

XV. *On the morbid condition of the generative organs, being a paper read before the Chenango County Medical Society, June 12, 1849. By WILLIAM D. PURPLE, M. D., of Greene, Chenango Co., N. Y.*

(Communicated by the Society.)

The subject to which your attention is called on this occasion, is *the physical and mental phenomena which depend on certain morbid conditions of the generative organs*. I am aware that this subject has been recently discussed in some of our periodicals, as well as in certain productions designed for the popular eye, and in this attempt to make "darkness visible," I disclaim all pretensions to originality, and all thought of a practical hypothesis; but shall merely endeavor to hold it up as a nebulae before this society, with the hope that more practical minds will reduce it to its constituent elements, define its laws, and point the way to remedy its evils.

Man emphatically partakes of all the characteristics of animal life. His chief end and aim, so far as his physical being is concerned, are like the worm of the dust, to propagate his kind. To this end all his powers, both physical and mental, are made tributary. All his gregarious habits— all his love of kindred, and all his social affections, find their centre in this wise provision of nature to procreate his species. The unerring laws of instinct, planted by Infinite Wisdom in the lower animals, are so guarded as to protect them from excessive indulgence of this appetite. But human reason is not so fortunate. This propensity in man often becomes a most debasing passion, and hence liable to be abused. In proportion to its elevated position in the animal economy in a physiological point of view, so is its physical influence over the life and health of the body when the laws of nature are violated.

The specific diseases of these organs consequent on promiscuous indulgence, will almost warrant the belief in the direct interposition

of Providence for the punishment of the violators of the seventh command. Nor are the consequences of excessive and unnatural excitement of these organs less apparent. They are exhibited in the premature decay and death of those whose sexual organs are stimulated by promiscuous indulgence, or the equally debilitating effects of masturbation.

Reproduction is one of the highest attributes of physical being. It involves more extensively the vital powers than any other functional act. The fabled notions of the ancients, that every part furnished a part, is literally true, at least so far as extensive sympathy with the sexual organs is concerned. The powers of both body and mind are more entirely concentrated here than on any other occasion. The slightest excess produces the most excessive prostration of the nervous power, and the mental faculties dependent on it; hence the recuperative energies of the system, on which health so much depends, are readily dissipated by excessive or unnatural indulgence of the sexual appetite.

An anatomical view of the sexual apparatus presents a very large extent of membranous surface. This membrane is liberally supplied with blood-vessels and nerves. It is subject for a long period of life to the most violent orgasms, and is exposed to the influence and effects of private lascivious reflections. It is emphatically one of the great nervous centres of the system, and possesses in an eminent degree all the nervo-membranous characteristics so ably described and illustrated by that great physiologist, Bichat.

This membrane is subject to abrasion, and local diseases of various kinds. They are the most acute to which the body is liable. They lay the system under more immediate and powerful contribution for its vitality than any other diseases. The slight excitement of a mild case of gonorrhœa, even after the inflammatory stage has subsided, wakes up a constant irritation both of body and mind; evincing an extensive influence over the nervous system, that conceals from the view its apparently trifling cause. It cannot with truth be said, that this is the result of remorse and fear of exposure, for it is much more intense than even the worse form of syphilis when the lesion involves other tissues.

These influences of actual disease of this membrane demonstrate that its *function* has a wide spread sympathy with every part of the animal economy, and involves to a very great extent the mental characteristics. But local disease of these organs may exist without actual abrasion. The function may become vitiated by abuse, and produce a chronic disease capable of undermining the whole nervous system, without awakening attention to its location. This is also apparent in hysteria, in functional disease of the stomach, and many other membranous surfaces.

If other evidence of the all pervading influence of this function is wanted, it may be found in the change, both physical and mental, which the age of puberty brings with it. The encephalic developments, as well as the change in the voice, are apparent to all, and the entire exemption from these changes when the function of this system has been suspended by a removal of the secretion on which it depends.

Excessive indulgence in the sexual appetite is emphatically a solitary vice. It seeks concealment from all not essential to its gratification. It is generally commenced at an early period of puberty, when, in solitude, excessive orgasms leave the generative system in a state of chronic weakness and nervous debility. This wakes up a morbid appetite for its repetition, and when long-continued it leaves the system in that state that renders subsequent indulgence, however innocent and moderate, anything but a healthy process.

This state of the generative system is hidden from the world, and is seldom admitted to the physician. As they are unable to institute comparison with others, it is frequently unknown to the deluded subjects themselves. It is imputing a wrong, and trespassing on reserved rights, for us to allude to it even in our own sex, and it is rudely trampling on the very drapery of delicacy, to charge it upon the gentler sex. Hence it undermines the constitution—saps the very powers of life—confines the subject in bed for years—or, by its metastasis to some more vital organ, closes the scene by death, without being clearly recognized by us.

This state of the generative organs may exist with very little local irritation. All its constitutional symptoms may be present, without a manifestation of any other local excitement than that of a morbid

appetite for sexual indulgence. It probably in every case depends on the violation of nature's laws, either by self-pollution or by early excesses in sexual indulgence. It is an admitted fact, that nearly all the chronic diseases to which the system is liable, are the sequence of some violated laws that Infinite Wisdom has imposed upon the animal economy. And the sexual organs, goaded on by a morbid passion, stimulated by an excited imagination, and hidden from the eye of the world, come in for their full share of the consequences of violated laws.

This disease usually presents itself in those who have a large share of the sanguine and nervous temperaments combined. It exists in comparatively rare cases, while others may be exposed to the like causes, with less irritability of these organs, with entire impunity. The tendencies to these symptoms may be, and I doubt not are in some instances, hereditary. It is, if not of modern origin, more prevalent now than formerly; at least it is attracting more attention from the profession now than at any former period.

In a hospital devoted exclusively to this form of disease, a single individual could do much to elucidate its characteristics. But the limited observation of a country physician can do little more than to mention a few cases, and present them to his brethren in their associated capacity, that they may be subjected to the touchstone of comparison, where joint effort may arrive at pathological truth and practical deductions. To this end the following cases, from among those that have fallen under my observation, are presented for your consideration.

1st. The first case to which I would call your attention in support of these views, occurred some years since, in an unmarried female, aged eighteen. She was of a robust constitution, with a nervo-sanguine temperament, and had enjoyed uninterrupted health. The first symptoms that attracted attention were a propensity to lonely wanderings, a heedless inattention to business, and a disregard to her personal appearance. These symptoms were succeeded by loss of appetite, an excessive emaciation, with high nervous excitement. She had irritability of the muscular fibre, with occasional paroxysms of chorea. These usually occurred on some sudden surprise. Her pulse was irritable, her skin dry, and she was harrassed with an almost incessant cough. These symptoms were succeeded by sleeplessness,

incoherent conversation, interspersed with occasional libidinous remarks—the medulla oblongata soon became involved; this was manifested by extreme tenderness of the spinal column. In this condition she was confined to her bed for some months, without any abatement of her unpleasant symptoms. Perfect delirium supervened, and she presented all the symptoms of a confirmed maniac. She was treated for this malady for about six weeks, when she gradually recovered, and was restored to perfect health.

It was impossible, at that time, to learn definitely the cause of these symptoms; yet as she had before enjoyed uninterrupted health, I had strong suspicions, and charged her with the cause. This, at the time, was met by a positive denial. In a subsequent conversation, however, after she was a wife and a mother, she admitted to me that all those distressed symptoms, even to confirmed mania, were the result of violent orgasms of the sexual apparatus, to which it had been subjected from three to five times a day, for two or three years. So great was the excitability of her nervous system in this case, that for months she was in a feverish condition, and every indulgence reduced her strength to that degree that she was forced to keep her bed. When local excitement and morbid priapism would so far subside as to allow her to lose herself in sleep, nocturnal orgasms would awaken her to a sense of her wretchedness. This state continued until the nervous system became involved, and the citadel of reason was invaded. The irritating process was then suspended, and with the straight-jacket and cold water we were able to effect a cure. On a return of consciousness, she reflected on my accusation, and inferred that her habits were publicly known. They were never resumed, and she was restored to perfect health.

2d. The second case to which I would call your attention, arose from extreme debility of the seminal vessels, brought on by early solitary excitement, and completed by early sexual indulgence, at the early age of sixteen. His first indulgence was so violent and long continued that the organs never regained their normal vigor, and the chronic sequences were never overcome. These were: enlarged testicles, tenderness and rigidity of the spermatic vessels, an irritable state of the bladder and urethra, an exceedingly acute and almost painful sensation in sexual indulgence. He was troubled with priapism, with diurnal and nocturnal seminal discharges. He had blen-

norrbceal symptoms, which presented themselves unconsciously with the urine. On his marriage, no unpleasant symptoms were communicated. His social feelings and affections were the source of painful excitement, and seemed to vibrate with harshness on his irritable nervous system. His whole life was a scene of constant physical and mental excitement. He became melancholy, misanthropic, and irascible. His thoughts, his feelings, his views of everything around him, were unlike others. He travelled much, and spent time and money to remove the disease from his body, and relieve his mind from the constant excitement it produced, but in vain. They adhered to him like the fabled shirt of Nessus, and controlled his whole physical and mental being. He sighed for the Lethean waters of forgetfulness to protect him from their influence, but they came not to his relief. He was conscious of his own characteristics, and freely admitted to his medical advisers the cause that produced them. Time rolled on, the nervous system became more and more involved. His seminal losses increased with his years, and the whole economy, particularly the cerebro-spinal system, "gave signs of wo, that all was lost." The local symptoms were lost in the general excitement, the mental faculties gave way, and for much of the time, for two years, he was unfit to do business, and in a moral point of view, was unaccountable for his many acts. A constant and gradual increase of the above described symptoms, which commenced with his boyhood, brought on a premature decay of his mental and physical powers, and without any other apparent cause, he sunk into a comatose state at the age of 50, from which he never revived, and death closed the scene in twenty-four hours.

3. The third case to which I shall refer, is that of a young man of eighteen, who had symptoms of gonorrhoea. The acute stage yielded readily to treatment, and it was supposed that the chronic debility succeeding, would yield to time and the recuperative power of the system. In this he was disappointed. A mild gleet continued, not enough to prevent him being about his business, but enough to create physical irritation and mental anxiety. Weeks and months rolled away; he had very little local irritation, yet he became emaciated and nervous. A slight fever followed for a few days. These symptoms were followed by mental depression. He became thoughtful and taciturn. His countenance indicated much anxiety. A sluggish pulse and incoherent speech followed, when suddenly a co-

[Assembly, No. 174.]

matose state of the brain supervened, which closed his earthly career in three days.

This case is somewhat in the dark. What were the essential characteristics of the original disease, cannot be clearly ascertained. It is proper to remark, however, that two other young men were nearly simultaneously affected thereby, from the same source, one of whom died some months thereafter, in a similar state which supervened on an attack of common fever. What the precise symptoms were, I am unable to learn, as the case occurred in a distant part of the State. But of one fact I am well assured, he had never entirely recovered from his gonorrhœal symptoms. The third individual yet suffers to some extent "for the sins of his youth," and although he has been married for some time, the disease has never been communicated.

4th. The fourth case to which I shall allude is that of a married man, aged twenty-six, in whom there is no evidence of having suffered under gonorrhœal symptoms. He has been confined to his bed for the last two years, with the following symptoms: His pulse is feeble, and occasionally irregular, he has palpitation of the heart, with throbbing at the pit of the stomach, pain in the back, with irritation of the whole spinal column, a choking sensation at the throat, equivalent to that caused by hysteria, erratic pains, denoting high nervous excitement. He is very feeble, with much emaciation; he has cold clammy sweats, with extreme prostration of muscular power. He is intolerant of the sounds of the slightest tread, and does not speak above the lowest whisper. He dares not turn himself in bed, and an extra pillow produces a sense of suffocation. All the animal functions are exceedingly weak, and the vital are but feebly performed. He is troubled with priapism, and has voluntary and involuntary seminal discharges. They were formerly very frequent, but do not now occur oftener than two or three times a week; when they do occur, however, they very much reduce him, and aggravate all of the above symptoms, and to these evacuations, which have continued through a series of years, we are compelled to refer all the above symptoms. The admitted cause is, long continued and excessive ante-nuptial self-pollution, which so far weakened the young and delicate organs, that they never recovered their normal state. On his marriage, the excitability of the generative organs stimulated him to excessive indulgence in his sexual appetite, when the powers of the system gave

way, and he was reduced to his present wretched and hopeless condition.

In the same house is another subject, in the person of his wife, who, though not so feeble, has been confined to her couch for a long time, laboring under a similar train of symptoms. She has superadded to these all the characteristics of our modern cases of prolapsus uteri. The cause in her case is, without doubt, her nuptial participation in the excesses of her husband.

Various remedies have been resorted to in the above cases, under the influence of all the lights of allopathy, homœopathy, and hydropathy, but with little or no effect; the subjects seem inclined to move in the even tenor of their way, regardless of all remedial efforts.

5th. The next and last case to which I shall allude, is that of a young girl of sixteen, whom early solitary excitement had reduced to the most abject condition. Her nervous system was entirely unstrung. This was manifested by all the neuralgic symptoms enumerated in the foregoing cases, with the addition of frequent epileptic paroxysms. The sympathetic action was early communicated to the urinary organs, and long continued and painful ischury was the consequence. The urethra became so rigid and irritable that the catheter could with difficulty be introduced. After some months, a fever followed, which ran its ordinary course in ten or twelve days. This left the stomach a prey to the sympathetic influence of the generative system; constant vomiting followed, and for more than a year she never received a particle of liquids or solids into the stomach without producing severe retching and emesis. In this wretched condition she became almost a shadow. She was very much emaciated, and could with difficulty walk the room. Hardly enough could be retained on the stomach to support vitality. She lost her vivacity, avoided all society, and seemed to abandon herself in despair to her fate. Everything was done for her that could be suggested, but as remedial agents were directed to the stomach, they were unavailing. At length endurance seemed at an end, and death appeared inevitable. She then recalled her oft-repeated denials, and admitted her habits. She confessed that self-pollution was commenced at the earliest signs of puberty, and that it soon became an uncontrollable passion, and for some three years she had subjected herself to violent sexual orgasms from three to six times in twenty-four hours. As soon as her secret was known, the spell was broken, and the charm dissipated. A firm

resolution, aided by travelling, and spending all her time, both day and night, with some one to restrain her, soon put an end to her emesis, and she was gradually restored to perfect health.

Did the time of the society permit, and your patience would endure it, I would mention a number of other cases, some of which are now under treatment by members of this society ; but enough has been adduced to show the various causes and the different manifestations of these derangements, and to serve as a basis for the following reflections.

From a review of the foregoing observations and cases, the following facts are clearly proven to my mind, and I doubt not they will meet with an affirmative response by every member present.

1st. That a gleet, following gonorrhœal symptoms, is not the mild and harmless thing it has generally been supposed to be ; but is capable, under certain circumstances, in some constitutions, of making up an irritation, liable to be transferred to other portions of the membranous surface, and of producing all the symptoms incident to the disease of that wide-spread structure, including meningeal irritation, coma and death.

2d. That violent and unnatural orgasms of the sexual apparatus in the early stage of puberty, before the organs are fully developed, and have attained their perfect vigor, will, in either sex, create an almost uncontrollable desire for its repetition, which, in the end, will leave the nervous system in a similar condition to that of the confirmed inebriate ; and, if long continued, will produce every variety of neuralgic symptoms, including epilepsy, mania, and perhaps, death.

3d. That, in consequence of long-continued excitement, there is a change of structure and functional action of the glandular portion of the testicles, the vasa deferentia and eferentia, the vesiculæ seminales, the prostate gland and its numerous follicles, the urethra, and by sympathy, the bladder, the ureters and kidneys, that cause them to pour out seminal and blennorrhœal discharges : thereby debilitating the system, undermining the constitution, producing dyspeptic symptoms, and, if not timely arrested, terminating in coma and death.

If the foregoing points are not satisfactorily sustained by the cases presented above, I have no doubt that the experience of many mem-

bers of this society will be able to supply many cases to demonstrate their truth. To this end, a rigid investigation is solicited, that their truth or falsity may be made apparent to our practical advantage.

How limited is our knowledge of the pathological character of these troubles? How little is the country physician prepared to form a rational theory of their influence in the animal economy? How little we know of their existence, and how frequently they elude our research? The veil of secrecy and shame-faced denial hides them from our view. They are produced by personal gratification and perverted action of the strongest passion of the animal system; a passion that over-rides all other physical powers, and is the basis of all earthly affections and sympathies of the heart! It partakes of all the characteristics of forbidden fruit, and is heightened by the imaginings of a perverted imagination! It is the seat of the "one idea" that dethrones reason, and fills our lunatic asylums with their inmates. It is, also, the source from "whence the darker passions flow," as the prison and the gallows can assert. The grave of the suicide can bear witness to the same truth. The poet and the novelist have made this giant their theme, and portrayed his power for the weal or the woe of mankind; but the medical philosopher has neglected to cultivate his acquaintance. He has been suffered to secrete himself among the mental afflictions, and has seldom been dragged forth to answer for the deeds done in the body! It is true, that these organs, so far as reproduction is concerned, have been thoroughly studied, and their pathological influences clearly developed; but the passions and appetites which lie behind them are almost entirely hid from our view. Their use or abuse have seldom been referred to as the origin of diseased action. The world sneers at and ridicules the suspicion that health is affected by their indulgence, and the physician is apt to join in the cry, and refuse to give the matter serious consideration. We hardly know

"that lovers' hectic flush,
"Will sap, at length, the very springs of life;"

and we have been slow to believe that disease of these organs may produce every variety of chronic disease, ultimately be transferred to the brain, and cause mania or death. But observation and reflection has convinced us that it will do all these things, nor is admitted analogy wanted to confirm this belief. We know that there is no organ

of the body that is not capable, by perverted action, to work its own destruction. That the seeds of disease and death are lurking in every healthy organ, and only require a certain amount of excitability to arm them with suicidal power. We know that perverted taste and morbid appetite produces a chronic disease of the stomach, which through the nervous system invades the citadel of mind, and by the most horrid disease consigns the bacchanalian to his grave. This is emphatically true in relation to the organs we are now considering. We know that in certain constitutions the process of reproduction in the female will produce an anæmic state that ultimately produces death. We see the far-reaching influence of hysteria, and its herculean effects upon the whole physical and mental characteristics, especially after long continuance. Analogous to this, is the effects of puerperal mania, which all admit to originate in undue excitement of a portion of these organs. These diseases both produce a sympathetic irritation of the brain, and their effects are liable to exist through life, even though the causes that produced them have entirely ceased. We see habitual costiveness producing severe pain in the head; and irritation of the large intestines causing effusions upon the brain. And we may expect that long continued disease of the reproductive organs will produce similar effects.

We often see death supervene on a train of nervous symptoms, the result of long-continued irritation of some excitable organ. We also see subjects where there is, to all appearance, *no* local disease, whose symptoms are entirely prostrated for the want of nervous energy. In these cases we are apt to say, "they are nervous;" and there is a degree of uncharitableness attached to the expression that conveys the idea that "there is little or nothing the matter," until death suddenly starts us from our fancied security, and we find that neuralgia, without any apparent cause, has worn out the powers of the system, and unexpectedly broken the brittle thread of life. These cases require more serious consideration at our hands; and there are reasons to fear that in many instances their origin will be found in the great nervous centre we have been considering.

The truth is, we are very much in the dark in relation to many diseases of this system. Their origin lies so near the *source of life*, that it is difficult for mere mortals to penetrate the veil beyond which they are shrouded. How often we see in the aged gentleman, a train of

fatal symptoms present themselves, from some morbid condition of the prostate gland, and other generative and urinary organs in its immediate vicinity? Should they be traced to their cause, it would doubtless be found in the long-continued use or abuse of the generative organs. Look, also at the bed-ridden subject, who, for years, has suffered under the various forms of prolapsus uteri. How little we know of her pathological condition! We know there is local weakness; we know there is relative displacement; we know there is excessive nervous sympathy and general debility; we know she cannot sustain an upright position. But what else do we know? Has post-mortem examination been had in the country to elucidate this dark point in pathology? Has it or can it demonstrate the fact whether it depends on the muscular, the fascial, or the membranous structure? Has it clearly shown that its seat is in the vascular, cellular, or nervous tissues? These things have not been done. All we know is, that they involve the "*generative organs*," and that every excitement of their function increases local debility and general nervous exhaustion.

The ovaria are important organs of the female system. Their physical characteristics have an extensive influence throughout the body. They are subject to many tangible diseases. They originate the most extensive tumors, and are the seat of hydropic disorders. These may originate in some obscure functional derangement that has heretofore eluded our research. There are well authenticated cases on record of their displacement backward and downward into the recto-vaginal sac; and there is hardly a doubt that they may be involved in the gone-sensation that universally exists in these protracted cases. The sensation is so like that produced by pressure or disease of the testicles in the male, that it affords additional reasons for the suspicion.

Dyspeptic symptoms and spinal irritation, are very frequent among our students, and others who lead a sedentary life, and in almost every instance they are greatly aggravated, if not produced by the habits we have been considering. They, as well as the other symptoms to which we have referred in these remarks, never occur before puberty, nor do they present themselves in the later stages of life. They exist only when the reproductive function is in full vigor, and if the powers of the system are not overcome as a consequence of the gross violation of nature's laws, they are apt to subside when the force and vigor of these organs are on the decline.

Prevention is the principal indication with the physician in these cases. The patient should be thoroughly instructed in the penalty which is decreed against the violators of nature's laws. He should be taught that every passion, and every appetite with which he is endowed, is given for a *specific* end ; and when nature's designs are transcended, and a perfect equilibrium is destroyed, it produces a physical disease, in the same manner that a single mental faculty, when allowed to supersede others, will work a destruction of the mind, and produce insanity.

In many instances, a consciousness that degraded habits are known, even to their physician, will work a reformation ; hence an intimation of the cause will not unfrequently arrest the habit, and if not too long continued, the consequences resulting from it. Travelling—cold bathing—engagement in some active pursuit that will absorb the faculties of both body and mind—entire abstinence in thought, word, and deed, from the sin that so easily besets them, are all strongly indicated, to remove the habit. When this is done, the recuperative power of the system, aided by invigorating treatment, will do much, at least, towards removing the effects it may leave behind it.

The practical questions deducible from the facts and reasonings contained in this paper, are left for the consideration of this society, with an earnest hope that they may be the means of exciting curiosity, stimulating inquiry, and in the end terminate in practical results.

Note.—Since writing the above a medical friend has put into my hands the valuable work of Prof. Lallamand, of Montpellier. In this book are detailed numerous cases of the character of case 2d, above given ; and to this treatise the reader is referred for a more extended exposition of that class of diseases embraced in the foregoing paper.