

J. D., about 60 years of age, convicted, and sentenced for an unnatural offence; was dirty in his habits, and very obstinate and perverse. Feigned a fit while speaking to me one day. I asked him in a half-bantering tone when he got up, if he could do another for me, and he went through the performance a second time, letting himself gently down on his knees, and rolling over on his back.

J. C., a low-minded old creature; was given to lewd practices. Very irritable, and ill-tempered, and revengeful. Had been convicted three times for arson, having set fire to farm stacking each time.

(To be continued.)

Necrophilism. By W. A. F. BROWNE, Esq., late Commissioner in Lunacy for Scotland.

(Read at the Quarterly Meeting of the Medico-Psychological Association, held at Glasgow, May 21st, 1874.)

The subject of cannibalism cannot be omitted from such an inquiry. The consideration of this revolting instinct and practice becomes imperative because there are grounds, derived both from history and psychology, for believing that cannibalism, either as a primitive or corrupted instinct, has at one time or other been universally prevalent, has characterised certain states or stages in the progress of every race. This proposition does not exclude the existence, either originally or in certain stages of progress, of purely vegetarian nations. We are so accustomed to regard modern communities in their civilised and mature condition, and in the same manner as the ancients fabled Minerva starting from the front of Jove, perfect, graceful, armed, that we forget that nations had beginnings, that their growth was from a mist or a myth which we cannot grasp, or that they emerged from barbarism so gross and degraded that we can scarcely realise its enormity. It would be a vain and futile task to establish by reference the proposition that a craving for human flesh, or, at all events, its use as food, preceded the habits and manners of civilised life, and we shall confine the allegation to our own progenitors as conveying a lesson at once to our pride and to our philosophy. Montalembert, after eloquently painting the striking and pleasing contrast between the aspect and social state of the west of Scotland, between 412 and 1867, perhaps the very spot in which these

words are now written, says "Dion, Strabonius, St. John Chrysostom, and St. Jerome have emulated each other in painting the horrible cruelty, the savage and brutal habits of those inhabitants of North Britain, who, successively known under the name of Caledonians, Scots, or Picts, were most probably nothing more than the descendants of the British tribes whom Rome had not been able to subdue. All agree in denouncing the incestuous intercourse of their domestic existence, and they have even been accused of cannibalism."*

Froude, quoting from Spencer and Sydney, states, "The rich pastures were burnt into a wilderness; through Killenny, Tipperary, and Cork a man might ride 20 or 30 miles nor ever find a house standing, and the miserable poor were brought to such wretchedness, that any strong heart would have rued the same. Out of every corner of the woods and glens they came creeping forth upon their hands, for their legs could not bear them, they looked like anatomes of death; they spoke like ghosts crying out of their graves; they did eat the dead carriages; happy when they could find them; yea they did eat one another soon after: *insomuch as the very carcasses they spared not to scrape out of their very graves*, and if they found a plot of water-cresses or shamrocks, there they flocked as to a feast for a time."† It is possible that from the influences of climate, soil, and even mental constitution, there may have existed aboriginal vegetarian savages, or, even that the possession of dogs as among the Esquimaux, as has been asserted by M. Toussant‡ may have rendered resort to the consumption of human flesh unnecessary; but, putting aside all speculation and inferential evidence, this practice, originating in one or other of the following incentives, has been traced in almost all known races.

I.—The carnivorous propensity may have been suggested by, or associated with, rude notions of human sacrifice.

II.—Anthropophagism, or the congeneric manifestation blood thirst, may have been connected with social and solemn rites, when the Lydians and Medians and Insular tribes cemented their conspiracies by drinking human blood.

III.—These horrible acts may have been the offspring of

* Montalembert's "Monks of the West," vol. iii., p. 21; Blackwood, London, 1867.

† Froude's "History of England," vol. iii, p. 257. Quoting Spencer's state of Ireland, with a description of Munster, by Sir. Henry Sidney, after a journey through it, 1566.

‡ Transactions of the Ethnological Society, vol iii, as noticed in "Saturday Review," April 15, 1865, p. 445.

revenge, or of feelings of triumph, as in the war feasts which followed victory among the North American Indians, instigated, moreover, by the hope that, in devouring the palpitating remains of their enemies, they might imbibe the courage, the strength, the success, by which they had been signalised; and as in the more recent quaffing of blood fresh from victims of the guillotine, or the greedy licking of the drops which fell from the instrument, by bands of unsexed and unhumanised women, in order to demonstrate their hatred of titles and tyrants.

IV.—The propensities may have been developed under the pressure of want, despair, and the delirium which accompanies these, for we read of mothers subsisting upon their children, in the Siege of Jerusalem; during the Plague in Italy, in 450; during the Siege of Paris; during the reign of le bon Henri Quatre. During the famine in France, in the eleventh century, the flesh-hunger seems to have gone hand-in-hand with murder, for we read “that human flesh was exposed for sale in the market-place of Tournus.” “The strong waylaid the weak, tore them in pieces, roasted them, and eat them. Children would be tempted into lonely places by the offer of an egg, or fruit, and then made away with.” “To such extremes did the madness of famine go, that the very beasts were safer than man. . . . A wretched man had built a hut in the forest of Maçon, near the Church of St. Jean de Castanedo, where he murdered, in the night time, those who besought his hospitality. The bones of his victims caught the eye of one of his guests, who managed to escape; and there were found in his hut forty-eight skulls of men, women, and children.”* Shipwrecks and starvation, in very modern times, have demonstrated that all the horror and repugnance, and moral antipathy, inspired by civilisation, and culture, and Christianity, to cannibalism give way before the first of our instincts—the craving for food—irrespective of its source.

V.—It appears as an appetite, or carnivorous preference for human flesh, naturally in certain barbarians, morbidly in chlorotic or gestating females, as exemplified in the wife, who, urged by the craving to eat her husband’s shoulder, killed him for this purpose, and then salted the body, in order to prolong or return to the gratification.†

* Michelet’s History of France, Book iv., p. 144

† Georget Dict. des Medicines.

VI.—It is affirmed to appear as a sign of love, reverence, kindness, as in the Papuans, who killed and eat their parents when aged or infirm.

VII. It appears as a liking or respect or veneration for the dead, their remains, their beholdings, their resting-place, their memory, and may be accepted as a healthy or insane attachment, according to the extent to which it is carried, and the circumstances and manner in which it is displayed. The green grave on the hill side or in the floor of the wigwam, or the deep pit in the bed of the river, may as fairly be regarded as proofs of the former as the enormous marble piles in Hindostan, which it required uncounted wealth, years, and even generations of men to erect, the Pyramids of the Desert, or the mounds—almost mountains—of earth piled over the dust of the red children of the Far West. Incremation is in the interest of the living. Inhumation and many other modes of sepulture, the preservation of reliques, even of locks of hair, are all indications of unwillingness to part altogether from what has been loved, what has been part of ourselves, of our physical and mental entirety. It is not our province to enter upon the question whether such processes do not prove or shadow forth a belief in resuscitation, and that there is something precious in what has been animated dust; but the most expressive attempt to preserve the body in life-like form and lineaments is witnessed in the various modes of mummification which have been resorted to, and which have, so far, triumphed over time and put history to the blush. Such devices are protests against death and decay, and cravings after immortality. In Egypt, where these struggles against the inevitable doom of change were carried to the greatest extent and degree of perfection, the body of the deceased was first cleared or purified from all that was disagreeable or destructible, then filled and surrounded by spices and medicaments, supposed to be antiseptic, then involved in linen bandages, so as to exclude the air, but not materially to alter the form or features, nor even to conceal the ornaments, armour, dress, which had characterised the owner, and then deposited in the painted and ornamented case or coffin so familiar to the visitors of our museums.* But this was not all. The hair was left, artificial eyes of enamel sometimes introduced, the cheeks, nails, and various parts of the

* Pettigrew's "History of Egyptian Mummies." *Passim*.

body covered with gold leaf or gold plates, and various other attempts to beautify and adorn were resorted to. The remains were not then consigned to their final resting place, in cave or mummy-pit, but were retained for various—sometimes long—periods in the chambers or houses of former friends or relatives, sometimes formed a companion in their feasts, and constituted a good, or chattel, in their bargains and legal processes. It is singular that this highly civilised people should have preferred the sad spectacle of the simulacrum of what they had lost, to what their knowledge of painting and sculpture might have supplied in anticipation of what these arts have done for us, in clothing our homes with the unrepulsive and speaking representations of those who won such a distinction during ages past. It would be vain and out of place even to epitomise the various means of embalming, exsiccation, fossilisation adopted in Burmah, Peru, the Canary Isles; and even now, where certain tribes of North American Indians allow the soft parts of their dead to waste or wither, and then carry the bones, or whatever remains, from camp to camp, in the endeavour to conserve, and have ever beside them some material part of the departed; and it would be equally vain to discuss the theological or metaphysical opinions which may have prompted or mingled with the ordinary feelings of attachment and veneration, or the import of the ceremonials with which these practices were associated. Suffice it to say, that ample evidence exists that such feelings and wishes are catholic, and remain until the present day. We do not allude to the success of chemical art in postponing the decay incident to animal tissues, or to the Chamber of Horrors, in Paris, where you are introduced amid large groups of figures, with the aspect and dress of living beings, intended to illustrate this success; nor to the instances of modern embalming afforded during the late American War, when the bodies of those slain in battle were preserved, placed in coffins with glazed lids, and sent to those by whom they might be identified; but to the much more commonplace veneration paid to reliques of the good and great; to the piles of skulls and bones of the unknown and unhonoured dead, which may be seen in the village churchyards in North Italy; to the sacredness and affection with which we regard the spot where even the rude forefathers of the hamlet sleep; and to the mementoes cherished in every household of those who have passed away, as proofs of what may be styled a healthy necrophilism.

In minds apparently otherwise sane, an exaggeration of the sentiment of liking for the dead, even during or after decomposition has been witnessed: "Juana, Queen of Navarre, kept her husband, Philip's, body by her for a twelvemonth. She imagined he was dosing, and would soon awake. She paid him compliments and made her servants treat him as a king."* There has come to my knowledge a notorious case of a landed proprietor, who, although on bad terms with his wife while alive, carried her body with him through India, scandalising the natives, and outraging the feelings of all, by placing the coffin under his bed. When we enter upon the debateable land which connects eccentricity with derangement, various grotesque modifications of this sentiment may be encountered. Consorting or living with the dead has been observed as a characteristic of melancholia. Individuals have inhabited graveyards, preferring the proximity and association of corpses with which they had no tie, to the cheerfulness and comfort of home. While in the Western Isles, some years ago, we examined two females, both bearing the same name, but in no degree related, who both laboured under a mild melancholia, manifesting this predilection as the most prominent symptom of their unhealth. They frequented their respective parochial graveyards, scaring the scattered and superstitious population around, who at first conceived that they must be the ghosts of the departed. One lay upon the earth beneath a flat stone, supported on short pillars, which marked the place of interment of clansmen, or, at least, namesakes of her own. The habits of the other were not so well known; but she was observed to haunt the uninclosed cemetery, to sit upon particular mounds, and so forth. Repeated efforts and even force were required to interfere with these midnight wanderings in each case.

In cases where the motives are altogether obscure, or where alienation is suspected, chiefly from the revolting character and inexplicability of the acts, a further advance in the same direction has been observed. The abodes of the dead have been visited, violated; the exhumed corpses, or parts of them, have been kissed, caressed, or appropriated, and carried to the homes of the ravisher, although belonging to total strangers; or, as in the instance of Sergeant Bertrand, who, leaving his barracks during the night, excavated recently-made graves, having no other instrument than his short

* Hepworth Dixon's "Two Queens." Vol. ii., page 274.

sword, and then touched, tore, or cut the bodies reached with the weapon mentioned.

The next step in this downward progress is, where this liking is developed into the ferocious appetite, or longing, for human flesh, but under circumstances where little or no doubt can be entertained that it is a symptom or complication of different forms of melancholia, or impulsive insanity. I was much struck, when frequenting the Parisian asylums as a student, with the numbers of anæmic, dejected females, who obtruded upon me the piteous confession that they had eaten human flesh, devoured corpses, that they were vampires, &c. Having met with no distinct example of this delusion in our own country, I very recently corresponded with the medical superintendents of six large asylums, in order to ascertain their experience upon this subject. One and all replied that they had not, in many thousand patients, observed this manifestation; but that they have met with many individuals who firmly believed that the soup, meat, &c., served up to them consisted of human remains, and recoiled from such repulsive fare. This horrible suspicion occasionally leads to the refusal of food; and, many years ago, a lady under my charge, under the impression that there was what she called a gigantic murder machine under the foundations of the asylum, which crushed and converted her companions into minced-meat, abstained, and was compulsorily alimented for two years and eleven months. Within a few days I have heard of a homicidal maniac, so dangerous as to require the presence of two attendants, who cries out incessantly for blood, flesh,—that he will tear out and roast the heart, liver, &c., of his guardians; and, it is suspected, might carry his threats into execution did an opportunity present itself. A Glasgow newspaper, October, 1874, under the heading “Act of Cannibalism,” narrates that A. B., sane, sober and without motive or provocation, assaulted a cousin with brutal violence, bit off the lower part of his ear and part of his lip, otherwise biting and worrying him, so that a large quantity of blood was lost, smearing the offender’s mouth when apprehended. Was this impulsive blood thirst? Brierre de Boismont, in his account* of the forms of insanity occurring after the Revolution of 1848, mentions the case of a wounded patient who craved and cried for “the flesh of a National Guard, soaked in the blood of a Guard Mobile.” What certain

* L’Union Médicale.

classes of lunatics harbour as a delusion, or have perpetrated in fancy, others actually carry into effect. Necrophagism generally occurs in such forms of insanity as to render it difficult to trace the propensity to a definite origin, or to unravel the feelings and objects with which it is associated. It has been referred to mere savage instinct, to morbid hunger, and to those tastes and tendencies towards inedible, disgusting, even deleterious substances which characterise certain unhealthy states of the system.* None of these solutions, however, are applicable to many of the examples on record. The explanations may include the examples given by Prochaska of the woman of Milan, who tempted children into her house, killed them, and fed upon them at leisure; and of the man who killed in order to satisfy his craving. Similar occurrences are recorded during the epidemics of lycanthropia in the middle ages,† but they scarcely embrace the drinking of the blood taken in venesection, the sucking of the bodies of the deceased observed in the hospitals of Versailles, the sudden parricides, and the extraction and roasting of the heart of the victims—in one case by a loving daughter and in another by a simple-minded son; or the connate necrophagism said to have appeared in many members of a Scottish family by Legrande du Saulle, who, however, gives no reference; unless we make a wider generalisation, and suppose such horrors coincident not merely with exaggerated and perverted instincts, but with the abrogation of reason, conscience, and will.‡ We have alluded to an approximation to what may be designated blood thirst, but more distinct and appalling illustrations are accessible. 1. A girl of 14, belonging to the Puy de Drôme, who is described as having displayed on all occasions an avidity for human blood, and for sucking recently inflicted wounds. 2. In the review of “Hilton’s Brigandage in South Italy.”§ In early youth Gaetano Mammone had shown the tastes of a cannibal. He would hang about butcher’s stalls in Sora, his native town, waiting an opportunity to put his mouth to the gashed throats of animals. In after life, this man, who subsequently retired on a pension of 3000 ducats, assigned to him by Ferdinand, was accustomed, as a regular habit, to drain with his own lips the blood of his unlucky captives.

* “Chambers’ Cyclopædia” Art. Necrophilism, Morbid Appetites, &c.

† “De La Folie, Calmeil” Paris, 1847, p. 342.

‡ Essai sur l’Anthropophagie par M. le Dr. Legrande du Saulle. “Annales Medico-Psychologiques,” 3rd Series, t. viii., p. 472. July, 1862.

§ “Saturday Review,” 21st January, 1865.

3. A sombre, sullen man, supposed to have been previously in confinement for some criminal act, leaves his home abruptly, after taking therefrom a sum of money, wanders to some distance into woods and wild country skirting vineyards, seeks for and secretes himself in a cave or deep fissure in the rocks, where he subsists for some days upon cherries, pears, and grain, taken from the adjoining fields and orchards. Instigated or "consumed" by disease, or unholy and morbid desires, he one day saw a girl, æt. 12, seated by the side of a vineyard, stealthily approached her, threw his handkerchief round her neck, dragged her on his back, ran for some distance till exhausted; he then threw his burden upon the ground, but not until the girl was dead. He then quenched his thirst by drinking the blood of his victim, then dragged the body into the hole where he had found shelter, and then, or previously, inflicted upon it deep gashes with a knife in his possession, laying open the different cavities, and had, according to a medical witness, devoured a part of their contents. He, subsequently, partially interred the corpse under the floor of the cave, lived beside it for some time, but subsequently went into the adjoining forest, where he was arrested. He was undoubtedly insane.*

It would be rash to stigmatise the partiality for game flavours, underdone meat, tainted and almost putrid delicacies prevalent among luxurious classes as proof of mental or even gustatory decrepitude, but it seems to form a link between our civilisation and the habits of certain of the degenerate and outcast tribes of Hindostan, who prefer and live upon carrion, and keep all animal flesh until it becomes so. Similar corruptions have been noticed where cannibalism was engrafted upon aberration. Berthollet describes a man who not only ate human flesh, but decaying human offal of the most disgusting kind; and the case of an idiot boy is before me, who, being left alone for some days with the remains of his mother, devoured a portion of the shoulder. But the most striking instance which has become known to me has been supplied by the Inspector of Poor of a Highland parish where the events occurred. The case shows not merely the perversion under discussion, but that many motives, revenge among others, lead to the act of tasting human flesh. The Goths, a thousand years ago,

* "Causes Célèbres." Tome vii., livre, 117. Paris. Hammond's *Insanity in its Relations to Crime, passim.*

carried at their saddles—as the North American Indians of the present day carry at their girdles—the scalps of their enemies killed in battle. About forty years ago a man and his wife lived close to a Highland lake. The former disappeared, and it was suspected was murdered, and thrown into the lake by the latter. Their eldest son, believing in the guilt of his mother, became insane, and expressed great antipathy and loathing towards her. This woman subsequently died, and was interred in the parish churchyard. The maniac wrote to the proprietor demanding that he should be allowed to dig up the body of the murderess. Two or three years passed, when the poor lad was detected in the act of carrying his horrible design into execution. He had dragged the body from the grave, placed the skull upon the low wall around the yard, had scattered the brains around, was tearing her flesh and hair with his teeth, and was only made to desist on a gong being brought and sounded. He escaped into the woods, subsisting upon frogs, &c., and I have been informed, upon less reliable authority, that he carried with him a portion of the remains of his parent, which he from time to time devoured. He subsequently disappeared from his native glen, but is believed to have recovered, and to have worked as a joiner in another part of Scotland.

I have advisedly omitted the co-relative topics of the worship of ancestors, Vampirism, Fetichism, &c., as only indirectly connected with this inquiry.

I am not prepared to enter upon a philosophical generalisation of the various and rather heterogeneous materials here gathered together. The most summary, and, perhaps, the most popular mode of disposing of the questions involved, would be to refer necrophilism to primary and pre-Adamite instinct; and, disregarding all our knowledge of the laws of the hereditary transmission of mental qualities and of the etiology of mental diseases, to throw all the blame of these monstrous aberrations upon the anthropoid apes. I adopt the bolder position that such aberrations owe their origin to that state of privation, degradation, or degeneration, as the case may be, from which all races have sprung, and to which, were the inhibitive influences of religion, education, and civilisation withdrawn, all races would inevitably return.