

WHY SOME PEOPLE ARE BASHFUL.

BY A FAMILY DOCTOR.

"I hate bashful men."—COWPER, 1781.



BASHFULNESS is defined as want of self-possession or as excessive self-consciousness, and those who suffer from it are embarrassed and ill at ease in society. The late Wilkie Collins tells a tale of a bashful man who applied for advice to a modern editor, and received the following reply: "When you have a sad trick of blushing on being introduced to a young lady, and when you want to correct the habit, summon to your aid a manly confidence." At first sight we smile at this answer and think there is a jest hidden somewhere, but there is really a basis of sound sense in the apparently absurd advice. This is recognised when the causes of bashfulness, together with its accompaniments, blushing, stammering, etc., are investigated with the help of medical knowledge.

Bashfulness is what is known medically as a *functional* disorder: that is to say, it does not depend upon any actual disease, but is due to some temporary interference with the natural action of the brain. When the natural action of the brain is thus interfered with, we say it is *inhibited*. The meaning of this word becomes clearer when one or two examples of inhibition are examined. We are able to stop a yawn or a violent sneeze by a resolute effort of the will. In these cases the brain-impulses which were about to produce those violent movements, receive a message from the part of the brain which is occupied with thinking, and so the movements are stopped, or inhibited. We cannot prevent every movement in such a manner. Thus, we cannot by any effort of the will stop (or inhibit) the beat of the heart for a single moment, but we can stop, at all events for a little time, the movements of the chest and other parts of the body which constitute breathing. In like manner, all those natural actions of the brain which are manifested in easy, unconstrained behaviour are *inhibited* in the disorder called bashfulness. It is really the messages sent by the higher or thinking part of the brain which are the actual cause of our embarrassment. This being the case, since we can control our thoughts to a considerable extent, it is in our own power to some degree to prevent the "inhibiting" action of the brain, and we shall find later that it is by cultivating "a manly confidence" that the cure of bashfulness is accomplished. The conduct of a bashful man shows clearly that the ordinary action of the brain is suspended as we have described. For example, one of the commonest symptoms is stammering. Here the orderly brain messages which cause the tongue, lips, and other parts concerned in speaking to move properly are inhibited, and so there is produced the confused and

halting speech known as stammering. His power of orderly movement, of judging distance, is also inhibited. He stumbles over furniture, he drops things from his hands, and exhibits all those painful embarrassments with which we are all familiar.

The first chief cause of bashfulness consists in a man's attention being directed to himself. The man who is quite at ease in his office—bashfulness is most often an attribute of the male sex—becomes self-conscious in the drawing-room, and very shy. Although capable of joining in the conversation, his witty remark is forestalled because he is too slow in giving utterance to it, or too timid to hear his own voice. The ordinary action of his brain is inhibited by his self-consciousness. The second cause is emotion. The extreme bashfulness of many men when they are in love is proverbial, and the surprisingly few married men who suffer from bashfulness is noteworthy.

These causes are, however, usually insufficient to produce bashfulness, but there must be some further necessary condition. Many conditions pre-dispose to it: *e.g.*, a highly nervous temperament, deficient moral courage, with which is associated lack of self-assertion. These may be regarded as constitutional causes.

Another pre-disposing cause is defective education. The general education may have been neglected, or the want of opportunities of acquiring self-confidence in society may have been experienced. Bashfulness is natural to youth. "Modesty is the graceful, calm virtue of maturity; bashfulness the charm of vivacious youth"; and unless a young man takes advantage of opportunities of entering society, he will retain "an air of bashfulness which is in reality the want of habitual intercourse with the world" (*Waverley*). As long ago as 1570 Ascham wrote that "if a young gentleman be bashful and soon blush, they call him a *babishe* and ill brought up thyng." Deficient social education is therefore a cause of bashfulness.

Habit also pre-disposes to it. A mere indisposition to exert oneself, if indulged for too long a time, may eventually result in confirmed bashfulness. This indifference may be due to a want of sympathy with the surroundings, or may have its origin in unalloyed selfishness—for many bashful men are extremely selfish—or may be due to vanity.

The man who is the life of the tap-room, because there he can do no wrong, is painfully ill at ease in the society of his equals; and the behaviour of Hastings, in "She Stoops to Conquer," is an example of this. Lastly, excessive smoking or excessive drinking, and immoral or unhealthy pursuits of all kinds, are sometimes the cause of bashfulness.

The pre-disposing causes of bashfulness may therefore practically be included in one comprehensive

term—defective education. The education is defective morally, intellectually, and socially. How very important is the intellectual aspect will be more apparent as the effective treatment of bashfulness is discussed. If the constitutional causes are in any way associated with ill-health, the family doctor must be consulted. With this exception, the cure depends entirely upon the ability of the man himself, by steady perseverance and well-directed effort to correct the moral and intellectual failings from which he suffers. It is certain that success can eventually be attained.

The elements of social education are best acquired in the family circle. There a man learns to take an intelligent and sympathetic interest in others, to be gentle and courteous, and to be forgetful of self. If he fails there, what hope is there for him in the company of strangers? The deep, lasting, and moulding influence of home life cannot be exaggerated. "No man doth safely appear abroad but he who can abide at home," says Thomas à Kempis. Bashful men often lead double lives; and it is certain that the artificial and unusual restraint which oppresses them in society is not unfrequently due to the neglect of social amenities at home. Such a man has only the veneer of a gentleman. The bashful man must finally take

full advantage of opportunities of appearing in society. At first he must content himself with a retiring and subordinate position. His social ambition will grow with his social success, and will be gratified eventually in full. If he be gifted with some accomplishment, his career will be the more speedy and brilliant. If, on the other hand, he has no "accomplishment," he will be greatly assisted by giving some thought beforehand to subjects of conversation. Few men are able to dissociate themselves without effort from their business or their own interests. Many people hide successfully their bashfulness under a cloak of reserve. If this is overcome, they add materially to the enjoyment of a company; while unconquered, it aggravates the bashfulness of others.

One note of warning, in conclusion: it is better to be shy and retiring than forward and pretentious. In avoiding one extreme, many rush to their own destruction in the other. A man entering society is like unto a man entering the sea to learn to swim. At first he must play in shallow water, but as he acquires confidence after many failures, he ventures further from the shore. The foundation of true social success is laid at home, but its complete realisation depends upon habitual social intercourse.

A DESPERATE VENTURE.

IN TWO PARTS.—PART II.

CHAPTER THE THIRD.

THE storm that Anthony predicted broke in full force the morning of the next day. Mr. Disney returned home in the middle of it, a miserable wreck after his night's debauch. Anthony touched up his sketches and listened to Georgiana's moans that her aunt's party was over. He watched Dorothy going about the house with strained eyes and colourless cheeks.

"I am going down to the village,"

she said, abruptly entering the room where Anthony and her sister were seated. "I shall not be back for supper unless the wind drops."

A moment later she passed the window, her head bent against the storm, one hand holding the hood of her black cloak on her hair.

"What a simpleton Dorothy is," said her sister, pettishly, "she thinks she can stop them from lighting the beacon, but she can't. She will only get into danger."

"I had better follow her," he said, starting to his feet.

"You had better stay here."

But Georgiana's words were lost. He was already

out of the door and running down the steep hill to the quay.

"Have you seen Miss Disney pass?" he asked a man standing in a doorway.

"Yes, sir."

Anthony looked at the man, surprised at the unusual civility of tone and words; he saw he was speaking to the coastguard who preferred to be blind to what happened.

"The young lady went down to the quay, sir. She's bent on stopping things to-night, but it's no use; they are buzzing like wasps and she'll only come to harm herself if she stays among them."

"Why are you not keeping order, instead of staying in your cottage?" said Anthony, angrily.

"I've a wife and children, and there's nothing for 'em if anything happens to me."

"You had better do your duty," said Anthony sternly, and hurried on.

The wind was too high for the rain to be continuous; it came in gusts of sharp, cold showers: one was passing over the dark, lowering sky as he came on the quay. Small waves, crested with white foam, dotted the broad river, of a cold, steely colour. The ferry boat crossing had its red sail nearly touching the water, heeling over with the wind.

But in spite of rain, wind, and storm, the quay was alive with fishermen in sou'-westers tied under their chins, and long coats flapping in the wind. Groups

