

Medical Matters.

THE MORAL TREATMENT OF DISORDERED NERVES.

An interesting little book on "Nervousness," by Dr. A. T. Schofield, M.R.C.S., should be studied by nurses, as far too little is known and understood in regard to this distressing affection. We quote below two sections of this work which will give an insight into its scope, and we hope induce our readers to study it at length.

MENTAL CAUSES OF NERVE DISEASE.

The predisposing cause to nerve trouble is principally a nervous diathesis or disposition. People are born nervous; that is, they are born with the nervous system unduly prominent, less under control, less orderly in its action than in other people. No doubt a highly developed nervous system *with adequate control* is the best type for man or woman; but without this control he or she joins sooner or later the ranks of nerve sufferers. The great predisposing cause is therefore heredity; but (and this may be noted as important), if the family history only reveals nervous troubles in other members as distinguished from loss of mind in any form, the invalid, however severe his symptoms and great his sufferings, is not likely to cross the border-line of sanity to the other side.

The exciting causes may be mental or physical.

The leading *mental* cause of nervous disease is worry, first and foremost, rather than work. Properly regulated brain-work no more leads to nerve disease than hard manual labour leads to disease of the muscles. Indeed, it is so far from injuring the nerves that it is one of the greatest sources of their strength, and one of the strongest safeguards against neurasthenia. Worry, however, is an unmitigated evil; it is a most vicious habit, doing good to none, but invariably damaging more or less the nervous system of the one who gives way to it. This must be due to the constant cross-currents of thought that eddy backwards and forwards in the brain, and to real fatigue and difficulty in finding the resultant that shall issue in action from among a number of conflicting forces.

Next to worry as a cause of nerve disease, or perhaps bracketed with it, we should be inclined to place sudden mental idleness, such as schoolgirls experience when all at once transformed at the close of the last school term into "young ladies." The change from working every day through a long time-table to the peaceful occupation of arranging the flowers in the drawing-room for half an hour daily, has a

very marked effect on some natures, and they readily become a prey to nerve disorders from the abrupt cessation of brain work.

Long-continued strain from any reason is another cause, and so is overwork of all sorts, especially if combined with underfeeding, as is so common in the poorer classes. Bad mental surroundings, such as association with other nerve sufferers or anxious or fractious parents, are other agents; and there are many more.

PHYSICAL CAUSES OF NERVE DISEASE.

Turning to the *physical* causes, which, however, generally act in conjunction with mental, we would first place general ill-health, especially if dyspepsia be present; too much physical work is seldom a cause, but too little exercise frequently is. Sudden change of surroundings of any sort frequently develops nervous disease. Shock arising from accidents, bad news, etc., is a cause; so is extreme grief or extreme joy.

Now, nervous people are the very salt of the earth, and the leading men in every profession are drawn from their ranks. They are men with brains that thrill, that feel, that are quick in action, firm, clear, and of high organisation. It is the nervous men that rule the world, not lymphatic vegetables. Listen to an impartial sketch of the type:—

"The skin is dark, earthy, pale, or may be of any shade, and is often hot and dry. The skull is large in proportion to the face; muscles spare, features small, eyes quick, large, lustrous; circulation capricious, veins large. Face characterised by energy and intensity of thought and feeling; movements hasty, often abrupt and violent, or else languid. Hands and feet small, frame slight and delicate. Require little sleep. Prone to all nervous diseases. Always seem to be able to do more than they are doing. The character may be, on the one side, admirable for its powers of mind and insight, for its lofty imagination; while, on the other, it may be disfigured by impetuous and unruly passions. To this class belong the most intellectual of the race—the wittiest, the cleverest of mankind. These are the poets, the men of letters, the students, the professors, or the statesmen. Their great dangers consist in uncontrollable passions. *They feel pain acutely.* Nevertheless, they can endure long fatigue and privation better than the sanguine. They form the leaders of mankind. Amongst women there are delicacy of organisation, quickness of imagination, and fervour of emotion; but they are beset with danger, from want of control of their great powers."

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