

## MEDICAL MATTERS.

## THE HYGIENE OF THE BRAIN WORKER.

The *British Medical Journal* for November 30th contains a most interesting article on "The Hygiene of the Brain Worker," in which we read that brain workers, like those whose sphere of labour is more mechanical, suffer from what may be called, in a special sense, professional diseases. These depend partly on the nature of the work, partly on the conditions under which it has to be done. The life both of the scientific and of the literary worker is one that places great strain on the nervous centres. The brain, like the muscles, is liable to fatigue when used too intensely or too long. This fatigue is the result of a process which brings about changes in the constitution of the blood. These necessarily react on the circulatory apparatus, causing more or less disorder in its action. This disorder is re-echoed throughout the system; the stomach, the liver, and the other organs suffer to some extent, each after its kind. In a word, fatigue of the brain entails fatigue of the body generally. Even the muscles lose something of their vigour, and diminution takes place in the resistance of the body to harmful influences. . . . It has been proved experimentally that brain work causes actual waste of tissue, an amount of organic refuse being thrown out of the body which corresponds to the intensity of the mental activity. It has also been shown by the thermometer that the brain is heated by work; this, of course, means increased combustion. . . . Hence the very conditions of intellectual work tend to upset the balance of power in the organic functions of the body which constitutes health. When depressing influences, such as poverty, anxiety, or ill-health are added to these conditions, the strain of intellectual life is at its maximum.

Among the main causes of the strain of brain work is want of sufficient sleep, which, we are told, will in time wear out the finest and strongest brain. All sorts of disorders—neurasthenia, melancholia, disordered nutrition, convulsive disorders—result from want of sleep. Lastly, a word of warning is given concerning intermittent excesses in the way of exercise. Till an anti-toxin is discovered which shall neutralize the toxin of fatigue, brain workers are urged not to be too strenuous in their use of the week-end holiday, as they become poisoned by an excess of waste products engendered by unwonted exertion.

## CLINICAL NOTES ON SOME COMMON AILMENTS.

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## DISORDERS OF MENSTRUATION.

It has been recently pointed out to me that I have not included in this series of articles any description of the common irregularities in the menstrual process to which many women are subject, and it was further stated that in the ordinary text-book of gynæcology the articles on this subject are often written in somewhat involved language. I purpose, therefore, giving firstly a short description of the phenomena of normal menstruation, and then discussing the chief variations from this type, together with the treatment of the distressing symptoms to which they give rise.

The difficulty with regard to the descriptions in the text-books lies in the fact that the whole process of menstruation is but imperfectly understood, and that there are several rather different theories to account for its phenomena. Inasmuch as a text-book is written mainly for students who have to pass examinations on the subject, it is necessary that these theories should be discussed, but for our purpose this is not essential, and we can, therefore, omit confusing details for the purpose of gaining a clear idea of the *rationale* of the subject.

The essential feature of menstruation is that it accompanies, and is secondary to, ovulation. In healthy women, at intervals of 28 or 30 days an ovum escapes from the gland which manufactures it—and which is called the ovary—into the abdominal cavity.

Except in very abnormal circumstances, it does not lie there, but is picked up by the end of the Fallopian tube, or oviduct, as it is sometimes called, and conveyed into the uterus. There it either meets with the male element, which is a microscopic body known as a spermatozoon, or it does not. In the former case the two combine and develop into a foetus, and pregnancy ensues, or it is cast out from the uterus altogether in the process which is known as menstruation.

The ovum itself is so small that it can only be seen under a powerful microscope, so it is obvious that something more than this is shed also. What happens is that every time an ovum reaches the uterus and is not fertilised, either the whole, according to some authorities, or the superficial layer, according to others (the difference does not matter to us in the least), of the lining membrane of the uterus breaks up into its constituent cells, and leaves

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