

NERVE EXHAUSTION IN WOMEN.

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THERE is no doubt that nerve exhaustion is much more common in this country than was at one time supposed. It begins even in school days, and is likely to become very much more prevalent if women and young girls push on, as they are in the opinion of most people rightly doing, the work exclusively belonging to men. It is therefore worthy of most serious consideration. It is not enough to prove that what men can do women can do as well: it must be seen that in this attempt the bodily constitution of women does not suffer. Without discussing the nervous system and its functions, it is sufficient to know that in nervous exhaustion there is a lowering of the working power, or vitality of the nervous system, so that not only is its special work imperfectly done, but serious bodily derangements arise.

The question naturally arises, What are the causes of this? They are in general—overwork of the brain, as in prolonged mental effort; neglect of recreation, or change of employment, curtailment of sleep, the giving of undue prominence to the worries of life—in one word, overwork of the thinking powers, while the other parts of the nervous system and body have not their fair share of duty.

The special periods in a woman's life at which the liability to nerve exhaustion is present are practically found in the schoolgirl and adult woman. In older women there is less tendency to this. Since the introduction of the new Education Act into this country, it has often been urged that the result of educational pressure in Board Schools has been hurtful so far as the health of many of the children is concerned. In many of our Board Schools ample provision is made for recreation in the intervals of lessons. But in some of the higher girls' schools pressure does exist. Schoolwork in some of these takes up six continuous hours, and if to this is added an average of two or four hours for the preparation of lessons, it will be found that girls, at ages of from nine to sixteen, are working on an average from eight to ten hours daily. This amount of continuous work is absurd, and is productive of headache, lassitude, and even more serious nervous disturbances. So many hours' continuous mental work is productive of harm to the mind, as a similar period of continuous eating would prove to the body, more especially on girls at the time when their tissues are actively growing, as if a girl has many hours' school confinement, walks

sedately home, and eats her food with diminished appetite, and then begins home preparation without proper recreation, she is certain to get deteriorated in blood, muscle and brain.

Undue prolonged strain of the brain, and neglect of the body, seems to me the great fault of the modern education of girls. Then some effort should be made to reduce the amount of home preparation. Girls require to be specially protected against over-pressure.

In the case of the adult woman nerve exhaustion is very often started by the self-sacrifice involved in Nursing a sick relative. Again, it may arise from educational over-pressure. Then there is no doubt that women in shops not only have long hours and continued strain, but are denied even the simple matter of a seat during work. They are often, indeed, too tired for recreation after their work. The same holds good as to domestic servants. Much of the harmony between mistress and maid which is wanting, is due to the lowered nervous tone which must come on in women who have the long hours and little recreation of a servant. They might easily arrange among themselves so as to give each other a day's outing occasionally, and their mistresses would soon find the inconvenience to themselves amply compensated for by the smoother working of that great cause of health depreciation to women—housekeeping.

Turning to the question of treatment, it must be kept in mind that while nerve tissue takes long to break down, it takes longer to repair. A thorough exhaustion might take years to repair, and might never do so. Hence the great importance of prevention.

Every woman should have work to do, but should work within her strength, as much as one lives within one's income; and recreation must be attended to. The brain worker can give rest to the tired brain best by physical exercise. The importance of out-door exercise for women cannot be over-estimated—a good smart walk, with perhaps the ascent of a hill at the end of it. But if the mischief has gone on to the production of headache, loss of power of concentration and other symptoms, there is nothing for it but to limit the amount of work, increase the amount of food and physical exercise, and if possible take change of air and scene, the best place being some bracing seaside resort. This, however, is precisely what it is difficult to persuade these sufferers to do, and they will be found anxious to try the effect of stimulants and sedatives. Nothing can be worse than this. Many a good life has been wrecked by it. How foolish to take that which merely goads on a jaded mind, to leave it more wearied; or to establish a habit of narcotism. Any sacrifice

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