

MASTURBATION.

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THE attention of the public, and especially that of the medical profession, has been called, within a few years past, to the evil of masturbation, and the practice has been shown to exist extensively among the youth of both sexes. There is good reason, however, to believe that the extent of the habit, as well as the fatal consequences following it, are yet but imperfectly known. That it is the most frequent cause of ill health among young men and boys, there can be no doubt, and many of the complaints to which youth are subject, and which are attributed to

other causes by their medical advisers, are justly referable to this pernicious practice.

It has been hitherto generally supposed, that the vice of self-pollution was confined mainly, in this country at least, to the male sex, and that females were generally exempt from it. So far from this being the case, it is believed, and not without good reason, that self-pollution is as common among females as among males, and that it has an *important* bearing upon the numerous diseases to which they are subject. There can be no doubt, if it were generally known among the medical profession how extensively the evil exists, it would furnish much aid in the investigation and treatment of female complaints, and throw much light on symptoms, which are often considered mysterious and inexplicable. And if any apology were needed for introducing this subject to the professional public, it will be found in the magnitude of the evil, and its almost universal prevalence.

The writer of this article has been in the practice of medicine for several successive years, in two different locations in the western part of this State, embracing a circuit of ten or fifteen miles each, among what would be called the most moral part of the community, and where the female portion of it are supposed to enjoy the greatest immunity from any contaminating influence. Yet here, surrounded by all the influences which nature furnishes for counteracting vicious feelings, and amid the high tone of moral feeling so well known to exist, he has found the habit of self-pollution among females extensively prevalent. Nor is it confined to the lower classes, those who are supposed to be nearly destitute of moral principle; it exists among all classes, and in every situation in life, even among those embraced in the bosom of the church.

In giving the result of his observations, the writer would state that he mentions only those cases in which the habit was *known* to exist, and which came under his own observation; although the symptoms which mark the victims of this pernicious vice, were present in a great number of instances in which medical advice was not sought, so as to leave no doubt in the mind of the existence of the habit, yet no cases will be mentioned where the fact was not rendered certain, by the statements of the patients.

The habit of self-pollution among females is usually commenced at an early age. Of the 30 cases which have presented themselves to the writer, within two years past, all of them except one commenced the practice at or before twelve years, and most of them at six or seven. The habit thus early formed, before the moral principle becomes developed, is continued, without the individual being aware of the ruinous consequences both upon the mind and body, gaining strength with every indulgence, till the unfortunate victim is oftentimes entirely under its controlling influence. Nor is it unfrequently the fact, that when conscience and reason point out the nature of the vice, and even when the body is sinking under diseases caused by this debasing habit, the individual still yields to the indulgence as a means of relieving her from the excitement and irritability which returns the oftener for being thus allayed.

Masturbation has been considered a solitary vice. That it is so to a considerable extent, there can be no doubt. Such is the conscious degradation attending the practice, that one would suppose the individual would always seek the recesses of solitude, and the darkness of night, to conceal the infamous act. But that the practice is not *always* solitary, the following facts will prove. In 24 of the above cases, the practice was common to associate together for vicious indulgence. The reason for this is to be found in the fact that the gratification is heightened by the manipulation upon each other. Self-pollution is a vice, more than any other, of a highly contagious and virulent character, and the congregating of females together in the various manufacturing establishments is a most fruitful source of moral contamination. One female may thus spread the habit among hundreds. In one school district it was a frequent custom among the female schoolmates to visit each other and pass the night for the purpose of self-pollution. One female, in another district in the same town, was in the habit of teaching the practice to every girl she met who had not previously acquired it. Most of the cases mentioned above were taught the habit by one older. It is impossible to conceive the full extent of such corrupting influence.

The physical effects of this vice are most serious and alarming. The practice cannot be followed any length of time without inducing corporeal suffering. That this is by far the most frequent cause of female complaints, and indeed the only cause of many, there can be no doubt. It is not too much to say that the various neuralgic affections to which females are subject, and especially that proteiform malady, hysteria, is almost always, if not always, connected with masturbation or excessive coition. Leucorrhœa invariably follows the practice, and that, too, at an early age. The frequent irritation and congestion of the sexual organs, by this practice, produces a slight colorless discharge which soon becomes continuous, and of a muco-purulent character. Not unfrequently acute inflammation of the parts follows from excessive irritation, producing severe pain and fever, with strangury, retention of urine, &c. The following is a case of this kind, which has just occurred in the practice of a neighboring physician, and has been communicated by him to the writer since the commencement of this article.

Miss —, aged 16, had been feeble for six months past; was taken a few days since with severe pain across the pubis and back, with retention of urine. There was considerable fever. On examination, the external parts were found much swollen and tender, with an enlargement of the nymphæ and clitoris. She confessed she had been in the habit of self-pollution almost daily for six months, having then been taught the habit. She had abandoned herself entirely to the indulgence, repeating it fifteen or twenty times in a single night, often laying awake for two hours after retiring, and producing the pleasurable sensation every few minutes. The practice was thus continued (although she was often so weak in the morning as to be almost unable to dress herself) until she was arrested by the present attack, for which medical advice was called.

More generally, however, the effects are less violent. More or less

leucorrhœa is always present, and frequently strangury and incontinence of urine. The individual soon feels pain, accompanied with a sense of weakness in the back and loins. There is a feeling of languor and inability to mental or corporeal exertion. Weakness of the limbs, pains in the side and back of the neck and head, and derangement of the digestive organs, follow next in the train of morbid sympathies. The appetite is more or less deficient or fastidious, sometimes voracious. Digestion is imperfectly performed, and the bowels irregular, sometimes constipated and sometimes relaxed. If the practice be continued, the stomach becomes irritable. There is frequent nausea, vomiting and loathing of food. The pulse becomes feeble, and is quickened on the least exertion or mental emotion. The extremities are cold, and the skin is often covered with cold clammy perspiration. If the lungs do not sympathize with the general derangement, and the victim die of phthisis, she soon loses all disposition to exercise, becomes confined to the room and bed, and not unfrequently loses entirely the use of the lower extremities, and becomes what is termed "bed-ridden."

The derangement of the menstrual secretion varies; sometimes it is suppressed or scanty, and sometimes profuse and painful. The writer is confident that chlorosis is almost always the result of recent or former abuses; and what is usually considered as the constitutional effects of the disordered menstruation, is almost invariably the effect of this polluting vice.

If the practice be commenced in early life, the child is feeble, pale and often emaciated. The hair is thin and dry, the eyes are sunken and dim, with a livid circle about them, and with a puffy appearance of the lids. The tongue is often coated, with the tip red, and the papillæ prominent. As the child grows up, the system becomes enfeebled—she is not well, yet cannot be persuaded to seek medical advice; she continues the enervating practice for years, just able to keep about, until at last she sinks under its withering influence.

The effects of masturbation on the constitution will perhaps be best shown by the details of a few cases.

I. Miss —, aged 22, enjoyed good health till she was 14 years of age, when she was taught the practice of self-indulgence. From this time her health began to fail. Soon had leucorrhœa, frequent and painful menstruation, became pale and emaciated, was subject to frequent headache, pain in the back, &c. She continued the practice without being aware that it was destroying her health. The indulgence had of late often produced great prostration, difficult respiration and fainting, from which she would not recover for several hours. She had also of late been attacked frequently with pain in the back and shoulders, followed with cough, difficult respiration, and with the expectoration slightly tinged with blood. These attacks came on usually just after going to bed. Medical advice was not sought, but the fatal habit was continued until the severity of the attacks alarmed the friends, and the writer was called. There was great dyspnœa and constant spasmodic cough, with bloody, frothy expectorations. She was relieved by bleeding, fomentations and anodynes. She renounced the habit on being told of its fatal consequences, and is now gradually improving. The long continuance of the

habit, however, had so affected her constitution, and predisposed her to these attacks, that she is still subject to them on exposure or over-exertion, yet they are becoming less frequent and severe.

II. Miss —, aged 24, had been out of health for six or seven years. She had been under medical treatment several times, and treated for "liver complaint," "fever," "spinal irritation," "prolapsus uteri," &c. Temporary relief only was obtained by any course, and on the whole she rather grew worse. She suffered much from neuralgic pains, frequent nausea and vomiting; had constant leucorrhœa, and frequently strangury, gradually lost the use of her limbs, and became confined to the bed for months. She was seen and treated by several medical men, and her case was considered as an aggravated form of chlorosis. On being questioned, she acknowledged, after *repeated denials*, that she was taught the practice of masturbation at the age of 11 years, while at a boarding school, and had followed it ever since, often to a great extent, and producing great excitement which she would prolong for several minutes. She renounced the habit, but became troubled with voluptuous dreams, frequent excitement and spontaneous gratification. So great was the excitability of the sexual organs, that the irritation of the clothes would produce the same effect as a voluntary indulgence. She commenced the use of tonic remedies with the tinct. cantharides, and obtained partial relief; but such had been the effect of this enervating practice, that her mental energy is in a good degree destroyed, and it is extremely doubtful if she ever recovers.

III. Miss —, aged about 30, has been feeble for many years, especially during summer. Has constant leucorrhœa, pain and weakness in the back, frequent headache, is always *much* emaciated, and frequently affected with strangury. She contracted the habit of self-pollution at the age of 10 years, and had continued the practice till the present time without being aware of its effects upon her health, sometimes yielding to the indulgence every night. Of late years she had been more moderate in the indulgence, yet her constitution was gradually sinking under the fatal habit. On being told of its effects and urged to abandon it, she replied she would *if she could*—a remark which shows the powerful influence the habit exerts over the moral feelings.

The three cases cited above were among those who enjoyed the highest station in society; and the last, in particular, was supposed by all to possess an unusual degree of modesty, and her deportment was every way considered amiable.

IV. Miss —, aged 37, has been confined to the bed for six years. She has lost the entire use of her limbs, and the tendons of the toes are becoming permanently contracted. She is very much emaciated, has some headache, pain in the back and through the loins, and has had frequent paroxysms of hysteria. She has had constant leucorrhœa for years. Her case was treated as such cases usually are, with every kind of medication, by different medical men, with no permanent benefit. When the writer saw her, she presented most of the symptoms already mentioned as the effects of self-pollution. On being questioned, she acknowledged that she had contracted the habit at an early age, and had con-

tinued it until a recent period. It had in all probability been continued until this time. Her health had gradually failed from the time she was sixteen. She had pain in the sides, back and loins, with headache, deranged stomach and bowels, particularly during the summer months. The operation of an emetic brought her upon the bed, from which she had never arisen without assistance. Her mental as well as physical energy is almost wholly destroyed. She lives from week to week with her shoulders raised during the day, a *perfect pattern*, in the opinion of her friends, of *patience and humble resignation!*

The writer has had under his care three cases of chronic ophthalmia commencing in early life, in which masturbation was the chief if not the only cause. Many other cases might be mentioned of similar import with the foregoing, but enough has been said, it is hoped, to convince medical men at least, that the practice is more prevalent than is generally supposed, and that it is a most fruitful source of ill health among females.

A knowledge of the existence of the evil, is not all that is required for its removal. The consequences must be made known to the individual sufferer before she will abandon it. And that there are here great obstacles to be overcome, no one will doubt. The difficulty of obtaining an avowal of the habit, the caution necessary in introducing the subject to the patient, and the fear of cherishing unfounded suspicions, all combine to render the position of the medical adviser embarrassing; yet when the patient presents most of the symptoms enumerated, and they cannot be readily and satisfactorily ascribed to other causes, it is clearly the duty of the practitioner, however much it may be against his interest, to inquire relative to this habit; nor will it do, in many cases at least, to be satisfied with mere *allusions*. One of the most deplorable cases that has fallen under the writer's observation, persisted in the habit for months after hints were given which could not be misunderstood, and not until questions were put in the plainest manner, so as not possibly to be evaded, was the habit acknowledged. It is only by gaining the full confidence that the physician can hope to benefit his patient. A moral lecture will do no good, and however much he may deprecate the practice, it is only as a cause of disease that he can deal with it. It is ardently hoped that the public mind will soon become enlightened on this subject, and the detestable habit broken up.

The treatment will vary according to the nature of the complaints induced. Without a total abandonment of the habit, no permanent good can be effected. The strong tinct. of cantharides (R. Pulv. canth. ʒ x. ; alcohol, ℞i.) given in doses of from 10, 15, 30 drops three times every day, until there is some degree of strangury, and continued so as to keep up an impression for several days, affords most relief for the morbid irritability induced by the habit, and is the most efficient remedy for the leucorrhœa. Oftentimes no tonic medicine will be borne until the chain of morbid sympathies is broken by the action of the flies upon the urethra and bladder. Narcotics may frequently be given with benefit, and if the patient is young and the practice has not long been continued, speedy relief is often afforded. On the contrary, however, if the prac-

will require a long course of the most active efforts on the part of the individual, combined with suitable medical aid, to effect a restoration to comfortable health.

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