

*Case of Intermittent Mental Disorder of the Tertian Type, with double consciousness.* By DAVID SKAE, M.D., Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons, &c.

THE following case is interesting, as affording an illustration of an extremely rare form of mental disorder, that in which it assumes a periodic or intermittent character. I am acquainted with only one case of a similar character, which was mentioned to me by the late Dr Abercrombie; the particular features of the case I have not been able to learn, but they are probably known to several members of the profession in Edinburgh, as the individual affected himself occupied a prominent position in the medical profession. This much I have learned regarding his case, that he was affected periodically, I believe, on every alternate day, or at least the regularity of the remission or intermission was such, that his family were able to anticipate, by calculation, the days on which he would be well, and those on which he would be ill, and to arrange their social and domestic engagements accordingly. On the intermediate days, he was perfectly qualified for the discharge of his several duties; on the other days, he was totally disqualified for social intercourse or the ordinary business of life.

The subject of the following remarks exactly resembles the individual referred to in the particulars enumerated. He is an unmarried gentleman, in the prime of life, connected with the legal profession, of a leuco-phlegmatic temperament, regular in his habits, which have always been retired, and extremely temperate in his mode of life. His complaint commenced with the usual

symptoms of dyspepsia—it then gradually passed into hypochondriacism—and ultimately into its present form, a state bordering between hypochondriasis and mental alienation.

The dyspeptic symptoms became a subject of complaint and solicitation to the patient about 10 or 12 years ago. They appeared to have had their origin partly in habits of over-walking before dinner, so as to produce considerable exhaustion, and partly in habits of sitting up to a late hour engaged in reading or in business. The symptoms gradually increased in severity and obstinacy, it being found quite impossible to induce the patient to break through the habits which he had acquired, or to alter in the least the quantity or quality of the diet to which he had been accustomed from his earliest youth.

To the usual dyspeptic symptoms there gradually succeeded a train of morbid feelings, and ultimately of illusions founded upon them. The distress occasioned by flatulent distention of the stomach, and the painful feelings in different parts of the body, which are its usual concomitants, led the patient to consult many medical men, and use large quantities of medicine, which, as he still persisted in the habits in which his complaints originated, and the diet by which they were excited, rather aggravated than abated the evil. The fugitive pains and uneasy feelings experienced in different parts of the body were spoken of as sufferings of a mysterious and unparalleled kind; they were at one time believed to be wind circulating through the veins, and at another, the whole system was imagined to be charged with water. While under the influence of these impressions, the patient, day after day, would sit for many hours in the water-closet, believing that the water was constantly discharging itself; and at another time, he continued spitting incessantly for many weeks, under the impression that his whole frame was becoming converted into saliva.

Feelings of gloom and despondency were at the same time developed:—the most trifling errors of the past were magnified into crimes of unpardonable magnitude, and the future was contemplated with the utmost dread. He commenced a system of reading the Scriptures, psalms, and paraphrases with great zeal and rapidity; this soon grew into a system of rapidly scanning the pages, and incessantly turning over the leaves, and he persuaded himself that he read the whole Bible through, and all the metrical psalms, once or twice daily. He now sat up the greater part of every night, and lay in bed during the day; and when he went to bed, he carefully surrounded his person, from head to foot, with bibles and psalm books.

Under the influence of the bodily distress and mental despondency from which he suffered, he not unfrequently spoke of drowning himself, or of throwing himself over a window, and on several occasions begged earnestly that he might have his razors. A natural timidity of disposition, and a prevailing conscientiousness,

prevented this tendency from displaying itself with any seriousness or determination of purpose.

From an early period in the history of this case, it was observed that the symptoms displayed an aggravation every alternate day. This gradually became more and more marked, and for the last 18 months the symptoms above described have become distinctly periodic. On each alternate day, the patient is affected in the manner just described, and will neither eat, sleep, nor walk, but continues incessantly turning the leaves of a Bible, and complaining piteously of his misery. On the intermediate days, he is, comparatively speaking, quite well, enters into the domestic duties of his family, eats heartily, walks out, transacts business, assures every one he is quite well, and appears to entertain no apprehension of a return of his complaints.

What is chiefly remarkable and interesting in the present features of the case, is the sort of double existence which the individual appears to have. On those days on which he is affected with his malady, he appears to have no remembrance whatever of the previous or of any former day on which he was comparatively well, nor of any of the engagements of those days;—he cannot tell whether he was out, nor what he did, nor whom he saw, nor any transaction in which he was occupied. Neither does he anticipate any amendment on the succeeding day, but contemplates the future with unmitigated despondency. On the intermediate days, on the other hand, he asserts that he is quite well, denies that he has any complaints, or at least evades any reference to them; appears satisfied that he was as well the previous day as he then is, asserts that he was out, and that he has no particular complaints. On that day he transacts business, takes food and exercise, and appears in every respect rational and free from any illusions or despondency; anticipates no return of illness, and persists in making engagements for the next day for the transaction of business, although reminded and assured that he will be unfit for attending to them. On those days he distinctly remembers the transactions of previous days on which he was well, but appears to have little or no recollection of the occurrences of the days on which he was ill. He appears, in short, to have a double consciousness—a sort of twofold existence—one half of which he spends in the rational enjoyment of life and discharge of its duties; and the other, in a state of hopeless hypochondriacism, amounting almost to complete mental aberration.

An endless variety of remedies have been used in the treatment of this case, and among others, those which are believed to be useful in periodic affections, but without marked benefit. The patient has obtained considerable advantage from change of scene and exercise in the open air. But the friends by whom he is surrounded, have not sufficient control over him to carry out those regulations as to diet, exercise, habits, and employment, which

should form the most essential parts of the treatment; and circumstances have hitherto prevented his being placed under more efficient control.