

Two Cases of Bearded Women. By T. W. McDOWALL, M.D.,
Northumberland County Asylum.

The illustrations which accompany this short paper are interesting examples of a sexual deformity very seldom met with in young women. I have not thought it necessary to collect the literature bearing on this subject, and I do not know of any special papers on it. In various works, however, it is referred to in a stereotyped fashion. The general opinion seems to be that it is almost exclusively among women who have passed the period of sexual vigour that beards are found; that such women are of a masculine disposition of body and mind; that the characteristics of their sex are usually imperfectly developed; and that they are, as a rule, barren. Whether such opinions are correct or not I cannot say, but they do not apply to the cases about to be described. Both these women appear to be perfectly developed in their sexual characteristics; one, indeed, now a widow, is the mother of three children. In both cases the hair began to grow on the face shortly after the patients arrived at the age of puberty. The deformity caused them great annoyance, so much so that one of them appears to have been teased into an attack of mania by her neighbours. In her case a hereditary tendency to insanity existed, and one of her sisters is now insane. By cutting, or shaving, they attempted to diminish the disfigurement, but, of course, with only temporary benefit. There can be no doubt that some irregular action of the nervous system is the cause of the growth of the hair in these cases; and it would be an interesting investigation, had we the materials, to discover if bearded women were more subject to nervous diseases than their more favoured sisters.

CASE I.—I had this patient under observation some years ago in the Perth District Asylum. For the photograph, and a copy of the notes in the Case-book, I am indebted to my esteemed friend and former chief, Dr. W. C. McIntosh. She was first admitted to the Perth District Asylum on 2nd March, 1868. She was then 23 years of age, unmarried, and formerly employed as housekeeper to her father, or as a general worker. She was suffering from her first attack of insanity. Her relatives stated that the first symptom observed was depression, which was speedily followed by maniacal excitement. One medical certificate is to the following effect: "She suddenly starts up and walks about the house laughing and talking to herself, quoting Scripture in an irregular and incoherent manner. She says that she does not require to work, that she has worked long



Fig 1.

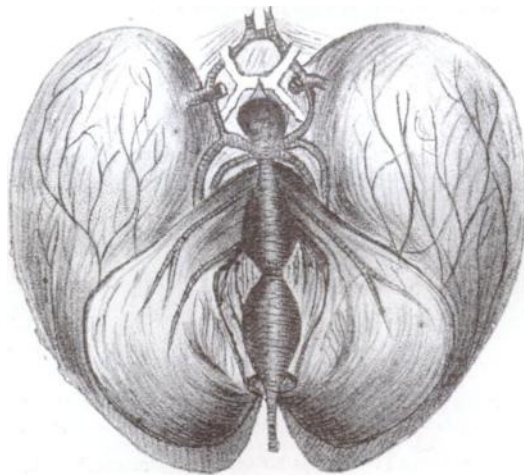


Fig 2.

CASE II.



CASE I.



BEARDED WOMEN.

enough for others, and now she may take ease for herself. Her sister states that for nearly a year she has been conducting herself as above stated, and, also, that at times she was dull and melancholic, sitting quiet without speaking, and at other times becoming excited, running out of the house, and walking about without any purpose." The second certificate was to a similar effect, it being added that she imagined her mother still alive, and that she laboured under various delusions. *State on Admission*: She was of average height, pale, and rather emaciated. Her general health was fair; the circulatory, respiratory, and digestive systems were normal. Her relatives stated that she menstruated regularly. She had a remarkable deformity, which she appeared anxious to conceal—a well developed beard. She had also whiskers and moustache, but they were less marked. The hair was black, and almost quite straight; fine, but not more so than is frequently observed on men's faces. It varied in length, according to situation, being longest on the chin and shortest on the upper lip. In the former position the average length was between 2 and 2½ inches.

The following entries in the Case-book sufficiently illustrate the condition of the patient during her residence in the Asylum:—"January 1, 1869.—She has enjoyed excellent health since admission. The mental condition is but slightly improved, but, on the whole, she is less restless and noisy. She is generally employed in the laundry, and is most industrious and happy, but she frequently becomes noisy, abusive, and incoherent, and then requires to be sent to the airing court. When in such a condition she walks about very quickly, rolls on the ground, or lies crouched up in a corner. She appears to imagine that persons around her laugh at her on account of her beard, so she generally wears her dress over her head, and conceals the under part of her face. When quiet she appears quite happy and cheerful, and, although she has occasionally asked to go home, she on one occasion told her father that she was quite content in the Asylum, and had plenty of food and plenty of work." "May 29th, 1871.—During this spring the patient suffered from pneumonia, and is still pale and emaciated. She often sits for a long time in a corner with her dress drawn over her head, and when disturbed becomes noisy and abusive. Very much against Dr. McIntosh's advice she was to-day removed by her father from the Asylum."

On January 21st, 1871, she was re-admitted in a state of mania, but of this it is not necessary to furnish details.

CASE II.—E. D. H. was admitted to the Northumberland County Asylum on 25th January, 1876. She is now about 26 years of age,

a widow, the mother of three children. It is supposed that her illness was caused by fatigue and anxiety connected with the fatal illness of her husband, she being pregnant at the time. It is, however, more probable that her illness was due to her confinement, which occurred almost immediately after her husband's death, for, although she had been naturally enough much depressed during the distress in her family, it was not till three days after the birth of her last child that the depression became morbid. She became stupid and lost, and frequently said that she had no chance of being saved. She was restless, sleepless, and refused her food.

There is an hereditary tendency to insanity. Her father died at the age of 56, of chronic brain disease, probably apoplectic softening. He had an apoplectic fit, and was paralysed for a time, but my informants could not give me trustworthy particulars. He was at first melancholic, and rapidly became demented. She is one of eleven children, in none of whom, except herself, is there any physical or mental peculiarity. Her brother-in-law states that she was always a merry, cheerful young woman, and showed little annoyance at the unusual growth of hair on her face. She generally kept it short by shaving or cutting.

State on Admission.—She laboured under melancholia, with various delusions and hallucinations of the senses of hearing and sight. She seemed much depressed, the memory was defective; questions required to be repeated over and over again before she would answer. She said that she had seen angels, and heard them singing.

It is unnecessary to give a detailed account of her bodily condition, or of her state since admission. At the present time (January, 1877) she is in good bodily health, but has made little progress in her mental condition. She seldom speaks, pays but little attention to what goes on around her, is exceedingly lethargic in her movements, and appears to be gradually drifting into a state of mild dementia.

As to her physical development, it is womanly in all respects, except the beard and whiskers. Her hair is light brown; eyes blue-grey. As may be seen from the accompanying illustration (No. 2), there is certainly nothing masculine in her appearance or expression. The hair is arranged on her face in a fashion very much like what is seen in Case I. It is, however, somewhat coarser, and slightly curled. Some of the hairs removed from the tufts near the chin measure nearly three inches.