

The Care of the Nervous.

Dr. Edwin Ash, Assistant Physician to the Italian Hospital, W.C., in a most interesting paper read at the recent Nursing and Midwifery Conference, said that the prevalence of nervous disorders at the present time was becoming a serious thing for the country, as the loss of "driving force" in the nation, owing to the fact that so many people suffer from nerve weakness, was even now very great, and bid fair to become greater in the immediate future. It was difficult to find anyone who was not bothered at times with nervous symptoms, and only those brought in contact with nervous patients in the consulting room knew how many people suffered from morbid diseases and fancies. Amongst these Dr. Ash mentioned the fear of being left alone, the fear of being in the dark, the fear of closed places, such as lifts and railway carriages, the fear of doing some wrong or foolish action, the fear of harming a friend or relative. It was easy to study nervous symptoms in public conveyances, in theatres, restaurants, and crowds; a speaker could study his audience from the platform, the audience could study the speaker; such tricks as twitching of the hands and face, frequent consultation of the watch, consultation with those around, unstill limbs were common, and quite a number of people talk to themselves. The normal human attitude should be one of consideration and dignified action; in nervousness it became one of flurry and hesitating haste. Watch the people arriving at a railway station, said Dr. Ash. Many arrive hurried and too soon, fearing their watches may be wrong. Another great indication of a nervous temperament was handwriting. The speaker said that he had been collecting specimens for some time, and later proposed to publish them.

Unhealthy nervous irritability was responsible for many of the squabbles which disturb domestic peace, and end so frequently in the police courts for the lower orders, and in the Divorce Court for more fashionable folk. There were thousands of cases of this kind, the proper place for which was the consulting-room of the nerve specialist rather than the public courts. In many instances bad temper was really a disease, as also were such conditions as sulkiness, sudden rudeness, abruptness of manner, and so forth. If this were more generally understood people would be more inclined to settle their differences amicably than they often are. If a husband is persistently unreasonable, or a wife irritable beyond endurance, the aggrieved party might

certainly advise the offending one to see someone about his or her "nerves" before resorting to more drastic measures. Were this idea carried out there was really not the slightest doubt that a great deal of unhappiness and misery would be avoided, which was now brought about because many little signs of a disordered, nervous system were over-looked or misunderstood.

Owing to this prevalence of nervous disorders it was most important that nurses should thoroughly understand nerve cases. But it often happened that a highly-trained nurse was at a loss when she had to deal with a patient whose nerves were out of order. The constant cry of patients was: "Send me a nurse who will understand me." That meant understand not merely the technical duties of nursing, but the patient's temperament and inmost feelings at the time of illness. And she must be in psychic sympathy with him. Some nurses made the mistake of over-riding a patient's little fads and fancies in order to observe hospital routine methods. A nurse began by "tidying up," and usually wished to make the bed her own way. There was no reason to upset a patient about details which were unessential; better a ruffled room and a ruffled bed than a ruffled temper. A ruffled bed was the most comfortable.

He had referred to the patient as "him" because so many men suffered from various nervous ailments. Formerly women alone were supposed to suffer from nervous complaints, but he thought that the nervous strain of modern life told more on men than women.

The successful care of a nerve patient required a strong personality on the part of the nurse. The personality must be used in the right way, and a nurse must not attempt to overawe a patient; her duty was to combine the right amount of authority with the right amount of sympathy. He knew big, strong men who avoided certain nursing homes like poison. Of all the 800 or more drugs and preparations in the British Pharmacopoeia there was not one which was really a "cure" for a disordered nervous system, and we had to rely on a series of measures in which the nurse can play a very important part. These were *Rest—Suggestion—Electricity—and Massage*.

Everyone influenced everyone else by suggestion, and some people were able to exert a stronger influence of this kind than others. For their part nurses should endeavour to cultivate an atmosphere of restfulness and health—this would then re-act favourably on their patients, and bring about the greatest benefit by suggestion.

Nurses should remember to protect them-

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