

**ON TRUE AND
FALSE
SPERMATORRHOEA**

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On True and False Spermatorrhoea by Percy Pickford & Francis Burdett Courtenay

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PERCY PICKFORD & FRANCIS BURDETT COURTENAY

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SPERMATORRHŒA.

BY

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Of the University of Heidelberg.



EDITED BY

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151 a. 131.

P R E F A C E.

NEARLY twenty years' residence and practice of my profession in this metropolis, have afforded me abundant opportunities of acquiring extensive and most painful evidence of the vast amount of mental and physical suffering, arising from the existence and prevalence of the gross fallacies in respect to spermatorrhœa and its consequences, which it is the object of the following pages to expose and correct.

I have long entertained a similar opinion to that expressed by Dr. Pickford, to the effect, that it was time that some explanation of their misfortunes, accompanied by consolation, should be afforded by the medical profession, to both the real and the imaginary sufferers under spermatorrhœa and other forms of sexual debility. Indeed, I had already to this end sketched out the introductory remarks, which I have now prefixed to the following translation, with a view to their occupying a similar position with respect to some observations of my own on this important subject. However, before I could accomplish my intentions, a review of Dr. Pickford's work appeared in the *Medical Gazette*. Struck by the similarity of the opinions therein expressed to those which I had formed from the result of my own observations, I lost no time in making myself more fully acquainted with his views. By the assistance of a near relative, whose proficiency in the German language enabled me to place the fullest confidence in the correctness of his version of the author's opinions, I became fully acquainted with them myself; and the result was a determination to abandon my previous intentions, and submit the following translation to the notice of the

profession, as well as to that portion of the public who might be interested in obtaining some reliable data in relation to the subjects of which it treats; and thus I hoped to render to both parties a greater service than I could flatter myself would arise from any observations of my own.

It only remains for me to add, that, should the contents of the following pages lead my professional contemporaries to entertain juster views in relation to the duties they owe to the class of sufferers to which it refers, and less exaggerated opinions as to the nature and consequences of these diseases, than have hitherto prevailed,—especially since the publication of Mr. Mc Dougall's Translation of Lallemand's work,—and, finally, induce them to pause ere they adopt the severe, dangerous, and efficient treatment of cauterization with the dry lunar caustic, which is therein recommended, or the scarcely less objectionable and equally inefficient employment of it in solution,—I shall deem the time devoted to preparing the following pages for publication not ill-spent; whilst, if the introductory remarks, conjoined with the opinions expressed in the text, should be the means of protecting the victims of sexual hypochondriasis from imposition at the hands of quacks, I shall equally have cause to feel gratified at the results of my labours.

F. B. COURTENAY.

2, CHANDOS STREET, CALEDONIAN SQUARE,
LONDON,
March 30th, 1852.

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

BY

THE EDITOR.

It requires but a very brief consideration of the social relations and intercourse existing between the male and female of the human race, to satisfy the reader that the diseases to which the reproductive organs of both sexes are liable, must have been, in all ages, and will ever remain, a source of continued anxiety and unhappiness to those whose misfortune it is to labour under any one of them. But, notwithstanding their frequency, and the severity of the mental and physical suffering induced by them, it is only of late years that they have received from the majority of medical men, that attention which their importance justly claims; and even at the present time, there is too much neglect evinced by the profession as a body in the study and treatment of those serious maladies. However, it is gratifying to find that this censure is being daily removed by the industry and learning which are the proud characteristics of the present generation of medical men.

That ignorance, quackery, and fraud should so long have made the subjects of these diseases their prey, can be matter of no surprise, when we consider how imperfect was the knowledge possessed of their nature and treatment, even by medical men, in former years. But that quackery (all its disastrous consequences considered) should, in the present improved state of medical and general knowledge, succeed in palming itself on the credulity of the public, must indeed be matter of painful astonishment to most persons; yet, to those whose experience in

the treatment of these diseases enables them to see the hidden springs by which the conduct of persons suffering under them is governed, it excites feelings more allied to pity than surprise. In order to enable the inexperienced medical man to understand and appreciate these secret influences, I will now, as briefly as possible, refer to those which we find most commonly prevail.

In cases of diseases affecting the genito-urinary organs, we generally observe that patients are most anxious to keep their infirmities a secret from their immediate connexions and friends. From this cause, they are frequently, also, reluctant even to consult their usual medical attendant, (on whose honour and talents they would, in every other case, place the fullest reliance,) lest he should, in an unguarded moment, betray to their common acquaintances the nature of their complaints. This is more especially the case when the patients are labouring under any form of generative debility or incapacity; because, in addition to their desire of secrecy, they are often haunted by the idea, that their medical friend can never see them without thinking of their deficiencies. When this feeling does not exist, they are often influenced by another—that of extreme uneasiness in his presence, because it recalls their real or imaginary diseases to their minds.

Again, some medical men, with a thoughtlessness which cannot be too strongly censured, are apt to treat with levity or indifference the complaints of persons labouring under debility of the generative organs. One of the excuses they offer for this unpardonable conduct is, that the suffering of which the patient complains is often the result of his own misconduct in having been guilty of unnatural practices, and they hence conclude him to be unworthy of their aid,—a doctrine so absurd, nay, so unchristian, that we should pronounce its annunciation to be beyond belief, had we not seen it urged by certain physicians. Another plea, somewhat more excusable, is, that in the majority of these cases, the disease exists more in the morbid imagination of the patient, than in any real or physical imperfection. To pay any attention to such idle fancies, they deem beneath the dignity of a medical man. But, although I admit the truth of their premises, in relation to the often imaginary nature of these maladies, I entirely differ from the conclusions which they draw

from them. It is true that there may be no cause for the incapacity under which the patient labours, beyond that resulting from a disordered and overwrought imagination; yet, as this in its effects is equally, and in some cases more potent, than any arising from functional derangements of the generative organs themselves, it merits the most serious attention of every medical man. I would ask, of what possible consequence is it to the patient, whether his incapacity arises from purely mental or from physical causes, if the effects are similar and equally distressing? The physician may laugh at the patient's idle fears, and under the immediate influence of the ridicule he may appear convinced; but, in solitude the imagination will quickly resume its sway, when its victim, having failed even in finding sympathy in the quarter from whence he had hoped to obtain relief, either sinks into utter despair, or, from having found the legitimate gates of science, so to speak, closed against him, he madly seeks the advice of some one of the numerous empirics and nostrum-vendors who abound, not only in this great metropolis, but also in most large provincial towns. Led on by the specious promises of these sordid impostors, he expends large sums in the purchase of their deleterious trash, till at last the exhausted state of his pocket or health—perhaps both—opens his eyes, though mostly too late, to his own folly and their villany!

I here pause to ask: To whom does blame most justly attach in the picture I have thus briefly sketched? Is it to the patient—to the empiric—or to the legitimate professor of medicine? I answer; we may feel pity for the credulity of the one—unbounded contempt for the rascality of the other—but our most marked and strongest disapprobation must be reserved for the last, whose bounden duty it was to sympathise with and to protect the hapless sufferer. If I have expressed myself strongly, I plead, in excuse, that I feel powerfully the importance of directing the attention of medical men, not only to this particular class of patients, but to all who suffer under any of the other various disorders to which the generative organs are liable, as I have too much reason to fear that, in their treatment of them, they are more than negligent.

I daily hear medical men declaim against the credulity of the public—the barefaced frauds practised by the hordes of quacks

and nostrum-vendors, whose names are to be seen, as it were, stereotyped, in every paper and on every wall. I hear them call on the Legislature to remove, by the suppression of patent medicines, and the prosecution of unauthorised practitioners, the dire consequences to the public health emanating from these pests to society; but, when I see that the unfortunate victims are, as it were, driven to these destructive vermin by the conduct of the declaimers themselves, I cannot vent the whole torrent of my indignation upon the quacks and nostrum-vendors alone. Besides, the law, however stringent, will prove, I fear, a poor security against the thousand rascally devices which such artful and unprincipled scoundrels will put in practice in order to evade it.

The remedy I would rather recommend, lies within ourselves. Let one and all of us resolve, by our kind and attentive conduct to our patients, no matter whether the disease they labour under be of a serious character or of less import, or even an imaginary one, to gain their confidence and esteem, and they will then have no desire to resort to any of these scamps, for the cure of their real or the removal of their fancied diseases. We may know that their disorder is slight and of no moment, or that it exists only in their morbid imaginations—but not so our patients; and consequently the least appearance of indifference on our part is at once the signal for distrust on theirs. It was justly remarked by the late Dr. John Gregory, in his Lectures on the duties and qualifications of a physician, in referring to the treatment of that class of patients commonly denominated *Nervous*, that: “Although the fears of these patients are generally groundless, yet their sufferings are real; and the disease is as much seated in their constitution as a rheumatism or a dropsy. To treat their complaints with ridicule or neglect, from supposing them the result of a crazy imagination, is equally cruel and absurd; they generally arise from, or are attended with, bodily disorders obvious enough: but, supposing them otherwise, still it is the physician’s duty to do everything in his power for the relief of the distressed. Disorders of the imagination may be as properly the object of a physician’s attention as those of the body; and surely they are frequently of all distresses the greatest, and demand the most tender sympathy.” An eloquent writer on