually by their brutal husbands—is, of course, a different matter, and one in which the woman has a just cause for complaint wherever it occurs. There are also men who beat, poison, and otherwise maltreat their wives, but they are *certainly* not in the majority.

Many people, however, are doubtless forced into much that they might have succeeded in avoiding altogether had their wills been a trifle stronger, their influence with

the suggester of the unpalatable act a little greater, or their own secret desires a little weaker. *Non omnes dormiunt, qui oculos clausos habent* has been remarked of alleged cases of rape, where the woman alleged that she had been ravished while sleeping. There are more ways of saying "no" than one. The average man is *not* a brute, and has some degree of thoughtfulness for his wife's pleasure, even when balanced against his own sexual desires.

I will not touch on the desire of women "to rid themselves of this function of the propagation of species" or upon the more serious one of abortion referred to by Dr. Drennan, beyond saying that probably to the thoughts of most people entering the married condition this propagation of species and sexual union—although closely allied subjects physiologically—are entirely different matters.

The former is a possible result of the latter, not its end and object, as seen by them. Nevertheless, it has not been the general experience of practitioners that in anything like the majority of cases there is any lasting grievance on the part of the *married* female when fecundation has followed cohabitation.

As is well known, dissatisfaction with maternity among *married* women is an evil more common in what are known as the upper walks of life than in the great masses of the world's population, and even then it would seem that the word maternity is a wrong one to use in this connection; dissatisfaction with the *state of pregnancy* and its attendant inconveniences, and enforced self-denials, especially among young pregnant women, would be a truer arraignment against the woman, as there are happily but few mothers who do not ultimately rejoice that "a son is born into the world."

Dr. Drennan is certainly correct in implying that the prevailing ignorance on these matters of physiological structure of the sexual organs, and on the importance of their proper use and abuse, is greatly to be deplored; but it is a dearth of knowledge that, let us hope, will be gradually diminished by the growth of more general information with regard to the structure and *modus operandi* of our earthly tabernacles.

However, that day is yet far away—and it will be a pity, from a moral, ethical, and psychological standpoint (and probably from a physiological one as well), if it ever arrives—when the newly married couple shall commence housekeeping with a calendar marked as to physiologically appropriate dates for sexual union.

But if ever it should arrive, as a result of the great enlightenment of our race, it is fair to presume that, by that date, adaptation in our nature and structure will also have occurred, by which means the human being will have been changed so as to allow of the inception and continuance of such a delectable state of affairs.

Otherwise the aforesaid marked calendar will, by mutual consent of all parties concerned, be relegated to the waste paper basket without delay.

ARGAO, CEBU, PHILIPPINE ISLANDS.