

SECTION II.

It has been asserted by those who have regarded the matter superficially that impotence can only exist in the female by reason of mere mechanical impediment. We have seen in the preceding section that there are other causes of impotence in the male than such as are physical in their character, and that the like is the case also in the female sex will be readily apparent on a little reflection and a consideration of the several elements of normal sexual intercourse.

Adopting, therefore, the classification, so far as it is applicable, under which impotence in the male is considered in this treatise, we have as the causes of the like condition in females:

1. Absence of sexual desire.
2. Inability, by reason of physical conditions, to allow of the entrance of the penis into the vagina.
3. Absence of the ability to experience the sexual orgasm.

CHAPTER I.

ABSENCE OF SEXUAL DESIRE.

In the consideration of this division of the subject it must be borne in mind that women as a sex exhibit far less intensity of sexual desire than do men. As an English writer has remarked, it is well for the sanctity of the family that it is so. The education of women in civilized communities, and the restrictions imposed upon them by the customs of society, are, moreover, often such as to stand in the way of the development of the sexual appetite. It would be well for the future of the human race if a like retardation could be accomplished in males.

a. Lack of sexual desire in women may be the result of *absence or arrest of development of the clitoris*. It is doubtful if the first of these conditions ever exists as an original defect. It is not infrequently in our day produced by the surgeon, and among certain savage nations it is brought about by the law of custom.

In those cases that have come under my observation in which the clitoris has been removed by surgical operation, while there has been a notable diminution of sexual desire, there has been no absolute loss of this appetite. While it is probably true that without the possession of the peculiar sensibility with which the clitoris is endowed the desire for sexual intercourse

would be at its minimum, it is equally a fact that the feeling in question is often of mental origin, and that the generative organs play a secondary part, so far at least as concerns the sequence of sensations. A look, a touch, a thought may be the starting point.

Besides, it is very certain that the clitoris is not the only one of the parts constituting the organs of generation by the excitation of which sexual desire can be developed, for the lining membrane of the vagina and of nearly the whole vulva are similarly endowed, though in a much less degree. Indeed, there are reasons for believing that the neck and mouth of the uterus are supplied with sensibility like in character to that possessed by the clitoris.

Extreme smallness of the clitoris is likewise a cause of absent or deficient sexual desire. Several cases in which this abnormality existed, have come under my notice, and in all it was the apparent cause of the frigidity that existed. In one of these the clitoris was scarcely larger than a mustard seed, and in the possessor, a married woman, twenty-two years of age, there had never been experienced the slightest disposition toward intercourse. She was of a mild temperament in all other respects, affectionate in her nature, and devotedly attached to her husband. Intercourse was not disgusting, as it is to some women, but while she passively submitted herself to her husband's wishes, there was not the slightest desire excited by his caresses. At times a slight feeling of pleasure was developed in the

external generative organs, but this was not sufficient to produce a wish for a continuance of the act, and in a little while it disappeared.

Of course such cases as these of absence and smallness of the clitoris are quite beyond the reach of remedial measures. Roubaud* is guardedly disposed to recommend that as in accordance with a well-known physiological law an organ is developed in direct proportion to its usage, erotic excitations, either moral or physical, should be employed. Such means, however, it appears to me—and doubtless all medical men in this country will agree with me—are altogether inadmissible. No woman could employ them herself, or submit to their use by others, without incurring the risk of utter demoralization. Besides, I think it exceedingly doubtful that the clitoris, like a muscle, increases in size by use. The muscular tissue under the action of the will undergoes contraction and in the process is consumed, new substance taking the place of the old, and almost invariably in excess of the requirements of the occasion. But with the clitoris and other erectile organs no such active metamorphosis, regressive or progressive, takes place, and hence there is no surplus of new formation. There is no evidence to show that the clitoris is larger in those women who indulge to great excess in sexual intercourse, or in masturbation, than it is in others who are temperate or even entirely abstinent. It is only when the organ is not present or

*Op. cit. p. 453.

is abnormally small that there is a lack of sexual desires. Doubtless, if in such cases the most extensive course of manual excitation were resorted to, there would not be the slightest result so far as the increase of the size of the clitoris is concerned.

b. There are instances of lack of sexual desire for which no such cause as the one just considered can be found, or in fact any other cause. This I shall designate *original absence of sexual desire*.

Roubaud expresses doubt in regard to the existence of idiopathic absence of sexual desire in women, and asserts that no case of the kind has ever come under his observation. But although such instances are probably rare, there is no question in my mind that they are occasionally met with, and due to inherent defect of organization, independent of any obvious cause, and by reason of which sexual desire does not exist. This condition Roubaud calls "organic idiopathic frigidity." Not only, he asserts, have no cases of this kind come under his notice, but he states that he has not been able to discover them in the writings of others. Whenever women have asserted that they have never experienced sexual desire he has always found the cause to exist either in moral circumstances or in general or local conditions affecting the generative apparatus. That this view is erroneous will, I think, be shown by a consideration of the following cases.

Mrs. C. had been married two years when she con

sulted me. During that period she had never had the slightest development of the sexual appetite, nor during her whole life had she experienced any feeling of desire. She was at the time I saw her about twenty-five years old; was well formed, and of healthy appearance. She had never had any serious illness, except scarlet fever in early childhood; had menstruated at sixteen, and had always been regular with her periods. On examination, the clitoris was found to be as well developed as it is in the majority of women; the ovaries could be distinctly felt, and were apparently normal, and the uterus was of full size. Sexual intercourse had never been painful to her, but was productive of no pleasurable sensations. She had never experienced the orgasm. The tactile sensibility and the ability to feel pain were not below the normal standard in any part of the external organs of generation. She had always yielded willingly to the wishes of her husband, and was anxious to be, as she said, "like other women." Various devices had been tried with the object of developing sexual desire, but the only effect had been to inspire her with a feeling of disgust. She loved her husband, and was anxious to do all in her power to please him, hence her visit to me. I was obliged, however, to tell her that I thought her case out of the reach of medical science. As well might I have attempted to change the color of her hair. But as the hair does occasionally undergo a radical alteration of hue, I told her that it was barely possible that through

the action of natural though unknown causes she might experience the relief she sought. In answer to her inquiry, I told her that I saw no reason why she might not become pregnant, and in fact some two or three years thereafter she had a child, and her husband informed me that she was beginning to acquire sexual desire.

In such a case as this it appears that the most rational explanation of the absence of sexual desire and its subsequent acquirement is to be found in the view that the system, so far as regards the faculty in question, is retarded in development. We see very frequently that certain mental characteristics make their appearance at a comparatively late period of life, and there is no reason, so far as I can perceive, why a like condition may not exist as regards the sexual appetite.

In the following case, however, this explanation does not apply.

Mrs. O., thirty-five years of age, and married for over fifteen years, had never experienced sexual desire. There were no evidences of organic disease or malformation of any part of the generative apparatus. There was no aversion to sexual intercourse, and at times she had derived pleasurable sensations therefrom, but this did not excite desire for a repetition of the act; neither did the caresses of her husband develop erotic feelings. Menstruation was regular, both as regards time and quantity, and the general health has always been excellent.

In this case there was nothing but original defect of organization to which the lack of sexual desire could be attributed. As we do not know in what part of the nervous system the sexual appetite is situated it is impossible to locate the abnormality. There appears to be no indication for treatment, for no part of the generative apparatus seems to be at fault.

CHAPTER II.

INABILITY BY REASON OF PATHOLOGICAL OBSTACLES
TO ALLOW OF THE ENTRANCE OF THE
PENIS INTO THE VAGINA.

The causes coming under this category that prevent copulation may be arranged under two heads.

a. Abnormal conformation of the external sexual organs.

b. Acquired diseased conditions of the external sexual organs.

a. This division of the subject includes :

1st. *Abnormal states of the vulva.*

Absence of the vulvar opening has been observed in a very few instances in conjunction with other serious malformations, such as obliteration of the vagina, in whole or in part. In these cases there are neither labia majora or minora or clitoris, but the part presents a smooth united surface devoid of hair.* Occasionally instances occur in which the vulva, while containing all the organs, is very imperfectly developed, remaining during adult life as small as it was in infancy.

Again, there are other abnormalities of development which are more curious from a pathological point of view than they are of interest in connection with the present subject. These consist of various forms of ar-

*Roubaud. Op. cit. p. 386.