Mentruation

The female, after she has attained to a certain age, is subject to a periodical sanguineous discharge from the genitalia, which has its source in the womb and is called variously the Menstrum, menstrua, Catamenia, and the function is called menstruation. It is a physiological function peculiar to the human female. It is common to all women in all countries, in all climates and in all conditions of society, from the most barbarous to the most highly civilized. Its appearance denotes that the female is capable of being impregnated. It is sometimes ushered in suddenly, but, for the most part, it is preceded by certain precursory signs.
The young girl, having attained to a certain age and having the other usual marks or signs of puberty, finds herself the victim of lassitude and weariness, of weight and fulness in the lower part of the abdomen, of pain in the lumbar and sacral regions and sometimes of various nervous disturbances.

These symptoms, having continued for a week, more or less, are followed by a discharge at first mucous, but soon becoming sanguineous and after continuing for a few days gradually disappears, becoming less sanguineous until it assumes the character of mucus and then ceases—this constitutes her first show or menstrual epoch.

Menstruation, having once occurred,
returns very regularly, generally every twenty-eighth day, or once every lunar month, for a period of thirty years, unless interrupted by pregnancy, lactation or disease. It is accompanied at each period by the same phenomena (less marked) which first ushered it in.

The age, at which the function of menstruation is set up, is about the point nine or fifteenth year in this country. The precise time, however, at which it appears, is subject to some variation, even within the limits of health. It frequently occurs as early as the twelfth, or thirteenth year. Indeed, instances of occurrence in infancy and childhood are recorded by good and reliable authority. These latter cases are very rare. On the other hand, it may be postponed or retarded to the eighteenth, or even to the twentieth year.
Climate is said to exercise some influence upon this discharge, both with regard to the time of its appearance and the quantity at each period. It is held that the warmer the climate, the earlier the menstrua appears and the greater the quantity. But, perhaps, the customs prevalent in warm climates have more influence upon this function than the mere climate. Luxurious and indolent habits accelerate its appearance, while those of a contrary habit retard it. The custom of early marriage will also hasten the appearance of the menstrua. So also, I believe, will continued association with the opposite sex.

But having once become regular, menstruation continues with great regularity until (unless interrupted by the causes before mentioned) the fortieth or forty-fifth year, about which time it finally ceases and with it the aptitude to become fecundated.
This period has been termed the critical time of woman's life, but it is now known that the female is not any more subject to disease at this time than she is for a few years immediately preceding or succeeding it. The period of the cessation of the Catamenia is also subject to variation. Frequently it ceases much earlier and as often postpones a few years. The earlier a woman begins to the earlier, as a general rule, the ceases and vice versa—her Menstrual years being about thirty. The quantity of the discharge is different in different females. The average amount is from three to six ounces.

The discharge continues from three to eight days at each period. As before remarked, Menstruation occurs once every twenty-eight days. But the interval is also different in some women. Some have a show every two, or
three weeks, while others, again, have a show every five or six weeks. But whatever may be the length of the interval, the periods are regular when once established. Thus we see that each female has a law of her own—i.e., she has a time to begin to menstruate, a time to cease. She observes a certain interval—throws off a certain amount at each period. The law of periodicity is general—it applies to all.

What is the efficient cause of menstruation? This is a question, about which there has been much speculation among writers upon this subject. Some have ascribed it to lunar influence and others to general plethora. But it is plain that the moon exercises no such influence; for if it did, then we should expect to find all females menstruating during some particular period of the moon, whereas we know that no such
law obtains, but that some are just beginning
others, ending their show throughout the whole
month, so that there is no day, perhaps, in the
which there is not some female menstruating.
It is equally plain that general plethoria has
no determining influence, since we see that
some of the most delicate females perform
this function with great regularity.
And, again, we know that venerealism does
not prevent the return of the menes, even
though blood is abstracted in pretty precise
quantities a short time before the expected
return.

The efficient cause of menstruation is
inherent in the ovaries. This is confirmed
by the fact, that the absence of the ovaries
is in every case attended with the non
appearance of the menes. All the other
organs of generation may exist in the
fullest perfection; yet if the ovaries are absent, there will be no menstruation.
This is proof indubitable in nature enough to satisfy any mind capable of conviction.
A short time before the appearance of the menses, the ovaries become the seat of an affluxion of blood, which affluxion is extended to all the reproductive organs, causing an engorgement, and of which engorgement the womb partakes largely, as is evinced by the increase weight, fullness, and even pain in the hypogastric region, of which most women complain at this period. For the relief of this engorgement, nature has devised a means of depletion, viz., that of permitting the affluxed blood to escape on the internal surface of the womb. By this means the engorged organs are gradually and effectually relieved and
allowed to resume their previous character.

It is believed and taught by many able
writers that an ovum is thrown off at each menstrual period, and that menstru-
ation is nothing more than the outward
sign that the physiological act of the
maturation and discharge of an ovum, is
performed or in the act of being performed.

In proof of this fact, they assert that
the examination of the ovaries of women,
who died while menstruating or shortly after
has revealed an ovum either litter already
matured and discharged or as far advanced
forward this condition. This is sufficient
proof of the theory or fact, to my mind
provided, subsequent autopsies confirm
those already made. I am inclined to
this belief, notwithstanding high authority
to the contrary—authority too, for which.
I have the highest regard.

According to the above theory, we have a good reason, I think, for the engorgement of the reproductive organs, for when the Graffian vesicle comes to press against the ducts of the ovaries, a point of irritation is set up and according to the old maxim where there is irritation, there will be a flow of blood.

And, perhaps, it is owing to this mode of irritation that bloodletting has so little influence in preventing the discharge making its appearance at the regular period. It does not remove the irritation; hence the engorgement remains until relieved by local bleeding or by menstruation.

This seems plausible to me. But it may not be worth much.

I: Menstruation a hemorrhage or secretion.
This is a question, about which there has been much discussion. Some able writers contend that it is a secretion, while others, equally talented and of great experience and observation, contend with the same tenacity that it is a hemorrhage.

The solution of this question depends upon the nature of the menstrual fluid. If it is blood, there can be no doubt of its being a hemorrhage. On the other hand if it differs from blood in its constituent properties, then it is not a hemorrhage.

Recent analyses prove the menstrual fluid, as obtained directly from the internal surface of the womb without admixture with seminal, to be and identical in its component parts with blood though...
as blood is never secreted it must be a
hemorrhage, or, as some say an exhalation
or an elimination. But as these latter
terms are applied to processes, whereby certain
fluids are separated from the blood and
differing from it in its properties, I think
they are calculated to mislead the mind, and
therefore I prefer the term hemorrhage, as
it conveys with it the nature of the discharge.
Menstruation occurs vicariously sometimes
i.e., proceeds from other surfaces than that
of the womb, as from the ears, eyes, nose, &c.
The system during the flow of the menses
is more irritable and more easily impressed
by morbid causes than during the inter vals;
therefore exposure to cold and damp and too
great mental and corporeal agitation
should be scrupulously avoided.
Like all the other functions of the human organism, menstruation is liable to many
abnormalities and serious disorders, a knowledge of which is of vast importance to the
practitioners of medicine.
Such is a brief and imperfect account of
that physiological function of the female,
the occurrence of which, makes known
to her the fact that she is capable of
fulfilling that high and noble prerogative
for which she was destined, that of
propagating the human race.
I close with the wish, this Thesis, imperfect
as it is, may meet the approbation of a kind
and talented faculty, the labours of which
have been generously given to impart
useful knowledge to those desirous of
learning.