

## CHAPTER I.

### THE SOURCE OF THE GENITAL INFECTIONS.

*The Genital Infections Defined.*—There are more than merely psychological grounds for avoiding the tendency to group the four so-called "venereal diseases," syphilis, gonorrhœa, chancroid and gangrenous balanitis, together under a single head. The history of these four infections is rich in examples of the retarding effect on knowledge, of a premature inclusion in one conception of several different ailments merely because of the accident of their beginning on the same part of the body. To be sure, syphilis, chancroid and gangrenous balanitis begin as sores. Yet the latter two of the sores have ahead of them when they appear, only a brief and usually a trivial history. Prompt and complete recovery, without any more than local damage to the genitals, is the rule. The first sore of syphilis, on the other hand, has, from the moment of its appearance, a significance which reaches potentially into every tissue of the patient's body and into every hour of his succeeding days and years. It reaches beyond him into the lives of his intimates and his friends, into his career and all that it may touch, and through the children that may or may not be his, it lays hands upon the future of the race. Gonorrhœa, instead of beginning as a sore, begins as a discharge of pus from the canal through which the urine flows, or in women often as an inflammation of some deeper portion of the genital tract. In the large majority of cases its field of action is local, the damage that it does the race being inflicted mainly through its power to injure and incapacitate the structures that create and bring children into the world. Syphilis in the overwhelming proportion of cases carries consequences for the individual that have a quality of seeming remoteness, a potential gravity and an element of surprise which make it stand alone among all human ailments. Between the tiny genital sore and the doddering victim of syphilitic insanity there is a vast gulf of alarms and tragic possibilities. Gonorrhœa is more of an inch-by-inch disease, less versatile and less dramatic than syphilis, and in proportion to its wider distribution, perhaps less inexorable and implacable. It is none the less a tenacious, stubborn and mean-spirited foe.

It will be worth while to bear in mind that for the broader outlook, the genital diseases are really only two in number—syphilis and gonorrhœa. Chancroid and gangrenous balanitis are incidents in the diagnosis of syphilis. Gonorrhœa is a wholly different problem from every point of view. There is no longer any need to speak of the venereal diseases. If we must choose two words, let it be the two that have the ring of frankness and the grace of simplicity and directness—syphilis, gonorrhœa.

*General Principles of Transmission of Genital Infections.*—Certain fundamental facts apply no less to syphilis, gonorrhœa, and their satellites, chancroid and gangrenous balanitis, than to such diseases as diphtheria, tuberculosis and pneumonia. All of them are infections, each produced by its own specific germ. They are transmitted by the physical contact