

The Psychotherapy of Professor Dubois.

BY MISS AMY TURTON.

I.

Having lately come across several cases of neurasthenia and hysteria which, after failure on the part of the best Italian nerve specialists, had been successfully treated by Professor Dubois, I carefully studied his famous book; *Les Psychonévroses et leur Traitement Moral*, in the hope of finding wherein lies his success in combatting and vanquishing these all but ubiquitous maladies.

The Dubois treatment is founded on the aphorism, *le nervosisme est un mal avant tout psychique, et à mal psychique il faut traitement psychique*. Neurasthenia, hysteria, hysteroneurasthenia, and the milder forms of hypochondriasis, and melancholia, should all be treated psychically, since they are pre-eminently psychic maladies.

What then is psychical treatment? It is a "re-education of the mentality of the patient," a sort of moral pedagogy. The treatment of neurotic and hysterical patients is too frequently carried out by, so to say, separating the nervous system from the psychic, by substituting loss of self-control in the patient, by control on the part of the doctor, through some form of hypnosis or suggestion. This Professor Dubois considers to be invariably a mistaken method of treatment, since it tends to weaken the patient's mentality, and consequently leaves the way open "to the invasion of other phobias," even when by its means one or other symptom may have been cured.

He, therefore, persists in maintaining the essential difference between *suggestion* and *moral persuasion*. He explains that though the terms may be "considered identical so long as one only means that they both inculcate ideas," yet in reality "they are at the opposite ends of the same chain, since one appeals to blind faith and the other to purely logical reasoning." And he adds a neat little analogy of Professor Beckterew: "Suggestion enters the understanding by the back staircase, whereas logical persuasion knocks at the front entrance," which analogy we might complete by remarking that the master of the house not infrequently ejects the visitors who enter by the back staircase, whilst receiving with honour those who seek admittance by the front portal.

It is therefore, necessary that everyone who wishes to practise psychotherapy should possess a clear conviction that though it is essential that the patient should have confidence in his

doctor, that confidence is not the determining factor of healing. The personal influence of the doctor, the prestige due to his former successes, are only indirectly the means to attain the end, in that they inspire the patient with the desire to submit himself to this or that especial doctor for treatment. But the actual, the immediate, cause of cure is always *la culture logique de leur moi mental*—the logical culture or development of their own mental self. And he gives as proof of this the fact that once started on this "mental culture" many of his patients discover spontaneously the reasonable reasons why they can be completely cured. And that even the simplest of them, once cured themselves, frequently succeed in healing others "with no other weapon than that of their advice to follow the counsels which had been given to them, and that because they recognised these counsels to be good."

Professor Dubois admits, therefore, of no trickery, no assertion, which he cannot prove to be true to the patient. He also dispenses almost, if not entirely, with the ordinary physical therapeutic agencies, "baths, douches, hypodermics, and the inevitable bromide." Once convinced that he is dealing with a psycho-neurotic, he holds firmly to his belief that the only efficacious medicine is that of the mind. Only in those cases where the malady has been of long duration, and reduced the patient to serious conditions, does he insist in a prolonged cure in his clinique where physical measures can be applied contemporaneously with the moral treatment.

He then orders the Weir-Mitchell cure of rest, isolation, and hypernutrition. The advantages of rest in bed where there is "fatigue and malnutrition are obvious, in that it reduces expenditure to the minimum." Professor Dubois declares that it is easy to persuade the patients "*si on se donne la peine de leur montrer la raison d'être de ces mesures de repos. C'est au medecin de les amener à la docilité, non par des ordres, mais par des conseils*" (if one takes the trouble to give them the reasons for this rest treatment. It is for the doctor to lead them to docility, not by orders, but by advice).

This applies also to the question of hypernutrition: the advantages of "augmenting the receipts" in such cases being equally patent. But here there is usually more difficulty in persuading the neurotic patient, who constantly believes himself unable to eat at all, to be suffering from gastric dilatation, etc., etc. Since, however, these "nervous dyspeptics" are usually reduced to a state of extreme emaciation, the process of "stuffing is

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)