

## A WORD WITH THE NERVOUS.

By MEDICUS.

I WILL not waste time or space in attempting to account for the fact, patent to every practitioner of any standing, that the disease called nervousness is much more common among people, and especially young people, nowadays than it was in former years. I really believe that our great grandmothers knew not the meaning of the word "nerves," nor that they possessed a nervous system. Little bits of fits of hysterics, or "the vapours" as they were called, they used to have, and used occasionally to faint for fashion's sake, especially when they knew that the fall would be both a safe and a soft one. But things have altered a good deal since their time, and nervousness is now looked upon as a real and often a very serious ailment.

Nor have we got very far to seek, for the reason of this want of sympathy towards the nervous. It has its origin in ignorance—I have no other name for it, and I do not mean to mince matters. "Where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise," but in this case ignorance is not bliss, but quite the reverse. Everybody knows that such a thing as a brain exists in the head of the human being: the brain is looked upon as matter, as something real, something substantial, and if you talk about inflammation of that organ you are to a certain extent understood, as much so as if you talked about inflammation of the wrist joint or the throat. But nine out of every ten people, if told that Miss So-and-So was suffering from nervousness, would make some such interesting remark as, "Oh, indeed! poor thing!" feeling at the same time in their own minds, that poor Miss So-and-So deserved to be punished more than pitied.

Well, I say that nine out of ten people have not a notion what nervousness really means, and it is to the nine that I shall speak, leaving number ten, the odd one, out of the lecture. Nerves, then, are a system of prolongations or cords leading from the brain and spinal marrow, just as the veins and arteries lead to or from the heart. They are white in colour, of somewhat the same composition as the brain itself. They divide and re-divide into millions and millions of branchlets, more numerous than the blood-vessels themselves, and are distributed to every part and portion of the human frame, even to the most minute and the most remote. So numerous are they that you cannot even prick your finger without piercing quite a number of them. Physiology is a dry subject, and I'm sure I do not wish my girl readers to study it; I only want them to believe in the reality of the nervous system, in order to get them to look upon nervousness as not a mere imaginary illness, but one which is just as actual as an inflammation of any part of the body visible to the eye. You will take my word for it, will you? Thank you, for I assure you if you didn't, or if I thought you didn't, I would go on talking about the nervous system, about the nerves of *animal* life and the nerves of *organic* life, and nerve knots, and nerve filaments, till you would be fain to stop your ears and cry out, "Oh! don't, don't, you terrible dry-as-dust Girl's Own Medicus."

But one thing you must please remember, and it will help you to understand the rationale of my plan of curing nervousness—viz., that every one of the nerves in the body is nourished by the blood that proceeds from the heart. If then that blood be healthy and pure, the nerves will be just the same, healthy and strong, and the person who possesses such well-nourished nerves will feel hale in body and happy in mind. This, you will readily perceive, is only another way of saying that one great cause of nervousness, and all the

misery entailed by that complaint, is impure or impoverished blood.

On the other hand, a weak heart would be unable to send sufficient blood to the nerves to nourish them, and the heart is weakened by anything that affects in a direct way the nerves themselves. This at once points to another great cause of the complaint I am speaking of—namely, mental anxiety; and bodily fatigue has the same adverse action on the nerves, so has want of sleep, overmuch brain work, &c., &c.

Now, then, what are the symptoms of nervousness? How can one tell when one is nervously ill? I cannot give you all nor even a tithe of the symptoms, they are in a great measure different in each individual; but I can tell you some of the commonest of these.

The first thing then that attracts the attention of the nervous person herself is this, she does not feel quite so well as she used to be, and yet she probably complains of no real ache or pain, and could not really say what ailed her or how she really felt, if asked. Very likely she is averse to confessing to anyone that there is anything the matter with her. But she cannot so easily deceive herself. She is more pensive and moody, and less bright and gay than before. Little things worry her; she is peevish, often angry without sufficient cause, and angry with herself for being angry. She has altogether less pleasure in life, she is more listless and easily tired; her spirits are low or fitful in their brightness. She is easily startled, easily frightened, and easily confused, and it may be has frequent flushings of the face, without apparent or sufficient cause.

Sleep at night is perturbed after a time, and often the girl wakes up of a morning feeling only half refreshed. The appetite suffers, or is very capricious, and the system generally feels out of order and below par.

These are the usual symptoms of a deranged condition of the nervous system, but they are not the only ones, neither are they the most distressing, for pains in the back and excessive weariness are often present, and headache as well—either a dull, throbbing, stupefying headache, or simply a feeling of fulness of blood on the brain, with heat of the brow or crown of the head, and throbbing of the temples.

Toothache and tic-douloureux are occasionally present, two other ailments for which, agonising though they be, people get but little sympathy, on the plea that they are not deadly.

Now these symptoms one and all, and a hundred more that I have no time to notice, point to a state of matters that cannot be too soon seen to and altered. And the very first thing to think about is how they are caused; for until the cause of nervousness be ascertained, and, to some extent at all events, removed, medicines can do a girl very little good.

The question then to consider is this: is the cause a direct one or an indirect one? Is the condition of the nerves caused by worry of mind, or overwork, or both, or is it owing to impurity of the blood, or owing to the blood being deficient in nourishing power? People who are ill of nervousness are very apt to take a very desponding view of their state. They should not do this, for, admitting that when, from whatever cause, the nervous system is enfeebled the body is less able to present a shield and buckler against the innumerable darts of disease and death, that are for ever flying around us, still, when once a young person makes a start upon the road to renewed health, hope at once begins to shine upon her upward path, and kind nature steps in herself to help her, and the cure is often as speedy as it was unlooked for.

If, then, gentle readers, your troubles are caused by overwork, and the worry and

anxiety that overwork entails, you must rest. I say *must*—no other word will suit—for if you do not do so of your own accord, circumstances may compel you; serious illness may lay you low, and even if you recover therefrom it may be with a constitution irremediably ruined. Change of place and change of work have often a marvellous effect in curing the kind of nervousness from which young girls suffer. Many of my readers I know have to work, and hard enough too, to obtain a respectable livelihood, but they should not have to work and suffer both. In many cases the work is really too hard, the position to be maintained while at it too fatiguing, the confinement too great, the hours too long, and the want of fresh air and cheerful exercise too trying for the system. Well, my advice is this, seek a change. Do not bother your little heads thinking about this during the day; wait till you get home to the quiet of your own room, or even to bed, when your body will be at rest and your nerves still; then ask yourself this serious and important question: Is there other work in the world that I am fitted for, and which may be less trying to my body and nerves? Argue this question with yourself, think it well out both *pro* and *con*, and when you do make up your mind—act. Do not forget either that change of air often does good, infinite good, even when there is no change in the kind of work.

Some might say that I am trying to invoke a spirit of restlessness among my girl readers. Indeed I am not. I have been a hard and earnest student of, and writer upon everything connected with the health of the people, for too many years to be likely to advise what is wrong to young or to old. "Let well alone" is a good old maxim, the value of which I fully appreciate, therefore I say to any weakly or nervous working girl who may read these lines, "When there is no *well* to let alone, or when well is but bad at the best, then try the effects of change. The world is wide enough for us all, and human beings are not like trees, born to abide for ever in the same spot."

Having as far as you can removed the cause, the next thing to do is to endeavour to improve the state of the general health, and enrich the blood, so that the nerves being better nourished may regain tone.

Late hours ought to be avoided. Early to bed and early to rise is a good motto for the nervous; eight hours sleep is quite enough for any young girl. The bed itself should not be a soft one, but, on the contrary, moderately hard. A glass of cold spring water before going to bed will often tend to make the sleep more refreshing. Supper should be a moderate meal, and partaken of two hours at least before going to rest. All hurry at meals should be avoided, and so should intemperance in eating, or taking anything between meals. Beer and stimulants of all kinds should be given up entirely by the nervous, and coffee is better than tea.

Pleasant exercise should be taken in the open air, and cheerful society sought after. A course of drill often does the nervous a great deal of good. The cold or tepid bath should be used every day.

You will naturally ask me if there is no medicine for the cure of nervousness. There are several, *but* you must live as I have told you or you will not give the medicine a chance. I do not name the medicines; any respectable middle-aged chemist will tell you the dose, which must bear relation to your years. Cod-liver oil, then, is a very excellent nerve tonic; so is pancreatic emulsion and Parrish's chemical food. With these you must take either zinc or iron, in pills or in drops, and a simple antibilious pill about once in ten days.

In conclusion, I have only a few words to add—"Trust in God, and do the right."