

"Of Hysterick Affections."

There are few nurses who, from time to time, have not had cases of hysteria come under their observation and care, though they may not have made a special study of the nursing of such cases; and it may be interesting to note, especially after the lapse of nearly 200 years, the views entertained of the causes and treatment of the disease by medical men of 1725, as compared with those of the present century.

Comment from a member of the nursing profession on medical literature certainly seems like trespassing on forbidden ground; yet who, possessing a love of comparison and sense of humour, could resist quoting from, if not criticising, this quaint volume entitled thus:—

A
TREATISE
of the
SPLEEN and VAPOURS:
or,
Hypocondriacal
and
HYSTERICAL AFFECTIONS,
with
Three DISCOURSES on the
Nature and Cure of the CHOLICK,
Melancholy, and PALSIES.
Never before Published.

WRITTEN BY

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Royal College of Physicians in London.

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Certainly, there is no fear at this distance of time of incurring the author's righteous indignation at being quoted lightly by one whom he would justly designate as a "female." Long since must he and his have crumbled into dust, by reason, to use his own words, of the greatest "quieting Medicine" of all, which "composes and allays the Disorders of the Spirits, and persuades and Sollicits Peace."

In that portion of the treatise styled "Of Hysterick Affections," a common note of humanity is struck at once by the declaration that "This Disease, called Vapours in Women, and the Spleen in Men, is what neither Sex is pleased to own"! which is just as true to-day as in 1725. There follows a good deal of discussion concerning the part the spleen, or, as it is called "this eminent Bowel," plays in the "animal Oeconomy," and the author successfully disposes of the idea that it is a "Fungus or Excrecence, not only insignificant, but apt to raise great Disorders and feditious Ferments in the Blood," after, as he says, "attentive Enquiry into the Office of that Organ."

He says that the "Antients, from a gross Conception, imagined that Hyfterick passions sent up

Clouds of Fumes and dark Vapours through the Vessels to the Brain, as they believed that the Symptoms proceeded from melancholy Reeks, elevated from the dark and impure Sink of the Spleen to the Head: that from the Spleen proceeded Laughter, from the Gall Anger, from the Heart, Wisdom, and from the Liver, Love; and they also accused it of being a great enemy to Race-Horses, by clogging their Sinews, and abating the Celerity of their Motion." In his opinion, however, he does not think that "to Steams or Reeks exhaling from Crudities and unconcocted Aliments in the Stomach, nor any Leaven lurking in any Parts whatever, can be assigned a sufficient general Cause of the Symptoms" in cases of hysteria.

These symptoms he next goes on to enumerate, and states that they "proceed from the Convulsive and confused Flights of the Spirits, or their unequal Distribution in the different Parts of the body." Among them he notes a "violent aking of the Head, black Spots and Nets (!) dancing in the air before the eyes Suffocations and Tremblings of Heart, frequent Fits of long and vexatious Sneezing, and excessive Spitting, caused by an inordinate Influx of the Spirits into the Strainers." (What are the "strainers"?)

Another symptom is "Paniculations," a little-used word, which he is good enough to explain by saying they are a "violent and involuntary stretching of the Arms and Body in Yawning." This is quite easy to understand, and, most likely, we have all been the unwilling subjects of "Paniculations" at some time or another, without necessarily being victims of hysteria. These, he further says, "are derived from the same Fountain as the other Symptoms, that is, the unnatural and perverted Motion of the Spirits; which, stimulated by some noxious Ferments, are disconcerted, and put into Flight and Confusion, and while thus disarranged, and unable to rally and recover their Order, they rush into these or those Membranes or Muscles in a tumultuous manner."

This description, which would probably be that of a "nerve-storm" according to the moderns, and not an ordinary attack of the "fidgets," seems to remind one vaguely of the story of the man who had seven evil spirits enter into him, and whose last state was worse than the first; also of the herd of swine, who, with their undesirable tenants, rushed violently down a steep place into the sea, and were choked in the waters. It likewise makes one tremble for one's own normal condition of things, when one reads further that "this Disorder may indifferently happen from any noxious Humours that offend and vex the Spirits till they are driven into Convulsions and hyfteric errors," and one wonders if anything can be done to avoid vexing these mysterious and easily-offended "Spirits," and to quell this "Disorder and feditious Tumult in the Animal Government, which, mount-

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