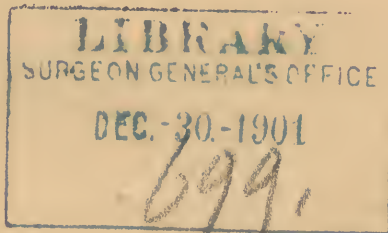


Kelly (H. A.)

The ethical side of the
operation of oöphorectomy.



THE ETHICAL SIDE OF THE OPERATION OF OÖPHORECTOMY.

BY

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I CONSIDER it a privilege to be able to present to the profession the following terse, crystallized, earnest declaration, from a purely ethical standpoint, criticising all operations which interfere with the procreative functions of a woman.

Since receiving this letter I have been again travelling in mind over that much-discussed ground kept so constantly before us in the journals of eight and ten years back.

I think the only causes for which we now remove ovaries and tubes apparently normal or capable of extruding, and transmitting an ovum to the uterus, are:

1. Menstrual insanity;
2. Certain cases of insanity, associated with marked menstrual exacerbations, or distinctly menstrual in type;
3. Menstrual epilepsy;
4. Osteomalacia;
5. Extreme dysmenorrhea rebellious to every other mode of treatment in ~~very~~ rare instances; and,
6. Occasionally to check the growth of myomata.

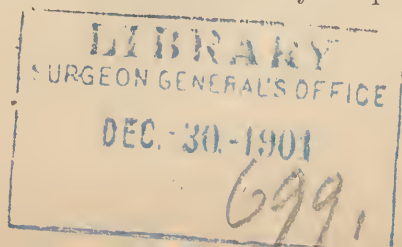
All gynecologists will not assent to the fifth heading, but I still insist that there are cases justifying its place in the list.

My correspondent, as will be seen, takes a radical view of the whole matter—"nothing short of impending death justifies the operation." I do not now propose to discuss the *pros* and *cons* of this important question, or to reply in future to any criticisms directed against this remarkable letter. I simply present it with the additional comment that, as surgeons in the constant presence of a suffering patient, perhaps we tend at times, under stress of sympathy, to prevent the ethical side of the argument being represented in its due proportions.

The operation here spoken of was performed ten years ago for retroflexion, hydrosalpinx, and pelvic peritonitis.

NOVEMBER, 1892.

MY DEAR DR. KELLY:—Mrs. A. tells me that in your special-



ty of surgery you are criticised for "unsexing women." Will you permit me, as a husband and as a priest, to give you my opinion of that for which you are criticised.

While ovariectomy does not destroy sexual desire nor the pleasure of cohabitation, yet the removal of the organs of motherhood causes a serious obstacle to the affections due a wife. For in depriving a woman of the possibility of children there is taken from the home the unifying power of parental love. And no high-souled affection can be sustained by mere sexual pleasure where the hope of children is taken away; and every Christian husband who understands God's chief purpose in marriage—namely, reproduction of species—cannot justify marriage as merely the means of sexual gratification. As a husband I believe that neither life-long helplessness nor anything short of impending death justifies ovariectomy, if, with the diseased organ or organs remaining, there could be the remotest reasonable hope of children. For the woman, pain of body is preferable to the anguish of soul attendant upon the destruction of the hope of becoming a mother. And as a man I should, in my present light, conscientiously decline to marry the best of women from whom had been taken the sacred fountain of motherhood. As a priest I believe that the absence of that function excludes the right of marriage, and, if performed after marriage, its absence takes away the right of sexual cohabitation, except where that act is needful to prevent mental impurity or the sins of adultery or fornication.

Since the diseased state of the ovaries taken from Mrs. A. before marriage ratified your prognosis, and you were wise in having my consent to both operations, and the assurance of mutual agreement between the betrothed that the second operation, in which the remaining ovary was removed, was based upon the fact that Mrs. A. would be better fitted for a life of usefulness as a clergyman's wife, your operating in this instance was absolutely without reproach in the operation of ovariectomy upon my wife. And you are at liberty to use this letter wherever it may tend to justify yourself and the special surgical skill with which God has endowed you, with but such limitation as your honor as a Christian gentleman and physician places upon you in protection of Mrs. A. from unpleasant publicity as to the fact of ovariectomy having been performed upon her. Believe me, with profound respect, etc.

