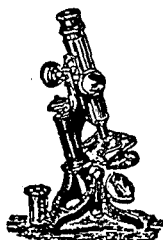


Medical Matters.

THE FUNCTIONAL FACTOR IN ORGANIC NERVE DISEASE.



Dr. Samuel West, writing on the above subject in the *St. Bartholomew's Hospital Gazette*, says:

There is often a functional or hysterical factor in organic nerve disease which may mask or exaggerate the characteristic symptoms of the disease. The converse is of equal im-

portance, viz., that underlying what may appear to be a typically functional or hysterical affection there is often some organic lesion.

To think that a hysterical patient has nothing the matter is very far from true. It would be much nearer the truth to say that a patient if hysterical is not sound, or that if sound would not be hysterical.

The essence of hysteria is loss of self-control. This may depend upon general ill-health, and be cured when the health is restored. If more than this its natural affinity is with insanity, a grave disease enough.

Many cases of hysteria prove ultimately to be connected with organic disease. The hysterical or functional part may be cured, but the organic part persists. In illustration may be quoted a case of a woman who had never left her bed for many months, and was apparently paraplegic. Her condition was thought to be largely functional. She was encouraged to make an effort. Within a week she was up and walking, and at the end of a month she walked more than a mile. Recovery was, however, never complete, for the early signs of lateral sclerosis became obvious. She had had some real loss of power in the legs, which had been magnified in her own mind until she believed them to be completely paralysed.

In this respect it is that in a case of apparent functional disease the presence of little peculiarities, such as irregularity in the reflexes, in the pupils, or in sensation, become of great diagnostic value.

It is, therefore, a good rule in practice to come to the diagnosis of hysteria or functional disease with some caution and misgiving, and only after careful deliberation.

INSANITARY RESTAURANTS.

Dr. F. J. Allan, Medical Officer of Health for Westminster, states that in no less than 57 out of 96 restaurants in the city of Westminster, recently examined by his orders,

sanitary defects of a more or less serious kind were discovered. In eight cases the water-closets in use communicated directly with the kitchens, the larders, or the dining rooms; while in six others they did not work properly, three were dirty, and two had no external ventilation. In eight other places food was habitually stored in places in which it was liable to contamination, other kitchens were in a generally dirty state.

Such conditions are so serious to the community that they should at once be rectified.

THE PROBLEM OF CANCER.

Mr. Bland-Sutton recently addressed a crowded audience at the Institute of Hygiene on "The Problem of Cancer," and said that, at the present moment, public attention was turned in the direction of cancer and its cause, but while the public is asking, and persistently asking, the profession to explain the cause of malignant diseases, observations have been made which tend to show that even physicians and surgeons have failed to grasp it. It has been possible to classify five different kinds of cancer, but we are ignorant of the cause of cancer itself, and very little reliance can be placed upon microscopic investigation. There is nothing to be seen in a cell under the microscope to indicate that it is a malignant cell, and the only safe course is to watch the clinical condition of the patient in order to determine whether the growth is innocent or malignant. The term cancer is used as an expression for any malignant form of tumour, but it is applied by pathologists more especially to that form of the disease which arises in perversion of the epithelium, and which is remarkable for its extraordinary vitality—of such vitality, indeed, that it will eat its way into the thickest bone, yet people may live five, ten, or fifteen years before cancer is fatal.

The lecturer referred to the remarkable way in which cancer disseminates itself over the whole body, and said it might possess a thousand nodules. It had always been thought that dissemination was due to the transportation of the blood stream, but it is not so to anything like the extent that was once believed. He said he had always failed to find indication of cancer in the blood even in a patient near death, though Dr. Schmidt had discovered nodules of cancer by severing and examining small arteries. It is noticeable that cancer invariably takes one organ only, although that organ is paired, as one kidney may be destroyed while the other is left quite sound. When a cell takes on malignant action it not only multiplies but it assumes constructive functions, as when the epithelium receives a nodule of cancer it reproduces it.

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