

## CLINICAL NOTES ON SOME COMMON AILMENTS.

By A. KNYVET GORDON, M.B. Cantab.

### NEURASTHENIA. (Continued.)

We have seen that the main symptom of neurasthenia is tiredness and disinclination for work, and that this is coupled with irritability, loss of appetite, and insomnia. This feeling of tiredness often shows itself in an utter inability to concentrate the mind on the purpose of the moment, and this is sometimes combined, especially in women, with a vague and altogether unjustifiable dread of the future.

How are we to treat such a case? Let us go back to our analogy of the big shop. The way to put the working of the business right is to take away its head for a time, during which the daily routine of the shop is confined to simple—"reflex"—buying and selling. After a week or so, the head of the firm comes back refreshed, and all is well—provided, that is to say, that he has gone away in time. Obviously the very worst thing possible would be to tell him that it was all nonsense, and he had better stay in the shop and work harder.

And so it is with the human machine. We want to take the brain away. Since we cannot do that, the next best thing is to put the patient in such a state that the brain has no work to do, while we restore its lost energy, or rather take away its tiredness, by supplying it with all the nourishment that we can.

So the first essential is to insist that the patient's surroundings shall be at once changed, and that he shall go away from his ordinary routine. In slight cases it suffices that he should hand over his business to someone else, and go away to a bracing climate and do nothing but eat, sleep, and take gentle exercise. Incidentally, it is essential that he should not get too tired physically. Many people under these circumstances take violent exercise, which is distinctly harmful—at first, at all events.

If he can eat and sleep when he is away, we know that the cure is working and that the outlook is good.

But it sometimes happens that the mischief has gone too far for this, and when he goes away he cannot sleep for worrying about the work that he has left. In such a case it is useless for him to continue; something more must be done.

Now the only way in which energy can be restored to the tired brain is by giving it plenty of nourishment, and we must, therefore, first make the patient hungry.

To do this, we place him in absolute seclusion away from his relatives, and from any possible communication with his business. We put him to bed, therefore, in a nursing home or other suitable place, and forbid him to read, write, receive letters, or talk. That at once cuts off any necessity at all for the sending of telephone messages by his brain cells. The drain on the energy is therefore stopped.

Now the best way of making a man want food is to tire his muscles; when they are tired they, unlike the brain, call out for nourishment, so we give him massage.

This consists in kneading and stretching his muscles so that they are at work, but are not receiving nervous impulses telling them to work. After a time, the patient feels comfortably tired and hungry. Probably he will sleep, but, if not, it is best to start him with a mild "sleeping draught," but inasmuch as it is not desirable for him to know that sleep can be summoned at will by drugs, we do not give it him at night, but three times a day, and we tell him that it is a tonic. For this purpose there is nothing to equal bromide of ammonium in doses of about 20 grains after each meal.

We now commence to overfeed him; and this may often be done by giving him a tumblerful or two of milk between each meal in addition to his ordinary diet. But many people cannot take milk in these large quantities, and we have to substitute other things. Of these there is probably nothing to equal Virol, which is a compound of fresh eggs, malt extract, and glycerine extract of bone marrow, all made into an exceedingly fine emulsion, and rendered palatable with lemon juice. It contains, therefore, a large quantity of fat, which is so easily digestible that the patient does not realise that he is being overfed, and it is the fat in a diet which is most useful for the restoration of nervous tissue. The other constituents are also useful. We can give him his Virol in milk, or spread on bread and butter, or made into sandwiches.

A word of caution should be here inserted against the indiscriminate use of concentrated *proteid* foods in cases of neurasthenia: they throw much too much strain on the liver and kidneys, and often lead to the evils associated with high arterial tension.

After a week of this treatment the patient generally feels much better, and we can allow him to read, or perhaps see a few tactful friends. In most cases, three weeks of seclusion will effect a cure, but it is better to send the patient away to the seaside, provided that a bracing locality be selected (and some seaside

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)