

nurses will at the present day be chiefly called upon to deal, rather than with patients described as hysterical. Nerve-weakness, then, shows itself in various ways, all of which can be traced to a want of nerve power—or, as it is more usually termed, nerve-exhaustion—occurring in patients who have suffered from longer or shorter illness of some severe and exhausting type. These cases are more common amongst women than amongst men. Whatever the cause of the ill-health has been, the patient cannot control her feelings as she would, when healthy and strong. If she laughs or cries she will continue to do so, as if unable to check herself; if she has any pain, she will describe it as excruciating; the effect of a strong light on the weakened optic nerves will often cause extreme headache, and sometimes a kind of temporary blindness; loud sounds may so affect the auditory nerves as almost to cause deafness; or, on the other hand, to produce a ringing and buzzing in the ears which are sometimes acutely painful; the weakened nerves of her stomach prevent her from digesting her food; the weakened nerves of the intestines prevent the regular movements of the gut; and the same cycle of events—nerve-weakness, and loss of power in the tissues which the nerves supply—is shown in every tissue, in every organ, and in every muscle of the body. It is easy enough, now that we have the knowledge of the great underlying cause, to explain the immense number of different effects, the widely-spread pains and diverse symptoms which formerly were so puzzling, and apparently impossible of belief to those who did not hold the proper clue. Now, it is known that treatment carried out on common sense lines will, by strengthening the nervous system, gradually cure every one of the many symptoms of the affection. So the patient is put to bed and kept there, in order to afford her body absolute rest. Her friends, and even her correspondents, are kept away from her, so that her mind can be absolutely at rest. It can be easily understood that the work of nurses for such a case is all important; and, moreover, that such cases demand qualities from the nurse which are not possessed by everyone. It is necessary to exercise sympathy to soothe the patient under her enforced seclusion, and at the same time sympathy must not be allowed to degenerate into submission to every whim. Half the benefit of the nurse's work for the patient, in fact, is to act as a kind of moral tonic to her, and, therefore, she cannot allow her sympathy with her patient's weakness to weaken her own control. On the other hand, the attitude of a perpetual cold douche, which some nurses exhibit towards such pa-

tients, diminishes their usefulness to them, by exciting antagonism and dislike, and, therefore, a more or less constant struggle against the efforts of the nurse to carry out the treatment prescribed by the doctor.

Next in importance to the absolute rest of mind and body in these cases, comes the necessity of what may be described as "forced feeding." The patient requires a much greater amount of nourishment, than is necessary during ordinary health, because the tissues which have been weakened by illness, and especially the essential elements of the nerves have to be rebuilt. It is needful, therefore, for the patient to be persuaded to take nourishment at frequent intervals, and in considerable quantities; and, especially at first, it can be easily understood, that to make the patient do this demands all the tact and patience and special knowledge which the trained nurse can possess. It often happens that the weakened stomach rebels against food of any kind, and then it is a matter of dietary far more than of medicine—it is, in fact, often the nurse's knowledge and tact—which determines the patient's progress and recovery. "When one kind of nourishment is refused, it is half the battle if the nurse can produce some other form, sufficiently appetising to be acceptable and accepted. As a general rule, in patients who have been greatly wasted as the results of disease—and it is these patients who generally suffer most from *Neurasthenia*—the Rest Cure treatment aims first and foremost at the production of fatty tissue; and if the patient sufficiently responds to it to gain from half-a-pound to one pound in weight each day, it can be predicted that in five or six weeks her recovery will be more or less complete.

It is, in fact, a practical point of the utmost importance that the more fat is formed the quicker will the nerve-power be recovered; just as it is a well-recognised physiological fact that fatty tissue forms Nature's reserve both of bodily and nerve strength.

The third measure of treatment is designed to improve the muscular power of the patient, and consists either of massage, or of the application of the galvanic battery, or of both. The friction of the muscles by the nurse's hand, or the alternate contraction and relaxing of the muscular tissue by means of the electric current, carry out passively, in fact, what natural movements do in an active manner; keeping the muscles in health and proper tone; and in this method of treatment the massage and galvanism not only tend to restore the weakened muscles, but they also prevent them from being more weakened by the enforced rest in bed.

(To be continued.)

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)