
ARTICLE III.—*On the Age at which Menstruation begins in Siam.*
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ON the 21st February of this year, I attended at the British Consulate in Siam, to give evidence in the case of a young girl who

was injured during sexual congress with a Continental European, and was asked by Sir Robert Schomburgk, the President of the Court, "What (from my observation in the country) is generally the age of puberty?" In reply, I stated that the menses were believed to commence "earlier in hot climates than in cold;" but I considered that, in Siam, 15 years was about the rule. My opinion was immediately called in question by the defendant in the cause, who "remarked that according to Siamese law, women can be married when over 12 years of age," and gave as his authority the ex-Royal Physician, His Royal Highness the Prince Krom Huang Wongsā. The Prince, on being applied to for his opinion, replied as follows:—"Sometimes Siamese girls arrive at puberty when only 12 years of age, but more generally at the ages of 14, 15, 16, 17, and 18 years;" and "there is no law or custom fixing the time of life at which Siamese sons and daughters are given in marriage; but I have observed that they are more generally given in marriage from 17 years up to 20; this may be said to be the rule,—to marry younger, the exception."

In Europe a belief prevails that the menses appear years earlier in warm countries than the ages above given, and hence I am desirous of placing on record the following data—relating to Siam—on the subject. As I believe errors often creep into statistics of ages from a lax mode of noting the years, I have, in the following tables, prefixed the symbol *plus* to the years as a means of indicating that the persons were above the ages given.

TABLE I.

Number.	Years.	Menstruated.
46	+12	4
45	+13	7
32	+14	12
44	+15	26
33	+16	26
13	+17	11
13	+18	13
5	+19	5
231	...	104

TABLE II.

Years when Menses began.	Numbers.
+12	8
+13	16
+14	33
+15	29
+16	13
+17	5
+18	0
+19	0
Total.....	104

Table I. is of a purely negative character, but still is invaluable, as showing that at the ages given only so many had menstruated; it is indeed a more valuable record than Table II., which, as it gives, in many instances, the dates of the first occurrence of the menses from memory, must, in the case of the older women, be a little in error; however, that error is, I believe, invariably on the side of early, not late menstruation, as, from the peculiar mode of calculation prevalent among the Siamese, I subtracted one year from the ages stated.

There is another mode of showing how late menstruation begins in Siam; and it is by inquiring into the custom of the country, relative to a religious rite to be observed before attaining puberty—for instance, having the hair trimmed for womanhood. The ex-Royal Physician, before referred to, states, “that if a girl have her menses come on while yet she has not had her hair trimmed for womanhood, it is a shame to her; hence there are respectable parents who have the heads of their daughters trimmed into womanly style when they are 11 years of age, fearing that their menses may overtake them ere it has been done; and there are those who, judging from the smallness of the persons of their daughters, and from the history of their families, that they will not attain to puberty short of 14 or 15 years of age, consequently postpone the ceremonies of their hair-cutting until about that age.” The truth, however, is this, that the Siamese almost never cut their daughters’ hair for womanhood, excepting at the ages of +10 and +12, called by them 11 and 13, for though they do perform the operation at +8, called by them 9, it is not from a fear of early womanhood; and of cases at +14, I have only met one instance. There is not only an insurmountable superstition against having the hair trimmed at the years intermediate to those stated (+9, 11, and 13), but there is even a like prohibition to having it performed on any other months than the 2d, 4th, 6th, 9th, and 12th—five months a-year—months sacred for other ceremonies, and hence this rite becomes a valuable means of getting comparatively certain records for the age before which menstruation does not occur. For instance,

Hair trimmed for
Womanhood.

Numbers.	Years.
4	+8
81	+10
149	+12
1	+14
234	...

Moreover, of the 81 who had their hair trimmed in their eleventh year, not one, I believe, did so from a fear of the menses setting in before the thirteenth year. I have taken the trouble to analyze the above 81, to find out when they menstruated, and obtained the following results:—

Menstruated.		Number who have not yet Men- struated.	Totals.
When.	Number.		
+10	0	3	3
+11	0	8	8
+12	5	14	19
+13	8	10	18
+14	8	4	12
+15	6	7	13
+16	2	4	6
+17	1	1	2
Totals...	30	51	81

These statistics show quite a different age to be the mean period of menstruation beginning in Siam, to those given by Drs Goodeve of Calcutta, and Leith of Bombay, the mean of whose tables is respectively 11 years 11 months 13 days, and 12 years 5 months 23 days. I have not met an instance of a female who has menstruated before 12 years and 5 months, and have been told of one only who had her menses before that age; but I recently saw two girls, in the theatrical corps of one of the nobles, who, judging from their large uncovered mammæ, would have a chance of menstruating before the above minimum period. During my inquiry into this subject, I have seen only one female who menstruated prior to her hair being trimmed; that person's hair was cut on the same day with five co-pawns; she was 12 years and 8 months, and another was 12 years and 11 months. All were above 12 years of age.

I have been told that the Siamese now menstruate at an earlier age than fifty years ago; and an old nobleman, who adheres to this view, once called some of his aged dependents to illustrate the point: he failed, however, as most of the aged women gave a year earlier than that which obtained in the cases of their daughters. He likewise gave as a reason that, in his youth, women of fifteen and upwards were wont to bathe nude in the rivers and canals, whereas now, from more speedy development, they never do so at that age.

It may not be irrelevant to this topic to mention, that during their infantine life the Siamese present many marks of retarded physical development; for instance, late teething, walking, speaking, closing of the fontanelle, etc.
