

Medical Matters.

THE QUICKENING SPIRIT.

Dr. Leonard Williams M.R.C.P., in an address published in the *British Medical Journal* on "The Quickening Spirit," says in part:—

That mind exercises an influence over matter is a formula which most of us have lisped since the days of our childhood. The formula represents a belief, held strongly perhaps, but essentially vaguely, even by those who have had a scientific training, and it has not hitherto assumed anything which could be described as a definite outline. Such an outline I believe it to be now in process of assuming, and it is the part of those who take the profession of medicine seriously to contribute something out of the vast store of material which lies daily to their hands towards the elucidation of some of the difficult but fascinating problems which await solution.

In the human body every motive force is provided with a corresponding controlling force, and it is important to realise that the motive force itself is always developed in advance of the corresponding controlling force. When a child is born it has the power of contracting its muscles and thus moving its limbs, but it is a long time before it can so co-ordinate these muscles as to walk or otherwise accurately accomplish any purposive movement.

So much is recognised, but it is not so well recognised that the same laws obtain in the region of what is called the mind. Here the motive force is represented by the emotions—a child is all emotion and instinct—and the control force is provided by reason and experience—that is by the intellect and the will. Intellect and will are admittedly not identical, and they are associated here with the view of abbreviating the argument without, I hope, vitiating it. It is of course quite clear that the development of the intellect and the will, with its consequent control of the emotions, will exercise a progressively modifying influence upon character, but is it true to say that this same development of the will at the expense, so to speak, of the emotions can exercise any moderating influence upon the *materies* of the human body, so as to render the tissues both less susceptible to disease and better equipped to combat disease when invasion has been successful? That it must be true is an opinion which is forced upon every thinking medical man by the experiences of his everyday work. They are commonplaces of medical literature which tell of chorea being provoked by fright, of an attack of the gout being caused by a fit of anger, of ex-ophthalmic goitre being brought

on by worry and anxiety; and works on psychology will furnish the curious with well authenticated instances of examples even more dramatic. When we come to enquire how such effects can be produced, our attention is immediately attracted by, and becomes focussed upon, the circulatory system. The physical manifestations of violent emotion are preponderatingly vascular. The lividity of rage, the blush of shame, the deathly pallor of alarm, and the ashen hue of excitement, are expressions which have been dear to the pens of writers since time began; and they describe truly enough what all of us have frequently experienced even in our own persons. Now, it must not be supposed that such vascular changes as these manifestations represent are confined to the integument; for, as Leonard Hill has shown, the pressure of blood in the system at large is kept in a state of equipoise by the law which provides that a vaso-constriction in one part shall be immediately compensated for by a corresponding vaso-dilatation in another part; so that while the sudden cutaneous hyperæmia of the "blush of shame" proclaims an ischæmia elsewhere, so the cutaneous ischæmia of "pallid fear" denotes a compensatory hyperæmia in some possibly distant area.

If we now proceed to consider the effect of such vascular storms upon the economy generally, we have no difficulty in concluding that the customary working of the human machine must thereby be profoundly disturbed. So long as the circulation of the blood is smooth and orderly its purification is regularly accomplished by the excretory organs, and its renovation adequately effected by the continuous supply of material from the contributory glands. If, however, instead of being smooth and orderly, the circulation is fitful and spasmodic, the excretory organs and contributory glands will be alternately gorged with sudden repletion and starved into astonished bankruptcy, with the result that the circulatory fluid itself becomes so fundamentally altered in composition that it imposes on the tissues either an excess of what they do not require or an insufficiency of that which they demand. In view of such considerations it is surely not possible to doubt that violent emotions affect the physical health of their victim.

And if this be true of sudden and violent emotions overtaking people who are normally controlled, it must be equally true of those who, owing to defective education of the will, live a life of constant subordination to the caprices of their emotions. For it is not necessary that profound changes in blood distribu-

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