

XXX. THE PHYSIOLOGICAL, PATHOLOGICAL AND  
PSYCHOLOGICAL BEARINGS OF SEX.

By SAMUEL S. WALLIAN, A.M., M.D.,  
NEW YORK.

NATURE'S prime object, her one incessant and unconquerable effort, is procreation. To accomplish this end she everywhere sacrifices time, comfort, justice, mercy, even life itself. Emerson says: "In most men sex and digestion absorb the vital force."

And notwithstanding the fact that digestion is the prime essential of all animal life, this astute observer of human nature and profound analyzer of natural phenomena, rationally gives priority to sex. The sexual instinct dominates all animal life, and compels observance of its laws even in the vegetable kingdom. It is this instinct which fires the heart of the warrior, whether hazarding the dangers of the chase, or battling for his hearthstone and defending those he loves. It steels the heart and arm of the gallant knight as he enters the lists, clad in the colors of his lady-love, and inspires the genius of the poet as he recites his tales of romance, chivalry, and daring. It builds homes, rears children, makes systems of government a necessity, and civilized society possible. It instigates, permeates and perpetuates all love, whether fraternal, parental or marital, and there is no known religion in which it is not prominently recognized and constantly exalted. The Fatherhood of God is a catchword in all creeds, and the pitying All-mother is the glorified central figure of one of the most popular Christian sects. It is the foundation and inspiration of all the music, poetry, romance and sentiment in the world. If it were possible to expunge its influence from literature, libraries would thereby be dwindled to a meagre collection of dry-as-dust essays, read only by ascetics and bibliomaniacs. The future destiny of an entire people often hinges on the accidental sex of some unborn child, itself the result of momentary and unthinking sexual ardor, which thus becomes the potent factor in perpetuating or destroying the equilibrium of nations, empires or republics.

Thus, the ultimate influence of sexuality dominates all literatures, all religions, all earthly dynasties. Without it, poetry, romance, chivalry and heroism would have been unknown. Eliminate woman, love, sexuality, from the books of Confucius, the Talmud, the Zend-Avesta, the Koran, the Bible, none of these wonderful works would have survived the generation in which they originated. Rob Homer and Tasso, Ovid and Virgil of that passion which is but an expression of sex; expunge all reference to the amorous impulse from Milton, Dante, Shakespeare, Byron and Moore, there would not be sufficient substance left out of which to construct a single sonnet. Remove its direct and indirect influence from all religious systems, sects would be obliterated, and churches would become extinct through a process of moral dry-rot.

Instance the Bible: The burden of the Mosaic law is directed

toward the relation of the sexes, the questions of race and family, the suppression of adultery, fornication and licentiousness. Wisest of men, Solomon could tolerate existence only through the comforting aid of hundreds of wives and countless concubines. Abraham, the revered patriarch, who has been exalted to the position of a demigod, failed of desired issue until he had trained his virile powers in the adulterous arms of his fair handmaid; and beloved Absalom lost his somewhat reckless but promising young life indirectly or directly from too frequent dalliance with Judea's girls. Paul launched his most eloquent philippics against the concupiscent tendencies of the age in which he lived, and, on the whole, leaves us rationally to infer that he reflected something akin to personal experience when he asserted that it was better to marry than to burn. The marital life of Adam and Eve was Milton's dominant theme, and Satan, prowling in the Garden, experienced a very climax of envy and despair when he stumbled upon the happy pair, as it were, *in flagrante delicto*. Milton even attributes the origin of Death to the incestuous sexual ardor of Satan with his daughter, Sin. Without the stimulus and impulse of this universal passion, religions would lose all human interest, society would lapse into inanity, courts would languish for want of causes, law libraries would grow musty from disuse, and clubs would become obsolete for want of topics to discuss, even for lack of suggestive embellishments for their parlor walls! It is this impulse which gives energy and direction to enterprise, builds cities, inspires the dramatist, and peoples theatres, opera houses and fashionable watering-places. Emasculate the dramatist,—the stage would be annihilated. No true poet ever piped in sickly falsetto; no eunuch has ever attempted an epic or an epithalamium. Eliminate the element of sexual passion from the works of the world's great musical composers,—the director's bâton would forever fall from his nerveless hand; music would become a lost art.

Sex, then, is metaphorically, as it is physically, the sub-structure from which is derived every impetus of human progress.

Every species, with a few unimportant exceptions, is composed of male and female members in about equal proportions. The male element has been compared to the positive and the female to the negative forces in nature; but this comparison is not particularly apt. The male is usually, but not invariably, the stronger, fiercer and more aggressive; the female the weaker, gentler and more

passive individuality. In the human race how much of this diversity is due to the influence of accident, training, custom, or dress, is still an open question. Certain it is that neither element can be long debased without eventually dragging down the other. It would be well for social scientists to ponder this fact. Putting it in the language of the Concord philosopher: "If you put a chain around the neck of a slave the other end fastens itself around your own."

Sexually considered, the matrix (woman) is more vitally important to the future of the race than the moulder (man). But there is no separating the elements. Positive and negative segregated, both become passive and inert. The condition is one of unity in duality, and cannot be otherwise considered. Hence no argument is either pertinent or permissible, and all the heated and ill-tempered wranglings as to capabilities and "rights" are out of time, and worse than wasted effort. To damage or disparage either factor damages the race as a resultant product.

In the brute creation the sexual impulse is controlled entirely by instinct, as are the other animal functions, eating, sleeping, and defecation. Whenever this instinctive impulse is aroused the animal gives its whole attention to its instant gratification. Human beings, on the contrary, in proportion to their individual culture and refinement, are presumed to temper instinct with sentiment and reason. In other words, instinct becomes secondary to reason. Hence, eating is not indulged wholly to gratify the palate and the demand for food, as with brutes. On the contrary, the dinner-table becomes a forum for social and intellectual exchanges, for sallies of wit and bursts of eloquence, for serious discussion and trenchant literary criticism. Even defecation is attended to with set regularity, privacy, and decorum. Strange that the one function on which the origin and perpetuity of the race depend should, more than all others, yet be left under the control of unintelligent impulse and unthinking passion; that this act alone, of all the bodily functions, has seldom been made a subject of philosophic inquiry, but has been virtually left on its original animal or instinctive basis, while all other instinctive acts have been elevated and refined through the exercise of taste and reason. There is no sound moral or physiological excuse for this. The act is susceptible of being elevated, not only as a means of stirpiculture, but also as a source of both physical and spiritual enjoyment.

Before discussing this question from a pathological point of view a few postulates may be laid down. First,—Sexual congress is an instinctive, and, therefore, natural function. Neither animals nor human beings need to be pre-instructed in order to accomplish it. Adam and Eve doubtless indulged the act with the same unshamed spontaneity with which they ate or slept. Second,—Its object is, primarily and instinctively, the gratification of an impetuous, universal, and natural desire. The idea of progeny could not have entered the minds of the primitive man and woman, and only after reiterated observations could they associate the sexual act, as a cause, with parturition as a result. Procreation is, therefore, only theoretically, and not practically, the primary object of sexual intercourse; hence the act and all its relations, direct and indirect, as regards the health and happiness of individuals, and the moral status of the community, should be treated from this standpoint. Third,—In the present state of civilized society, the primary object of sexual intercourse is the same as in the beginning. Not one act, of many thousands, is undertaken with a premeditated view to procreation. On the contrary, the average couple take every feasible or known precaution to avoid the usual and legitimate results of intercourse. The enforced restriction and curtailment of the act which this effort compels, are at the bottom of much of the suffering and disease incident to married life. Both parties suffer. In a physiological sense, partial gratification is quite as injurious and unsatisfactory as total abstinence; and the average married couple never get beyond a feverish, imperfect, or interrupted form of indulgence. Hence the prevalence of married infelicities and infidelities. The unsatisfied male seeks the unrestricted and unapprehensive embrace of the courtesan, and the female either becomes an ascetic, or seeks other means for expressing the repressed forces of her nature,—social gaiety, or religious fervor; or she, too, much more rarely than the male, indulges in marital wanderings.

It may be objected that no tuition is necessary; that human beings, in common with animals, get on very well in this respect in spite of the prevailing ignorance; and that any effort to enlighten or to discipline them must partake of the nature of prurency, impertinence, or even unchastity. But this argument is incompetent. If there is any one function that should be properly and perfectly performed, it is this one, as every physiologist must admit. Hence

it will not absolve the medical man from all further responsibility, to say to the anxious and blushing inquiring bride and groom : "Go on and copulate to your hearts' content ; take no thought for the morrow. It is the ordained and natural way. Leave the results to Providence and the doctor !" This is, in substance, the advice usually given, and, when followed, makes the wife a child-bearing drudge and slave to the desires of her husband. Ignoring it as economically impractical, resort is had to makeshift and injurious methods of self-protection, the use of condoms, after-injections, villanous "female pills," or to actual fœticide. Could the direct and remote results and dependencies of this passion and these practices be wholly abolished, the medical profession would have occasion to complain, with Othello, that its occupation was practically gone. Yet, far-reaching as are these results, the subject of sexology is more flippantly treated by social scientists, doctors, and divines, than any other attribute of human nature. True, the bolder manifestations of social vice are spasmodically attacked and exposed, but, in the main, the whole question is piously ignored, or is so mincingly and almost sheepishly approached that no good results.

In this connection no portion of the community is so culpable as the medical profession. Community cannot be severely censured while the profession remains either so manifestly lame or so stupidly silent. The physician who writes or speaks intelligently and frankly on this subject, if not ostracized by the majority of his professional brethren, is at least voted a crank or a bore. On the other hand, it is no easy task for the most painstaking investigator to accumulate sufficient data on which to base conclusive deductions, for the manifest reason that, while to the pure all things are pure, even cultivated and pure-minded men and women have heard and known so much of concupiscence and sensuality in connection with this topic that they refer to it with a degree of hesitancy and semi-shame. They instinctively shrink from imparting their personal experiences in this direction. Only the uncultured, immodest, or lewd members of society care to prate about their marital enjoyments or infelicities, or their sexual wants, impulses, and conquests. This is a touchy subject, but it is time to face the question fairly, frankly, and as it really exists, and not as it has traditionally existed, or should theoretically exist. Hiding the head in the sand does not avert the oncoming but unseen danger. Nor is it altogether from lack of moral

courage that the physician hesitates to speak. As a rule he himself lacks exact knowledge, and is wanting in a proper appreciation of the dignity and importance of the subject. From his youth up he has been familiar with only its superficial and prurient phases. Nor is the average medical training calculated to inspire him with higher respect for chaste ideals. Too often its tendency is to lower his standards, if it does not even incline him to become a sexual freebooter; while the prevailing false conceptions of modesty have their origin in false social training, and from the fact that the published data regarding sexual matters have been so largely derived from the experiences of the uncultivated, the lewd, and the vicious, rather than from respectable and cultivated people. For example, medical students study anatomy over the dishonored bodies of prostitutes, this class furnishing a majority of the female subjects found on the modern dissecting table.

On the part of the community there is a prevailing sense that the sacredness and privacy of the nuptial couch should not be desecrated or invaded, that the "rites mysterious of connubial bliss" should never be mentioned to alien ears, or exposed to the gaze of alien eyes. To a certain extent this is emphatically true; but there is a limit to reticence, and that limit is the line beyond which the moral and physical health inevitably suffers. False modesty ought not to be allowed to fill untimely graves with the self-immolating victims of unseen and unconfessed maladies.

The fashionable "decline" into which so many modern women, of susceptible natures, "fall," generally has its origin and perpetuation in disordered, perverted, thwarted, or excessive sexual demands. Many married women are too proud to admit even the existence, much less the actual cause, of their serious maladies, but bear their secret burdens with dumb endurance. Thus, ignorance and an over-weening sense of modesty and propriety are allowed to sap the lives of thousands and thousands of the most cultivated and sensitive wives and mothers in the land.

The names of the actual, tangible physical ills attributable to sexual want, sexual excesses, or sexual incompatibility, are legion, and to thoughtful medical men need not be recited. But they are by no means of paramount importance. The mental and moral aspects of the subject are of even more serious import. What a prolific source of crime and misery, in all ages, has been the demon of jealousy! Murder in every horrible form, intrigue the subtlest,

conspiracies inconceivably cruel, tortures too horrible to be recounted, among all nations, in every grade of human society, and in all periods of human history. All these have had their origin in jealousy, and jealousy is but one of the myriad expressions and out-workings of morbid or baffled sexuality. Men are not jealous of men, nor women of women, except when one of the opposite sex is involved. Juno would have kept her temper unruffled had it not been for the suspected liaisons of Jupiter. Even Xantippe unquestionably had her savage instincts developed through crossed affections, or some other cause directly traceable to this part of her nature; while sexual ardor, no doubt, nerved the relentless hand of Lucretia Borgia, caused Cleopatra to apply the venomous asp to her voluptuous bosom, and indirectly rescued the fair Juliet from the portals of death itself!

That licentiousness and debauchery, disease and crime, have always been associated with the morbid manifestations of sexuality, is no reason why this vital subject which underlies the foundations of society itself should be left to the superficial, flippant, and unscientific treatment of quacks and the professed promoters of lasciviousness and prostitution. Again, as physicians, we know only too well that the evils of diseased and perverted sexuality are not restricted to the legally unchaste. It is a sad and shocking fact that the bridal veil is often but the drop-curtain which hides legalized, but none the less beastly and shameful, sensuality. The convenient cloak of matrimony too often covers a multitude of sexual sins. Moral chastity is much rarer than that which is merely fashionable, current, and legal; since the prevailing standard is a false one. As the fashion now obtains, a chastity which is unquestionably moral and pure may yet be illegal; and there are many persons who are in nowise amenable to the ecclesiastic canon or civil statute, yet are morally no whit better than the avowed prostitute.

Of ordinary and extraordinary gynecological lore and gynecological practice and malpractice, we already have fairly too much. It is clearly evident that when all has been said that can be said concerning the bearings of sexual commerce which accidentally or designedly results in offspring, the subject has been scarcely broached. Medical works already treat quite at length of this aspect of the subject, and therefore it is not a feature of the present inquiry. Thus, the cruder forms of infectious venereal diseases



have been much studied, and form a prominent feature in the curriculum of every medical college; but the non-infectious and obscure maladies arising from sexual crimes, mistakes, and ignorance—their name is legion. They abound in every community, and in every grade of society, to an extent that ought to be actually alarming. Again, thwarted or abnormal sexual impulse is the most prolific cause of insanity. Our asylums are populous with aberrant husbands, wronged wives, and heart-broken lovers; while nervous diseases in general are largely the result of interrupted, thwarted, or inordinate sexual impulses. Hysteria is but another name for abnormal sexuality. Its subjects are usually overtaxed wives, or the victims of false or inharmonious sexual relations, or of morbid sexual desires. It is not, however, confined to women; and in all, healthful sexual relations are absolutely essential to permanent intellectual vigor and spiritual health.

Admitting that all this and much more is literally true, the profession has done very little in the way of enlightening the public on this vitally important subject. Yet it is evident that its far-reaching influences should be much more thoroughly investigated, and a morally wholesome knowledge disseminated. On the contrary, physicians limit themselves to the study of results, and to the purely medical and surgical bearings of the subject. Beyond a half cautious and serio-sanctimonious warning as to the evils of feticide and criminal abortion, very few medical men feel called upon to speak. It is time that the profession should awake to the paramount importance of this tabooed topic, since it is evident that the preponderance of sexual sins are sins of ignorance. No reasonably sane man or woman would knowingly entail on himself or herself perpetually increasing sexual misery, except through ignorance of the laws governing sexual health. The fact is, most laymen, and perhaps most physicians, have fallen into the illogical rut of thinking that much sexual enjoyment implies excessive sexual indulgence; that the penalty for this is inevitable; and hence no one attempts to characterize properly the evils, or enlighten the people. Again, selfish interest tends to silence the voices and pens of those who certainly ought to speak.

The status of public sentiment on this subject is another obstacle to reform. There is an ingrained and inborn prudery prevailing, which stifles the few and hesitant endeavors of medical men who occasionally feel impelled to speak on this subject. Society cannot

yet bear the whole truth any more than all its doings can bear the broad light of day. No society lady wishes to be frankly told that her marital practices and surroundings will eventuate not only in physical prostration, but also in mental and moral ruin. She demands, and is willing to pay for, a more effective periodical pill, or, that her physician shall quietly, and without compunction, relieve her from the results of marital inadvertencies; or, that her husband shall use more reliable "safes," or be actually advised to quench secretly his excessive sexual fire in unholy foreign pools. Happy is the man or woman whose sexual relations are entirely natural and healthful. But this does not consist in the mere absence of defined and recognized disease, and the possession of crude physical vigor. Nor is it more skilful or hair-splitting and hazardous abdominal surgery that we need. It is the moral, æsthetic, or psychological aspects of the subject that need attention.

The first inquiry, on examining a candidate for life insurance, or in any chronic disease, is: "Have you ever had any special ailment which you do not care to talk about at the breakfast-table or before the minister?" or: "When did you last have any disease of the urinary or generative organs?" If the patient be a married woman: "How many children have you borne, and how many miscarriages have you had?" "Any disease of the abdominal or pelvic organs?" Of course, the considerate physician would hesitate to ask a respectable woman whether her marital habits and relations were regular and happy, whether reasonable or excessive, pleasurable, indifferent, or positively painful; but these questions would certainly be more pertinent than most of the interminable list usually propounded.

This only corroborates the assertion that, in the present state of society, the sexual instinct and the generative functions are more apt to be morbid and unhealthy than otherwise; wherefore it follows that indulgence, no matter how frequent or intense, is not necessarily a source of satisfaction. The enjoyment afforded by it varies more than that from any other sensual or emotional source. The act itself may be the highest expression of pure and elevated love, or merely the boisterous exuberance of animal lust. Between these extremes are all degrees of variation. An intelligent few, happily mated, dwell perpetually in the region of the highest enjoyment. The many have never known its purest and most satisfying delights, but, rather, like the victims of lust in Dante's *Inferno*, they are forever tortured with burning desire, which imperfect indulgence

only whets; which leaves them cloyed rather than satisfied, and which is a source of ultimate loathing and self-disgust.

The conditions for normal sexual relations are: First,—Physical compatibility. Aside from excessive disparity of size, a certain congeniality—not necessarily similarity—of temperament should exist. Couples too near alike are apt to breed both discord and unhealthy offspring; but a congeniality of leading tastes is a desideratum. Second,—A certain spiritual affinity is absolutely essential. Measured by this latter qualification, all others are comparatively valueless. The nature of this spiritual affinity, so called for want of a better name, is not well understood; but it is certain that it is not mere animal magnetism, although the latter is frequently mistaken for it. Confiding and susceptible women meet a man who is full of animal life, whose glance, touch, and tone are all magnetic, and straightway they yield themselves to the spell, and become as clay in the potter's hands. Too late they learn that sexual ardor and spiritual affinity are, in no sense, identical.

Few men have given any thought to the study of *sexual honor*. In sexual matters woman is the necessarily passive or negative factor. Man is the aggressive and positive. It is so throughout the animal kingdom. The female, even in heat, runs or hides to elude the fierce advances of the male, and only yields through partial exhaustion, persistent solicitation, or actual force. The male knows neither discretion nor mercy, but is utterly inconsiderate of all else save immediate gratification. The picture is but little exaggerated as applied to the average male of the human species. Prompted by desire, his voice becomes plaintively tender, his whole nature glows, and he woos with an intensity which is fairly irresistible; but, once possessed of his object, his impetuosity knows no check, judgment and discretion are put in abeyance, and he becomes brutally oblivious, until his exaltation culminates in a convulsive orgasm, by which his fierce energy is spent, and he lies gasping for breath, or stertorously sleeps off the momentary exhaustion; neither knowing nor caring for the moral pain he may have caused or the physical havoc he may have wrought. With many women the act is not only devoid of romance and pleasure, but is a source of unmitigated disgust and of acute mental and physical suffering. With others indulgence is of the passive kind, and is so insipid and spiritless that abstinence is an easy virtue; and such can have no charity for those whose sexual ardor turns their hearts, as it were, to fire

and their blood into molten lava. As a rule, the male is far more passionate than the female; but the rule is subject to the usual exceptions. There are also women in whom the sexual passion fairly predominates. They may be outwardly virtuous, observing the proprieties enforced by society usages, but it is almost impossible for them to look on a comely man without ardently longing to embrace him. In some extreme cases they restrain themselves only by the most intense and constant effort of will, their whole natures being suffused, and passionate tears filling their eyes whenever they witness suggestive plays, or listen to passionate music. Many others who are, perhaps, in some sense, really quite as passionate, do not suspect the origin of their inner promptings and passion-hunger. Oliver Wendell Holmes, that keenest analyzer of human passion, on its æsthetic side, says, in substance: "Blessed is the woman who can take refuge in music; it gives her an outlet which often proves a saving factor." And what braver utterance has escaped the lips of woman than that of Anna Dickinson, when, in a lecture on the social evil, delivered twenty years since, she said, in substance:

"As human beings, as respectable men and women, let us not be prudes or cynics, let us frankly admit that we all have passions, and that there are times when it seems as if they would sweep away all barriers and assert themselves, in spite of the will, in spite of society, in spite of all practical, prudential or moral considerations. But we can, if we will, make them our servants instead of our masters. Instead of goading us on to sensual indulgence, and proving but a source of weakness, they can be made a source of strength and inspiration for our other work. We can find legitimate outlets for the lustful ardor that lurks in all our natures."

It is easy to say that sexual intercourse should be indulged strictly for the purpose of propagating the species, but it is a fact that it is not so indulged, and will not be; therefore it is stupid folly to ignore this fact, and make no provision for the results of such stultification.

The day will come when sexology will have its chair in every educational institution, especially in every medical college; and when no man, whether priest or physician, will hesitate to teach those laws which lie at the foundations of society, and on which hinge the progress, perpetuity, and perfection of the race. When this degree of prominence is given to it, and only then, will knowledge on this subject advance to that degree which its importance demands.

But the subject broadens as we touch it, and it is scarcely necessary to say that in this imperfect sketch it has been but vaguely suggested. If, however, this suggestion shall have given the cue to a single other mind, so that helpful observations, investigations, and observations shall follow, its object will have been accomplished.