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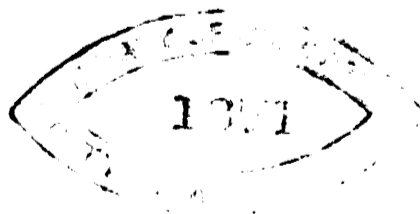
# ESSAY ON FASTING,

AND ON

# ABSTINENCE.



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# ESSAY ON FASTING.



## CHAPTER I.

### *The use of Fasting.*

ABSTINENCE from all nourishment was long a favourite remedy in plethoric diseases among our ancient practitioners of medicine. Patients were ordered to fast two or three days in fevers, dysentery, and other indispositions. This cheap, simple, and vulgar remedy, at length became unfashionable; other medicines of greater cost and mystery wholly eclipsed it; and fasting was heard of only among the temperate, healthy, and industrious part of the community.

Dr. Edward Miller, lately of this city, revived the consideration and utility of this remedy, by publishing an excellent essay on the utility of fasting in the cure of many complaints.—*Med. Rep.*

A reason why this subject has excited my attention more than it otherwise would, is derived from filial attachment to my mother, who always practised, and recommended the use of this remedy to her children when indisposed.

Fasting may be distinguished into three kinds; agreeing with the three kinds of vitality in human nature. The vegetable life in man fasts when it is not supplied with sufficient food and chyle to promote the growth, and support the body. The animal life fasts by self-denial to the animal lusts of hearing, seeing, smelling, tasting, feeling, &c. The spiritual life fasts by not receiving spiritual food. The Jews, under the law, fasted *physically*. Isaiah reproves these fasts when done

through hypocrisy, and urges them to *moral* fasts, which crucify animal lusts, by doing moral benefits: see his 58th chapter. Jesus Christ speaks of *spiritual* fasting, when he says—"Can ye make the children of the bridegroom fast, while the bridegroom is with them?" And Amos mentions it, (ch. 8. 11.) as a famine not of bread or water, but of the words of the Lord; and Jesus said—"man must not live by bread alone, but by every word that cometh out of the mouth of God."

Thus we may perceive that fasts are physical, moral, and metaphysical. The physical should be governed by reason; the moral by revelation; and the metaphysical by Jehovah. But in the following essay, I shall only treat of physical fasts, and leave moral and spiritual fasts to be analyzed by ethical and metaphysical philosophers.

The remedy of fasting appeared hereditary in my mother's family, and by it they avoided the necessity of physic and physicians; to the saving of their fat and their money; and avoiding many unpleasant circumstances. I have also continued the *medicine* with the most satisfactory success.

The rule of fasting, in cases of indisposition from plethora and fulness of habit, is this—"Fast from all food till thou becomest hungry and well, or fast as long as it renders thee stronger and pleasanter; but no longer."

Emetics and cathartics evacuate the stomach violently, and the intestines painfully; but fasting empties both without sickness, violence, or pain. Those debilitate, but this, in plethora, refreshes and invigorates the vital powers.

Venesection and sudorifics diminish the quantity of blood. Fasting, by preventing the hourly addition of chyle, does, in effect, the same thing.

By total, or even partial abstinence from aliment, the stomach and intestines have time to relieve themselves of their burden of ingesta. The system, oppressed with fulness from checked perspiration, or from too full diet, has time to free itself from its depression, by the usual evacuations of urine, fœces, and the excretions.

It appears, page 319. vol. 10. of the Medical and Physical Journal, that the cause of appetite is the gastric

fluid secreted from the stomach. If this secretion is checked or stopped by inflammatory plethora, or by sympathy with the constricted pores of the skin, the stomach will not desire food, and it would be wrong to eat: acidities, dyspepsia, borborygmi, &c. must be the consequence. Hence gastric fluid is given with benefit in dyspepsia, and hence, food remains undigested in fever, for many days.

If cold creates fevers, as Dr. Moses Willard suggests, by producing torpor of the glandular system, which checks the secretions, and plethora is produced, which will over-stimulate the heart and arteries, why should we stimulate the system still more by food;—which, if undigested for several days in fever may ferment or putrify in the bowels, and poison and prostrate the system?

The secretions and excretions are often suppressed by the astringent properties of hearty diet, and stimulant drinks: these operate as anodynes, and cause dullness, chills, and stupefaction; these effects, from too much nutriment, are removed by a contrary mode of diet and regimen. In such cases, I have compared our bodies performing the offices of vitality to a grist mill in the action of grinding. If the mill be fed too copiously from the hopper, the stones become clogged, and burdened, and the motion of the mill is impeded. Cease to feed it for a while, and the stones soon clear themselves, and the wheels regain their accustomed velocity: there is no necessity of removing the impediment by art.

In phlegmasiæ, synochal fevers, catarrhs, dysentery, headach, &c. we evacuate the system by the violence of art, by venesection, emetics, cathartics, and diaphoretics. If these are good, why will not fasting, added to this list, be beneficial? In ordinary cases, it is preferable to any other remedy.

In my indispositions I have fasted from every kind of victuals several days, and grew livelier and stronger; as soon as my appetite returned, I could indulge it, without any farther indisposition.

Let us endeavour to give a reason for such pleasant effects. If too great labour oppresses and depresses

the human body, will not the nervous system, and blood vessels, burdened by an increased plenitude, feel depressing consequences; such as languor, lassitude, chills, anxiety, aches, &c.? Now, if the system, thus burdened and weary, has no occasion to occupy a part of its forces in conducting the preparation of chyle by digestion, it will have them to help and animate it, and make it feel sprightly and vivacious.

The people in the United States of America eat more than is salutary. As their country produces an abundance of all kinds of aliment to indulge their appetites with, which they too frequently excite to a higher degree, by whetting it with spices, spirituous and fermented liquors, the prevalence of inflammatory and plethoric indispositions must naturally be the ultimate consequence.

We may perceive the gluttony of our days, by attending to the abstemious diet of the ancient monks, who lived on about fourteen or fifteen ounces of bread only, with pure water: this, their daily sustenance, would starve our full-fed citizens. The present Bedouens in Arabia, eat still less in a day; their food consisting of six or seven dates in some butter-milk.

The celebrated nobleman of Italy, the abstemious Cornaro, has demonstrated, in himself, the excellent effects of an abstemious manner of living. At seventy years of age, by being over persuaded to increase his food to sixteen ounces of bread in a day, the consequence was dullness and languor, which ended with a pleuritic pain. This, he judged, arose from plethora; and this, from the increase of nutriment; which induced him to fast from all kinds of nourishment, and by so doing, he was speedily cured.

If an increase of his vegetable diet had such an effect, what will our fish, fowl, beef, veal, and bacon do? He drank water; but we drink beers, wines, and spirits. Very inflammatory diseases of various sorts must be the necessary consequences. Almost all our diseases arise from plethora and stimulation.

Captain Riley, in his narrative, states, that many Arabs of the great desert of Zahara, live five centuries; their century is, however, but forty years. But their diet is

principally camel's milk, which is one of the blandest, mildest, and lightest kinds of sustenance.

Our catarrhs, cynanches, teeth-aches, rheumatisms, consumptions, apoplexies, palsies, epilepsies, choleras, dysenteries, yellow fevers, synochas, dyspepsies, diarrhœas, constipations, pneumonias, asthmas, and a host of diseases, too tedious to enumerate, are frequent effects of stimuli and fulness.

For this reason, and because a country can support fifty millions on vegetables, where it could support but one million on a flesh diet of beasts, I have abstained about eight or ten years from the meats of birds and beasts, and avoided the use of ardent liquors. Water is the best of drinks, and is to be preferred to all other beverages. Alcohol, by unnecessarily stimulating the system, heats, inflames, and exhausts it. Hence, a childish activity of the limbs and intellect; inflamed countenance; and, finally, tremors, debility, and premature old age. Too much stimulation in hot clothes, in a hot sun, in hot rooms, and by great and continued exercise, produces similar consequences. Hearty meats are also stimulant, and wear out the vital energy faster than a diet of herbs.

All these stimulants combined are exceedingly pernicious to the vital principle: and intimate to us the propriety of abstemiousness in diet, clothing, heat, drink, and exercises, to preserve our healths, and prolong our years.

Though abstemiousness is a duty, and a preservative of health; and fasting is one of the best remedies in indispositions attended with plethora, fulness, and inflammatory irritation or stupor; yet I would caution my readers against fasting, in an irritable or debilitated state of the system, produced by want of sufficiently nourishing aliment, or by excessive exertion, or by immoderate evacuations of any kind, or by protracted fevers, or by intemperance, and an abundant use of stimuli. To fast here, or use depletion, in such cases, would be very injurious. It would increase the exhaustion, debility, and nervous irritability, pain, and spasm.

Though an excessive use of stimuli is daily used by lovers of alcoholic liquors, of luxuries, and high life; and

though a *sudden* and *total abstinence* from these things have been known to prove mortal, yet I desire these ebrates, epicureans and profligates, for the sake of their own, their country's good, and the salvation of souls, to love more than these the most amiable of all beings, and cease from these evils as fast as is prudent, and learn to do well as rapidly as possible. For when fevers seize such citizens, (depend on what I now say,) they are in imminent danger of exhaustion, typhus, and death; with a reward in eternity according to their works.

I might instance many cases of the utility of fasting on myself, and others, had I been particular enough to have noticed them. The following cases may serve as examples.

1. During the prevalence of dysentery, in the hot and dry summer of 1805, I was seized with a diarrhœa. I had seen the same turn into the state of dysenteries that season, and tried *fasting*; it cured it, without purge, or paregoric, or diaphoretic.

2. In the 11th month, exposure excited another attack of the same complaint. For four successive nights I was driven from my warm bed into the cold night air. That I might lie quiet, I took opiates and rum; constipation ensued, which was itself followed by an odontalgic affection of my jaws, and a soreness of all my muscles. My joints felt weary, my bones appeared to ache, and I apprehended an attack of fever, or rheumatism. Instead of bleeding, vomiting, purging, or sweating, I fasted several days, and was wholly relieved.

3. Bilious remittents were prevalent in the same year. I was attacked with an unpleasant burning soreness of my stomach: I ate less, yet it continued. During the epidemic prevalency of the dysentery in the hot season, I improperly used a small portion of rum, as a preventive. This, I suppose, caused the burning pain of my stomach. I felt universally indisposed; I took a dram, and visited a patient about three fourths of a mile off, on foot: at his house, my stomach nauseated, and I vomited four times. I soaked my feet, and drank warm water; by which means the burning,



and the cramp of my stomach were alleviated: I returned home, and refrained from nourishment and liquors three days, and was well. But the burning pain of my stomach was followed, as in yellow fever, by a universal yellowness of the skin; and I verily believe, that I should have had an attack of the remittent fever, if I had continued drinking rum and eating victuals. Soreness of the stomach is one of the precursors of yellowness in the typhus icteroides; and when it is followed by indirect debility and effusion of blood, black vomit, and even gangrene, may be the consequence.

But it is unnecessary to fatigue you with examples of the beneficial effects of a total abstinence from food, in the cure of indispositions; I shall only say, if I am attentive to my diet, I hardly need any medicine.

If I eat too little, I feel very hungry and weak before the next meal. If I eat too hearty, I do not feel hungry. If I eat heartily for some time, I grow dull and feel indisposed; sometimes I have head-ach in the morning, especially if I lay long in bed, and I become languid and lazy. Such symptoms are signals for abstinence from food and from inactivity.

One winter I fasted and attended to my practice, in severely cold weather, for three days, before I found my system relieved from its indisposition.\*

If fasting answers the same purpose as phlebotomy, pukes, purgatives, diuretics, diaphoretics, &c. and these medicines promote the secretions and excretions, and the action of the absorbent vessels, it is a remedy not to be contemned in dropsies from effusion and plethora.

\* *Remarks on Case 2d.*—It may not be improper to remark, that the same causes that created a diarrhoea in case second, produced by metastasis, when improperly restrained by rum and opiates, an odontalgic affection of the face; and was likely, by a continuance of stimulants, to excite a fever or rheumatism, which might require venesection. By venesection I have frequently cured tooth-ach; and in very severe cases I found emetics necessary to succeed it.

The similiarity of the causes and remedies of diseases, are greater than is generally supposed.

## CHAP. II.

*Of some astonishing Fasts.*

HAVING said a little on the utility of occasional fasting, excuse me, though I add a reason to explain the phenomenon of persons living wholly on air.

In 1805, I went with my brother Ebenezer, to see a sister of Abraham Speers, in Essex County, New-Jersey. We were informed she had fasted about two weeks. Her stomach rejected every kind of food and drink, with pain, retching, and vomiting.

We found her sitting by the fire; her countenance was florid; her respiration and pulse quick; and she appeared like one that had been running or exercising with violence for a short time. She complained of sourness of her stomach, with soreness and pain.

We gave her two small anodynes of laudanum in burnt brandy; soon after we persuaded her to eat a cracker, and it sat well on the stomach. After a short time, she rose from her chair, and walked without assistance, into another room, and went into bed.

The laudanum, brandy, and nourishment in this way, invigorated her stomach, changed the morbid action of the lungs to the proper organ, and she soon recovered. Her complaint arose from trouble; her lover, we heard, had abandoned her.

In the forty-third article of the sixth volume of Medical Essays, mention is made of a handsome girl of sixteen years of age, who, on the sudden death of her father at the time of her menstruation, had an immoderate flowing, with fainting and trembling fits. She was seized with a difficulty of swallowing, which increased to such a degree, that she could swallow no more; every attempt threw her into fits, which were repeated in a quarter or half an hour, and ended in the rigidity of her whole body. She neither ate nor drank for thirty-four days: at that time the spasm of the œsophagus, was overcome by a syphon introduced into her stomach. Having been costive during the thirty-four

days, she was now glystered. She still vomited up every thing, but an anti-hysteric mixture, cherries and strawberries, during three weeks; she then felt the spasm return in her throat, after evacuating *per alvum* about two pounds of blood in two days. She now continued fifty-four days without eating or drinking; and was often more violently affected with tetanus than before. During both fasts she was not hungry, and lost but little of her fat.

In the next article follows an attested abstinence of Janet Young, which lasted fifty years. For the space of sixteen years, she voided fœces but once a year, and it was like one globulet of sheep's dung. This fast was induced by falling into the water, in winter, while she was menstruating the first time, and she never menstruated afterwards.

Jeremiah Minster, a respectable methodist minister, relates a fast of a year and nine days, which occurred in a lad of Jeremiah Johnston, in New-Garden, Russel County, Virginia. In 1797 he was ill of a lingering sickness, which in three months deprived him of the use of his limbs. In this situation he remained three months longer, when his right leg was rigidly drawn up and fastened there; his tongue was drawn back and fastened there, like a dark lump in the fauces; and he lived fifty-three weeks and two days without eating or drinking; and then he was restored to health and activity, walking, eating, and declaring with raptures, that Jesus Christ appeared to him, and cured him miraculously.

Moses, Elijah, and Jesus, fasted each 40 days.

When we have such facts, we desire to know the proximate cause of them. As I have seen no explanation, I offer the following. In diabetes mellitus, gallons of urine have been evacuated, more than the fluids received into the stomach. As cuticular, not cutaneous, absorption is denied by Klapp, Dangerfield, &c. this water, with its sugar, sufficient to nourish any body, must be derived from the atmosphere through the medium of the lungs, whose internal surface is estimated by Kiel, to be equal to the whole external surface of the body.

I conceive, therefore, that in fasts of the above nature, the energy and activity of the stomach and intestines, is translated to the lungs, where it exerts a morbid activity of the pulmonic absorbent vessels.

In the young woman I saw, the flush of her countenance, and her accelerated respiration, as if she had been under smart exercise, struck my attention before I had any theory. The lungs hold an important office in the functions of the system. Their office is said to be similar to that of the leaves of vegetables. The leaves of the air-flower, epidendron, nasturtium\* sempervivens, will absolutely nourish their several plants, so that they grow and thrive without their roots. Their leaves, therefore, do certainly absorb much nourishment; and it is supposed that the great leaves of pumpkins absorb more moisture and nourishment than the small roots of this vine. The office of the roots of plants are thought to be similar to that of the stomach and intestines of animals.

One of the most remarkable accounts of vegetable life being supported without roots is exhibited in the air-flower of Cujo; it is a plant without root, and consists of a single shoot, resembling the stalk of a gilliflower, but with thicker and larger leaves, which feel like wood to the touch. Its native situation is an arid rock or dry tree, on which it entwines itself. Each stock or shoot has two or three white and transparent flowers, resembling the lily in size, shape, and fragrance: and the plant may be transported three hundred miles, and suspended on a nail, where it will bloom annually.†

If this be a correct view of these analogies, we may see, that though a man or woman must necessarily die, who is deprived of aliment; yet, if the activity of the pulmonic absorbents be morbidly increased, by a metastasis of the vital power from the stomach and bowels, a man or woman may live upon air. If the action of the kidneys, bowels, and digestion, continue when the office of the lungs is morbidly increased, diabetes will necessarily be produced.

The plant that grows without roots, must be in the

\* *Tropolum.*

† See Supplement to Molina's History of Chili.

shade, and the person that lives without food, must keep still in his room, and not labour.

Doctors Keil, Home, and Hales, are said to have ascertained, by experiments, that people have gained weight during their sleep. They went hungry to bed, were much fatigued by the preceding labour of the day, and gained from two to three ounces weight, by rest, respiration, and retained excretions. As exercise increases the excretions; so, contrarily, rest diminishes and stops them.

Thomas Lancaster, late of Fall's township, in the county of Bucks, Pennsylvania, a man of strict and undoubted veracity, told me, that in breaking a block of limestone, about two or three feet long, taken out of his quarry, he found in the centre of this solid block, a living red toad, sitting in a smooth red cavity, just large enough to contain it. How it came there, and how long it had resided in that dark and solid prison, were questions which had often puzzled his mind in vain to unravel.

Land tortoises have been kept for an astonishing time without food. Dr. Barton kept a rattle snake a year and a half without food. Leeches will live on water for an indefinite time. Gold-fish have grown double their size with nothing but distilled water. The *rana pipiens* has been kept for months on nothing but pure water. Salamanders decapitated by Gallois, have breathed and lived three or four months; but he was careful to behead them above the occipital foramen, so as not to cut off the *par vagum*, which causes respiration.

These are facts; and how are they to be accounted for, if we deny pulmonary and cuticular absorption?

Those who have experimented on pulmonary and cuticular absorption, were wrong in experimenting with substances which were not nutritious to the system, or which the lacteal absorbents would refuse to receive.

## CHAP. III.

### *On Abstinence.*

ABSTAIN from all evil; love temperance; and let your moderation be known to all men. Abstain from food highly spiced, and from hot victuals: for they stimulate the stomach to crave and receive too much nourishment for a good digestion. Thus the stomach is burdened; the bowels are affected with diarrhœa, and are daily debilitated. Defective digestion, or dyspepsy succeeds; which is accompanied and followed by a train of nervous diseases, to wit, flatulency and acidity from the fermentation of the ingesta received into the stomach, palpitations, heart-burn, hysteria, colic, hypochondria, &c. Hot teas are injurious also to the teeth.

Diseases produced by improper habits of eating and drinking, watchfulness, and resting, working, or study, &c. are generally obstinate; and are rarely cured unless the old habits and customs which have originated them, are abandoned. In such cronic complaints nothing is superior to temperance, in every thing we pursue and do. The votary of temperance and abstinence must be moderate, meek, and lowly of heart. Superabundance is more ruinous than indigence: for the gratifications of the opulent are continually destroying them. I really believe that intemperance does more mischief, and destroys more lives, than war, pestilence, or famine. Nay; if we investigate things rightly, we may discover that intemperance is the cause even of wars, famines, and malignant fevers.

How much we do to be voluptuous, honoured, and luxurious!—and how little, for health and a clear conscience! For the former, for a puff of human joy and glory, men are willing to endure years of labour and subjection to learn the science, mystery, and art of some occupation; or to travel by sea or land, suffering many deprivations and hardships, exposing their lives on the billows, and in the wildernesses, to many perils; yes, men will, for the trash of human wealth, far less valuable than health and a good conscience, expose their personal liberties and lives in the commerce of per-

nicious things, and wickedly trade and work in the superfluous, luxurious, corrupting productions of life: Alas! how little do we justly appreciate health, peace, and a pure heart! Though all are in the pursuit of the riches, fame, and pleasures of this life, how few obtain them! And when this few possess them, their luxuries, extravagancies, dissipation, and exalted manner of living on their income from the industry of others, necessarily require the remaining multitudes of men to toil in poverty, want, oppression, and wretchedness. The industry and misery of the latter in all nations, support these few in their indolence, splendor, and magnificence. What an unnatural, cruel, and unjust exaltation!—yet it is attended with the greatest ambition, pride, and vanity of human life; and with the greatest and most ruinous temptations. These few and opulent families of the old continent and the new, are naturally seduced from abstinence, sobriety, temperance, moderation, humility, meekness, and every virtue. Their eminence and wealth become their burden, snare, and ruin:—the human honours, flatteries, and obeisances bestowed upon them, feed their pride, hauteur, dominion, oppression, ambition, and contentions: the superabundance of their income, beget the children of indolence, effeminacy, lasciviousness, profligacy, luxury, gluttony, and intemperance. Finally, some of them end their estates, lives, and honours, in gambling, robbery, and suicide. Thus they are ruined in estate, body, and soul—Still man will not abstain from physical, moral, and spiritual evils. The continents of the east and west are visited in ships for tobacco, toys, teas, trinkets; pearls, spices, peppers; laces, alcoholic liquors, coffee, wines, and other unnecessaries, that tend to destroy our healths, lives, morals, and religion; and prevent the labour and use of necessaries; and hinder an increased population to consume them.

Abstain, therefore, from all unnecessary things; neither use, make, nor consume them. Why should thousands and millions of the human family labour for that which is a thousand times worse than nothing?—Sailors, for luxuries and perverse things are lost in the deep. And are we clear of blood, who use or trade in them? Are we happier by their sinful indulgence? Do not those

who live in the enjoyment of the luxuries and unnecessaries of life, suffer more diseases and miseries in body and soul? Their bodies are like hospitals: and if they awhile escape the clay-tenement, they will not escape the expenses of nurses and physicians. How often do hypochondriac fears and weaknesses alarm and scourge them for their iniquities, as with a whip of scorpions! Melancholy, despair, or mania, at times, complete their extreme affliction. A wounded spirit who can bear? Hence some attempt suicide, and plunge into an abyss of eternal horror, anguish, and despair.

Temperance excels rubies and crowns. For what are riches, power, honours, and luxurious gratifications, to a man sick and in danger of dying with diseases produced by his intemperate indulgences? Who would wear a crown, if his head was to be thenceforward afflicted? Or who would drink costly liquors, or feed on the most luxurious viands; or wear the most costly apparel, or repose in beds of down, or respire the pent air of cities, be admired for elegant houses and furniture, or adored for the grandeur of equipages; if they certainly knew that, thenceforth, they shall be afflicted with the gout, racked with the stone, cramped with the colic, drowned with the dropsy, suffocated by asthma and hydrothorax, nauseated with gluttony, vomited with drunkenness, burnt, like *Ætna* with lusts or fever, shaken like *Sinai* with hypochondriac and hysteric terrors and perturbations, or stretched as on a rack with tetanus?

Be temperate, therefore, and avoid these and other consequences of intemperance. Every sin is an act of intemperance: and a pure abstinence is nothing but a denial of self, and taking up the power of God as that cross on which selfishness must be crucified, or destruction must overtake us here, and misery be our portion in eternity, awful eternity.

“ Good health consists in temperance alone .

“ And Peace. O Virtue, peace is all thy own.”