

OUR PRIZE COMPETITION.

WHAT ARE THE MORE COMMON CAUSES OF NEURASTHENIA? MENTION SOME OF THE MORE COMMON SYMPTOMS.

We have pleasure in awarding the prize this week to Miss J. G. Gilchrist, Gillespie Crescent, Edinburgh.

PRIZE PAPER.

Neurasthenia is a term commonly employed to denote an abnormal condition of nervous exhaustion, brought about by a prolonged or excessive mental and physical stress and strain, by which the *reserve* store of nervous energy, as well as the daily recruited supply necessary for ordinary needs, becomes so markedly depleted as to affect the working of the whole nervous system.

The more common causes are those relating to (a) health, including lack of nourishing food or improperly cooked and unassimilated food; personal habits and mental hygiene; lack of recreation. (b) Temperament, including general training as to emotional self-control; disposition to worry and anxiety; lack of mental balance; undue sensitiveness to outside impressions and influences. (c) Environment, including nature and condition of employment and surroundings; long hours, producing physical exhaustion, in combination with close mental application; aimless, monotonous, or too stimulating and exciting work; excessive use of drugs or stimulants when over-tired; financial worries; depressing surroundings; morbid companions; personal responsibility as regards safety, welfare, and happiness of family or others under one's care in difficult or untoward circumstances.

All the above are predisposing causes reacting one upon another, much depending on the health, temperament, and recuperative power of the individual.

Some causes are preventible, such as relate to wholesome habits of living, with intelligent regard to personal needs; other causes are unavoidable, such as conditions of duty and responsibility and circumstance involved.

The neurotic, highly strung, sensational patient, whose nervous balance is unstable at best, is often a difficult subject for treatment; on the other hand, some of the saddest and most serious cases, especially as regards women, are those unselfish, conscientious, self-contained subjects, who have struggled on against overwhelming conditions for a long period, till it is well-nigh impossible to recuperate their physical strength.

The more common symptoms are first in connection with the most highly developed nerve centre, a lack of sound judgment; irritability of temper and undue anxiety over trivial matters; depression of spirits and distaste for social intercourse, or a craving for diversion and excitement and unusual talkativeness.

The patient is unrefreshed from sleep, or sleep may be broken, intermittent, with bad dreams; sleeplessness or insomnia may occur as condition progresses; the patient may act on impulse instead of reason. The handwriting is often altered in character, showing a lack of control of the fine muscular powers; the motor nerve centres are over-stimulated and uncontrolled, the patient moving and working with undue haste in an unsettled manner, unable to sit composed or concentrate thought and action for a normal period of time. The sensory nerve centre may be affected; the patient unduly sensitive to light, noise, heat, and cold, and exhibits unreasonable predilections at one time which may be favourably regarded at another. Digestion is always impaired more or less, and the patient is very difficult to please as regards diet, and is apt to indulge in fads as regards this, with unwelcome results. Physiological functions are more or less deranged, and flushes of heat may be felt at intervals, and palpitations on slight exertion, which may greatly alarm the patient. In speaking the patient may appear incoherent, frequently and illogically changing from one subject to another. Any idiosyncrasies may become developed unduly, to the annoyance of others probably, but, in the case of the patient, there is a certain satisfaction that a duty is being justly performed.

Headache, vertigo, and eyestrain are frequent. Loss of weight is marked; sometimes the patient becomes rapidly reduced to an emaciated condition. Later a collapsed condition, with extreme inertia, may result, or the patient may become delirious and demented from loss of sleep.

Above are the common general symptoms manifested in neurasthenia, though the patient may also complain of a host of symptoms and sensations which are very difficult to locate in diagnosis.

HONOURABLE MENTION.

The following competitors receive honourable mention:—Miss J. V. McNeillie, Miss E. A. Noblett, Miss E. O. Walford, Miss D. B. Vine, Miss V. R. Dawes, Miss F. Sheppard, Miss S. Simpson, Miss B. Macintyre.

QUESTION FOR NEXT WEEK.

Give directions for giving medicine so as to prevent accidents.

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