

The Psychotherapy of Professor Dubois.

By Miss M. Amy Turton.

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IV.

THE TREATMENT OF DIGESTIVE TROUBLES.

The majority of nervous patients suffer from some form of digestive trouble, though it differs greatly in intensity and symptomatology. "Sometimes these troubles are so localised, and seem so far removed from any mental symptom, that the doctor does not hesitate to treat the patient for gastric or intestinal affections. Other cases again are so visibly *détraqués*, unbalanced, that the veriest débutant recognises immediately that he has to deal with neurasthenia and hysteria, hypochondria, and melancholia. . . . Between these two extremes there is a large variety of intermediary psychopaths, and it is here that the mentality of the physician must intervene with judgment. . . .

"He will not neglect local symptoms, but he will take into consideration, not only the animal functions of the man, but also his psychology; he will interest himself, not only in what he eats and drinks, but also in what he thinks. And gradually he will perceive the preponderance of psychic influences, and understand that he must work on the *moral* of the patient to ensure success."

Anorexia is the commonest of these symptoms. It is often also the one most difficult to trace to its psychopathic origin. It seems to be quite sufficiently accounted for by dyspepsia, gastric pains, or the foulness of the tongue. But yet "there is no real difference between these cases with gastric symptoms, and those where there is no—or very little—digestive trouble, and the tongue is quite clean. More than thirty years ago Dr. Lasègne exposed the mental nature of this want of appetite in both cases.

The latter condition, where the patient complains of no gastric disturbance, but steadfastly refuses to eat, is generally due to some mental shock, and is most common amongst the young. Such patients are frequently brought to Professor Dubois in the last stage of emaciation. He says that "nothing is needed but the gift of persuasion; but its action must be prolonged, and the cure is much facilitated by adding rest in bed and isolation."

A very interesting example of his treatment is as follows:

The patient was a young girl suffering from

this mental form of anorexia, resembling a walking skeleton from long starvation. During the first six weeks she made some progress, but as the anorexia returned and threatened to undo all that had been obtained, the professor thought it necessary to propose lengthening the cure by a fortnight. The patient, alarmed at this prospect, managed to escape and take the night train for her home. [Where were the sisters?] This abrupt departure did not, however, prevent the professor attaining his object. He telegraphed to the parents, enjoining them not to reproach their daughter. He wrote at the same time to the young girl, explaining what anxiety she had caused by her flight, then, leaving quite aside any re-primand, he quietly advised her to continue the cure of hypernutrition *at home*—"As one says, 'The king is dead, long live the king!' I say the treatment has not succeeded, let us begin it over again under other conditions."

The patient became quite docile at this unexpected, gentle encouragement, and obeyed instructions. After a few months, she wrote to inform the Professor that she was completely cured, and had regained her normal weight.

Dubois carries out the same treatment where anorexia is accompanied by vomiting, and regurgitations; and constantly finds that these symptoms cease from one day to another, even though they have been present for years. He relates that a father came to consult him about his daughter who had suffered from gastric troubles and invincible vomiting for the space of three years. Without even seeing the patient, the Professor enquired into all the moral circumstances which had led up to this illness, after which he did not hesitate to order the usual treatment of rest and hypernutrition. The father was most willing, but declared his daughter absolutely refused to undergo such a cure. Dubois then wrote to her. He related all that her father had told him, "without untruths, without exaggeration, but with a strong desire to gain her confidence, dilated on her fine moral qualities, her altruism, her energy in working." He then analysed the successive mental states through which she had passed, and showed her the original cause of her illness. Finally, he described her actual condition, and then put the dilemma before her as follows: "Either you will continue to go on as you are, and in that case I see no other issue but death, since you are on the verge of physiological bankruptcy; or you will set courageously to stuff yourself under conditions of perfect repose, when these

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