

I meant, he told me that he could depend upon every act of his will or resolution. I then told him that if he had a perfect confidence in himself in that respect, that he was to go to bed to this woman, but first promise to himself that he would not have any connection with her for six nights, let his inclinations and powers be what they would, which he engaged to do, and also to let me know the result. About a fortnight after he told me that this resolution had produced such an alteration in the state of his mind, that the power soon took place; for, instead of going to bed with fear of inability, he went with fears that he should be possessed with too much desire, too much power, so as to become uneasy to him, which really happened; for he would have been happy to have shortened the time, and when he had once broke the spell the mind and powers went on together, and his mind never returned to its former state."

The device of setting up a different line of thought or of emotion from that which fills the mind, will generally succeed in cases such as the foregoing. In the case of the recently married man, the old prescription of bread pills will suffice to restore the supposed loss of power as well as anything else in which the patient has confidence, or the mere direction to wait patiently, the assurance that the trouble is simply transitory, and the explanation of its cause, will, with a sensible person, prove equally efficacious. Most of the cases cure themselves in a few days at farthest.

*Fear*, from whatever cause arising, is a very powerful factor in temporarily producing impotence, and one which often causes a more or less permanent loss of sexual power. The individual engaged in illicit relations, with the apprehension of detection constantly before him, fails at the moment he attempts intercourse, from the absolute inability to maintain an erection; and, indeed, any emotion will, if strongly felt, almost invariably lead to a like result. A gentleman once, a member of the volunteer fire department, informed me that he was for several years practically impotent at night, for the reason that he never went to bed without the expectation of being called up to go to a fire, and the anxiety effectually prevented his having intercourse, although his desire was strong.

The effect of *superstition* in causing impotence is even, in our times, occasionally exhibited. In a former period this influence was more generally admitted, and it was supposed that witches and sorcerers had the power of casting a spell upon a man, and by this means to deprive him of the ability to accomplish the act of sexual intercourse. These individuals were in France known as the *nouveurs d'aiguillette*, "the tiers of the knot." All that was necessary was that the person upon whom they pretended to impose their spell should thoroughly believe in it, and the impotence was an accomplished fact. Cases of the kind were a very common occurrence, so that after a while every man who found his virile powers becoming weaker laid the cause



upon some old man or woman who had the reputation of being a sorcerer or witch. Many of these poor wretches were burned at the stake or otherwise severely punished for this supposed crime.

The extent to which notions of the kind prevail at the present day is scarcely known among educated persons. Physicians, however, often meet with cases of purely imaginary impotence, which the subject religiously believes has been produced by an enemy, by a look or an incantation of some kind, or by causing him to eat some particular substance which has had the power conferred upon it of depriving him of his sexual functions. The consequence is that, actuated by the belief which he entertains, the attempts at intercourse result in failure, and hence he ceases to make any further efforts in this direction.

Only a short time ago a man consulted me for impotence with which he believed his wife had affected him so as to keep him continent during a visit he was about to make to New York. She had, he said, given him a singular glance as he left the house. He felt a peculiar thrill pass down his spine to his testicles, and after that, erection was impossible.

In another case a man from Long Island came to see me, bringing a lock of the hair of a woman who, he believed, had "laid a spell" on him by which he was rendered impotent. The woman in question, he explained, had wished him to marry her. He, however, had fixed his affections on another woman, and had married her,

whereupon the first, out of revenge, had caused the loss of his sexual power. The event had taken place on the fifth night after marriage. Up to that time he had done his part to his entire satisfaction, but on the fifth night, the disappointed woman, concealing her jealousy, had invited him and his bride to take tea with her, and on their return home he found himself in the condition mentioned. He had been told that I could cure him by treating a lock of the hair of the witch, and with much trouble he had succeeded in procuring this, in his opinion, indispensable prerequisite to cure, and had brought it to me.

Such cases, unless the patient can bring to bear a little common sense on the subject, are apt to pass on into a *hypochondriacal condition*, in which the whole attention of the individual is concentrated upon his generative organs. He examines them many times a day, measures them, and is constantly applying lotions and running from one physician to the other with stories of their deficient power, the shrinkage of his penis, the gradual disappearance of his testicles, etc., etc. Convinced that sexual intercourse is altogether beyond his powers, he abstains from any attempt, and continues to lament his sad condition. In one case of the kind that came under my observation, the patient, probably from some slight weakness of the organs due to previous excess, contracted the belief, soon after marriage, that his sexual power was gone, and that the result was due to atrophy of the testicles. As a matter



of fact, there was no change in the consistence or appearance of these organs, but it was impossible to convince him of this fact. Under the idea that phosphorus was a tonic to the generative system, and would cause the nutrition of the testicles to be better effected, he kept the scrotum well anointed with an ointment containing phosphorus, and drank no other liquid than phosphoric acid and water. In this case the conviction of absolute impotence was so strong, that it was impossible for an erection to take place, even under the most provoking circumstances. Indeed, he declared that all attempts in this direction were a mockery of Providence, and therefore in the highest degree sinful. In my recently published work on insanity\* I have treated the subject of hypochondriacal mania at length, and have adduced several examples of the length to which patients will go in their false beliefs relative to the state of their reproductive organs. From that book I cite the following instance: †

“A patient of my own, after great sexual excesses, took the idea that his penis and testicles were diminishing in size. He spent the greater part of each day in measuring them and recording the results in a book which he kept for the purpose. Finally he reached the conclusion that they had entirely disappeared, and although he did not go about lamenting the fact, he

\* “A Treatise on Insanity and its Medical Relations.” New York, 1883.

† Op. cit. p. 480.

was examining the region as often as he could get the opportunity, and making a record of the results of his examination. As an interesting instance of the line of thought of a hypochondriacal maniac, I transcribe here a portion of his diary for one day:

“November 4th, 9 A.M. The event that I have been fearing has at length occurred; they have vanished! absolutely vanished! and I am ruined. Oh, my God! how I am punished for my sin!

“9:30 A.M. Cold water does no good; hot water is no better. Will try blistering.

“9:45 A.M. Not even a vestige of penis or testicles, not a vestige. I will consult a physician. No; I cannot exhibit my misfortune. Applied blister.

“10 A.M. Removed blister to see if they really have gone. Alas! it is too true. Blistering can be of no possible service. Removed it.

“10:15 A.M. Reflected that if they were really gone there ought to be something left to show where they had been. Find ample evidence. A vast cavity at the bottom of my belly. Will consult a surgeon, but how in heaven can he help me? Is there any medicine that can restore the organs when they have entirely gone as have mine? It would be a mockery, a sinful mockery. God knows I have sinned enough.

“10:25 A.M. There is no doubt of it. They have gone, and I am a ruined man. I am no man. I am a eunuch, an unsexed man, a mere thing without purpose on the earth.



"11 A.M. I might sing in the choir if they are really gone. But oh, God! for me, a man, a strong, lusty, vigorous, boastful man, to be reduced to singing in a church choir. It is horrible! But what else am I fit for? My mind is certain to become weaker. I shall grow to be fat and pulpy. I will be an oyster, a big, disgusting oyster.

"11:10 A.M. Have just urinated, and had the most singular experience. The urine oozed out from the place where the penis used to be, but alas! where it no longer is."

This will suffice; there were hundreds of pages of such stuff. He finally came to see me, and brought his diary with him for my instruction. He with the utmost confidence in the correctness of his perceptions and judgment, attempted to demonstrate to me the complete absence of his penis and testicles. I could detect no deviation from the normal standard in either, but no arguments or tests that I could apply sufficed to undeceive him. He groaned and wept over his misfortunes, walked up and down the room cursing himself for his wickedness and the science of medicine for its inability to help him.

Such cases are extremely difficult of cure, the delusions becoming more and more strongly fixed, and very often extending in other directions. They constitute one of the most obstinate forms of insanity with which we have to deal.

There is, however, another form of hypochondria,

having its basis in real or supposed derangements of the sexual organs, and in which the prognosis is more hopeful. Cases of this variety are founded on the emotion of remorse for sexual misconduct in youth, and are further characterized by the display of a vast amount of ignorance in regard to the anatomy and physiology of the reproductive system. The following extract of a letter recently received from a young clergyman exhibits in a strong light most of the features of this form of sexual hypochondriasis:

"... For oh, sir, I am one of the most unhappy and most afflicted of men, and if any one ever needed your assistance, I do.

"In my youth I was guilty of the fearful sin of masturbation, and through it I know I have ruined myself both in this world and in the world to come. All my symptoms are clearly traceable to this cause. . . .

"I will be as brief as possible:

"First. In the first place, I cannot go into the society of ladies, even though they be of the most refined character (and of course I know no others), without having my semen escape. I do not have erections, but it flows from me involuntarily, and I feel weak and depressed mentally and physically for hours afterwards.

"Second. Then again, when at stool, especially when I am constipated, and I am obliged to strain, the semen escapes, and again without erection.

"Third. I have repeated nocturnal emissions, and they are accompanied by the most degradedly lascivious



dreams. When I awake I feel so wretched that I am tempted to commit suicide, rather than longer endure my suffering and contemplate my degradation.

"Fourth. I am engaged to a lovely girl, and yet on account of my sexual weakness I am afraid to marry. I feel that such a step would be the destruction of her and my happiness, and an act of the grossest immorality.

"Fifth. I am sure that my condition is known to every one I meet who has any knowledge of such disorders as mine. I find that physicians scrutinize me closely, as if endeavoring to make a diagnosis from my appearance, and that many others look at me sharply in the face, as if suspecting my trouble.

"Sixth. I have pains in my head and back; my digestion is bad; I have eructations of gas, and sometimes of a sour liquid and of food which I have just eaten, and I sleep very badly.

"Seventh. My penis is shrunken in size; my testicles are disappearing, both are softer than they ought to be, and one hangs a great deal lower than the other.

"Now you will see how desperate my case is. I have struggled manfully, I think, against the ills that bear so heavily upon me, but without success. I have applied to physicians, but they have given me no relief. One wanted to burn my urethra with nitrate of silver, but I defer the operation till I hear from you. I am willing to undergo any suffering to be cured of my affliction. . . .

"As to my virile powers, I scarcely dare to hope that they will ever be restored."

It will very readily be seen by the physician that every circumstance on which this young gentleman relied to strengthen his conviction that he was impotent, was a purely natural phenomenon. Doubtless, as he says, he had in his youth committed masturbation. The remorse for conduct which he had learned was improper, and the persistence of nocturnal emissions, are the only features deserving of the least consideration as causes of his mental and physical state. I required him to come to New York. On examination I found the generative organs in good condition. By getting his thoughts from himself, enlarging his knowledge of the anatomy and physiology of his sexual system, insisting on a full diet, with plenty of out-door exercise, cold baths, and the administration of the mixture, the composition of which is given on page 118, the patient entirely recovered in a few weeks, and was shortly after married. If there had been any real difficulty in consummating the marriage, I think I would have heard of it.

Such an instance is a type of hundreds of others in all parts of the country. If the confidence of the patient can once be gained, there is never in my experience any difficulty in conducting the case to a successful termination.

**PATHOLOGY:** The pathology of sexual impotence arising from an impossibility of obtaining erections de-



pends upon the cause. Taking up the several factors which have any special importance so far as the theory of their action is concerned, we come, in the first place, to the consideration of the subject when the cause is any kind of sexual excess.

It may be asserted without the possibility of there being any error in the declaration, that any attempt at the performance of intercourse or any manœuvre undertaken before the age of puberty, is destructive more or less in accordance with the extent to which the actions in question are carried, of the genesic power of the individual. Such actions very generally tend to cause early puberty, so far at least as the secretion of semen is concerned, and early puberty of itself means an early loss of procreative power. This is only in accordance with the general law of the organism in regard not only to the generative function, but of all others of the system.

Moreover, if a function is exercised before the organs with which it is connected are prepared for use, by having attained to their development, demands are made upon them to which they are not prepared to respond. They are consequently overtaxed, and precocious exhaustion must be the inevitable result. The same result attends the too early use of any organ of the body. Take, for instance, the muscular system, which in a child is weak and delicate. If severe physical tasks be imposed upon the muscles, they not only break down, but the whole organism of the child becomes disor-

dered. Again, as regards the brain, which in early childhood is scarcely fit for any further use, so far as the mind is concerned, than that of receiving impressions of surrounding objects, if it be spurred on to the making of what to it are strong efforts towards acquiring knowledge, it is not long before the evidences of serious derangement make their appearance, and an era of suffering begins, which becomes more and more strongly marked with every act of mental exertion which the child may make.

But with the sexual apparatus the matter is worse, for while the muscles, the brain, and the organs are adapted to some use from the very earliest period of existence, those intended for the purposes of producing the species are absolutely incapable of fulfilling their office till the age of puberty be reached. The effects of their use, or rather abuse, for all use prior to that time is abuse, are therefore clearly to be seen from the very instant that they are subjected to the maltreatment in question.

The manner in which early excess acts, therefore, is by producing premature extinction of the virile power. A function which ought to be very little below its highest point at fifty years of age has come and gone at puberty or soon after. The nervous centres in connection with the organs are exhausted, the testicles have run through an imperfect process of development and are atrophied, the blood-vessels of the penis are shrunken, the erectile tissue of the organ is withered and inelastic.



If all these changes have not advanced to the highest point, and if the patient be still young, it is possible, under very favorable circumstances, for a second development to take place. In general this is readily effected. The individual stops short of actual ruin. He ascertains that the practices in which he is indulging are vicious, both from a mental and physical point of view, and merely through the restorative power of nature, after he has given it an opportunity to act, or through that factor in conjunction with proper medical treatment, his sexual organs recover their tone, and advance to something like the normal standard of health. It may, however, be asserted with absolute truth, that the boy who has before puberty indulged even moderately in masturbation, will never be as strong sexually as he would have been had he entirely refrained from the practice.

But in not a few cases the habits of the individual have become so firmly established, and his mental power over them is so greatly impaired, that he can make no successful effort to abandon his destructive practice. The processes of degradation which have been initiated go on to such further points under the continued forced excitation, and drain to which they are subjected, that recuperation is out of the question, and a permanent state of impotence is the result.

In the adult the morbid processes which are set up in consequence of excessive sexual indulgences are by no means so pronounced as those which have just been

described; neither are they so readily induced. The sexual organs will stand an immense amount of improper usage in the cases of some men; in others, however, their power of resistance is much less; and in all if the excess be continued there is danger that a condition of permanent impotence will be reached. This and all less pronounced states of sexual weakness may be due to nervous exhaustion, to paralysis of the erector muscles of the penis, to *vaso motor* disturbance causing a diminished flow of blood into the vessels of the organs, especially the penis, to consecutive atrophy of the testicles, or to two or more of these circumstances acting together, and these are the chief physical states which are induced in all cases of impotence coming under the present division of the subject. They will be more definitely considered in the remarks that will be made when the therapeutics proper to be employed are brought to the notice of the physician.

*Treatment.*—The treatment of impotence resulting from an inability to have an erection of the penis, and hence to effect an entrance into the vagina, or of that less severe form in which an imperfect erection is obtained, may be appropriately considered under the heads of *hygienic* and *medical*. And though some of the agents employed may very appropriately be embraced under either of these categories, it is a matter of no consequence, so long as it is borne in mind that the arrangement is one made only for purposes of convenience, and not with a view to scientific accuracy.