

ity, and many writers accurately describe a class of so-called "Masturbational Insanity": but if all those who masturbated to excess became insane, it would be beyond the powers of any government to provide asylum accommodation for this class alone. It is not, however, the strong and healthily constituted rustic lad, physically strong and mentally sound, who comes under its baneful influence to any very serious extent. His indulgences—and, I presume, the most of them do indulge—are not usually carried to any very great excess. He has an abundance of vital force and nerve power which can stand a moderate amount of depletion without any very serious damage to his general health or mental vigor. Not so, however, with the weak, nervous stripling, tenderly raised in the vitiated atmosphere of a large city, whose ancestral inheritance is, physiologically speaking, of a low type—the boy or girl who comes into the world with an unstable nervous organization, with an insane diathesis, as some have aptly described it, with his whole animal economy crippled, and who never had the proper controlling influence of his nerve centres adequately measured out to him. This is the individual who masturbates to excess, and in whom the indulgence produces the most disastrous results. He learns the vice early in life; the more he practises it the greater is the desire to continue it, and the habit is forced upon him without his being able to exercise the controlling power of a naturally weak will, he soon prostrates all his nervous energies, and being already predisposed to insanity, an attack of melancholia or acute mania is precipitated.

In such subjects masturbation may be set down as an exciting cause of insanity. They are the cases writers describe under the head of "Masturbational Insanity," and evince feelings of egotism, conceit, self-importance; they frequently have delusions in harmony with this line of conduct, and yet they are irritable, nervous, restless, and shun society, especially of the opposite sex. They frequently become religious, and are looked upon by their parents and friends as models of morality. This condition of ill-health gradually increases, unattended at first by any acute symptoms of sudden demonstration of an unbalanced mind; the patient soon begins to act strangely. This is noticed by friends and relatives, but cannot be accounted for; overt acts are committed, and finally

an attack of acute mania renders it necessary to remove him to an asylum, or profound melancholia with suicidal tendencies and self-accusations of having "committed the unpardonable sin" may take its place.

Whilst a certain number of such cases recover, a large proportion of them are incurable. The constant drain upon the system, irritation and exhaustion of the great nerve centres, produces structural changes of a permanent character, and the patient after a variable period, lapses into a condition of chronic insanity, frequently degenerating into dementia or mental oblivion.

In early life the child who thus pollutes himself retards and arrests the healthy development of his nervous system, and the practice in such an one tends to idiocy and imbecility rather than to insanity.

Although, in the sense in which I have pointed out, masturbation may be set down as an *exciting* cause of insanity, it would be a grave error to conclude that all insane persons who practise self-abuse have thus caused their mental estrangement. Should any of you pass through the wards of a large asylum for the insane, and in the morning carefully examine the beds and linen of the patients, you would find evidence of masturbation amongst many of the chronic as well as acute forms of insanity, and would be able to note amongst them all classes of mental alienation. In many of these cases the practice is but a symptom and not a cause of their illness. The intellectual part of our nature being disabled, the animal passions burst forth and self-indulgence in all its unrestrained gratification reigns supreme. This condition is often noticed in the early stages of the general paralytic. It is frequently seen in puerperal insanity, though here it may in part be due to local irritation. It is also noticed in that form of insanity coming on at the climacteric period, when it has been spoken of as "the final blaze of passion before its complete extinction or altered condition"; and perhaps the same remark would apply with some force to an old man of seventy-five summers, whom I once had under my care, and of whom, like DeQuincey and his opium, "to ask whether on any particular day he had or had not indulged, would be to ask whether his lungs had performed respiration or his heart fulfilled its function." Dr. Savage, in his admirable little work on Insanity, records a