

## CLINICAL NOTES ON SOME COMMON AILMENTS.

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### NEURASTHENIA.

I now propose to deal very briefly with a few common affections of the nervous system. Before describing the diseases in detail it will be as well if we recall a few facts about the functions of the nervous system in health.

It will help us to take an analogy; we will compare the body to a large commercial undertaking. Let us imagine, for instance, one of the big London shops containing many departments. In the first place, we will suppose that a woman comes in and asks for a reel of ordinary sewing cotton of a definite size and price. Assuming for the moment (perhaps rather improbable in some cases!) that she goes to the right counter, the transaction is perfectly simple: the assistant hands her the cotton and takes the money. The point is that the process does not get any further than the man behind the particular counter.

The next case is that of a customer who does not know what she wants, and asks for advice (as to what will suit her complexion). Here the counter expert is powerless, and he has to summon the magnificently attired consultant in the middle of the shop, who then originates an idea, and gives directions—it may be to another counter altogether—for its completion. Here we have two sets of employees involved.

Let us now imagine a man coming into the shop with the information that a new discovery has been made concerning the method of production of the goods that the firm sells, and which is of importance to the business. Here neither the assistant nor the gorgeous perambulant is of any use, and a telephonic message is therefore sent to the head of the firm, who deals with the matter by making a decision, and then telephoning—it may be to all parts of the country—his particular instructions.

Assuming that the business is in working order, the shopwalker does not trouble himself about the selling of the reel of cotton, nor the head of the firm about the particular kind of advice that this individual is going to give the customer about her Sunday frock.

The essential point about the working of a good business is that each man has his own work to do, and while the head of the house knows—by constant messages and returns from the different departments—that all is going well, he does not interfere with his subordinate officials.

So it is with the nervous system; there are different grades of responsibility, requiring different expenditures of nervous energy for their execution. The reel of cotton transaction is represented by the simple "reflex action," as it is called. A good example of this is seen when a fly alights on a person's hand, and he simply moves the limb to shake it off. Here there is no doubt as to what is required, and the whole business is effected in quite a subordinate department—namely, the part of the spinal cord that receives the impulses from the arm. Nothing is required to be originated, and so anything higher than the spinal cord does not come in, and the expenditure of nervous force is very slight, as only two telephone calls (namely, those from and to the skin where the fly settles) are used up.

A good example of the Sunday frock episode is seen in the game of cricket. A man is batting, and the bowler sends him down a ball which pitches near him. Here it is obvious that a decision of some sort has to be made, and the man has to use his eyes, for instance, to see whereabouts he may most advantageously hit the ball. This is not, therefore, quite so simple, and the spinal cord alone cannot deal with the situation, but several telephonic messages have to be sent up to various parts of the brain, and many muscles of the legs as well as of the arms have to be brought in for the subsequent stroke. Still, the making of a hit at cricket is not a very important matter, after all, and has no great effect on the life or career of the batsman (unless he is a professional cricketer, which we will leave out of the question just now), so the highest part of the brain is not used to any great extent, the work being done by the lower centres or subordinate parts of that organ.

The third analogy finds its counterpart when the man is about to take some momentous step, such, for instance, as getting married. Here there are many factors to be considered, and the decision may only be reached after weeks of anxious thought, involving the highest part of the brain, and much expenditure of nervous energy, so that the man, though normally well balanced, may have one or two sleepless nights, and his daily work may suffer, for a time. Once the decision is made he returns more or less to his normal state, and the daily work goes on as before.

Coming back now to the analogy of the big shop, let us see what happens if the head of the firm is tired out with overwork. The first, or most marked, sign of fatigue is irritability, and we can imagine him "fussing round" the heads of the different departments, and trying

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