

men and women become physical and mental wrecks. It will be obvious, therefore, that the first principle of treatment must be to discontinue the use of the poison. It is equally important, in order to afford the patients a chance of recovery, that the nervous system should be improved, in order to help them to resist the craving for the drug, and also to improve the physical condition which has suffered coincidentally with the mental and nervous depression.

The Nursing recently described for cases of Neurasthenia, is equally requisite, and for the same reasons, in the cases in which any drug habit has broken down the patient's health. It has been before explained that the chief object of these Lectures is to define, and illustrate, important principles of Nursing, showing the reasons why certain treatment is required for certain diseases, and precisely what effects that treatment is designed to produce; because when such principles are clearly understood, it is comparatively easy to adapt them to the details of individual patients. It is not, therefore, necessary to discuss at length the various effects which are produced on different individuals by different kinds of nerve poisons; but it will be of interest to remember that men who thus suffer from excessive smoking may lose more or less completely the sight of one or both eyes—the optic nerve becoming definitely diseased in consequence of the continued poisonous action of the *Nicotine*. In like manner, the slave to the *Cocaine* poisoning may suffer from acute, and in time incurable, indigestion, while the *Chloral* habit often leaves its victim with definite disease of the brain, and some form of insanity; and the *Morphia* habit causes diseases of the kidney or of the intestine.

It is almost sufficient, also, to point out that the loss of nerve power, whether this be due to poisons, such as those described, or to degeneration of the nerve tissue caused by disease, or by the pressure of tumours, shows itself by the loss of functional activity in the organs supplied by the affected nerves, just as certainly as we have already seen that similar affections of the nerves result in paralysis, and gradual wasting, of those muscular tissues which are supplied with energy by the implicated nerves. For example, the nurse will meet with many cases either of palpitation of the heart, or of attacks of syncope or fainting, due to affections of the nerves supplying that organ. The former effect is caused by irritation of the nerves, the latter by degeneration and gradual weakening of the nervous tissue itself; and as soon as the cause of the irritation, or the cause of the nerve weakening, can be removed the heart symp-

toms will pass away. The nurse will also find that many patients are unable to digest even the simplest form of diet. They are suffering from what is technically called *atonic Dyspepsia*, the loss of nerve power preventing the proper secretion of the digestive fluids, and the proper movements of the stomach walls. Once again, if the nerves affected can be restored to a healthy condition, and only then, the patients' digestion will become natural, and they will be practically cured. The same principles apply to the work of every other organ in the body; the special function of each, the special chemical changes which each organ carries out for the whole economy, are all controlled by their separate nerve supply; and any interference with those nerves is immediately shown by a diminution in power, or even complete failure, of the organ they supply, to carry on its proper work. In one and every case, therefore, the first effort of the doctor is to remove, if possible, the cause of the nerve affection, and then to so restore the power of the affected nerves as to enable them once more to perform their full duty in the body politic.

With slight variations, what has already been said with regard to the temporary affections of nerves applies to their more grave diseases, the only differences being that the destruction of the nerve tissue in the latter cases being often progressive and permanent, instead of being temporary and curable, the results are also progressive and permanent instead of being removable by proper treatment. So the diseases of the brain and spinal cord, to which allusion was recently made—due to the presence of tumours, or blood-clots, and the consequent breaking down and complete destruction of the nerve cells around the diseased area—go on in most cases steadily from bad to worse, until a fatal termination is reached. Still every year finds improvements being made in the treatment of nerve diseases, whilst the resources of surgery are only now being directed for the first time to the removal of brain tumours, and therefore to the cure of the patient. It is possible that, within the next few years, immense advances will be made in this direction, and that cases which are now given up at once as incurable will be brought within the realm of surgical success. Then, it is needless to say, that greater scope will be given to the trained nurse than is possible now, to assist by the means already indicated, especially by feeding the patient, by massage and by the use of the galvanic battery, in restoring the damage caused by the nerve disease before the cause of that disease was removed.

(To be continued.)

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)