

**ELECTRO-
THERAPEUTICS
OF NEURASTHENIA**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649397099

Electro-therapeutics of Neurasthenia by W. F. Robinson

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No. 20, 17, 188

INTRODUCTION.

The author of this little work feels safe in saying that it certainly has the merit of treating two of the most important questions of the day: First, that wonderful and mysterious power, electricity, which is fast becoming such an all-important factor in our modern civilization. Secondly, the question of functional nervous disease, which is playing to-day, and in the future is destined to play, a part even more important than the former. One reason for this importance is, that it claims for its victims some of the best and brightest minds among us.

Although in the author's opinion neurasthenia is a pretty clear-cut morbid entity, it is not by any means an easy matter to define it.

The fundamental characteristic of this disease, which may be said to lie at the basis of the whole matter, is a lack of reserve force, or nervous bankruptcy. The chief symptom or manifestation of this lack of nerve force is vaso-motor instability; that is to say, the vaso-motor system, instead of keeping up a steady tonic pressure upon the blood-vessels, is constantly loosening and tightening its grip upon them, now in one part of the body, now in another. The result is that we are having anæmia of a certain organ, then a little later hyperæmia of another, or the two conditions may follow each other in the same organ.

As to the true nature of neurasthenia, it is a most difficult and involved subject, and one upon which the various authorities are not by any means agreed.

The principal question seems to be as to how far the disease is independent, and how far it is secondary to some




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lesion of a special organ. It must be acknowledged that this is a question of great difficulty. There are certainly many cases to be met with where local disease of the pelvic or abdominal organs exercises a most profound influence on the system at large. When it is reasonably sure that a connection like this exists between local disease and a general nervous condition, the only course to pursue is to attack vigorously the local disease; and in all probability, when the cause of irritation is removed, the secondary manifestations will disappear also. If the original lesion has lasted a long time, however, the train of nervous symptoms which it caused may have become independent of it and persist even after the cause has been cured.

It must be remembered, however, that no local cause could ever produce true neurasthenia in a system in which the nerves were in their normal condition. We often hear it said that disease in one part of the body or in one organ affects every other. This is perfectly true, but the effect so produced does not by any means have to be neurasthenia. It is quite possible for some slight local trouble to exist along with true neurasthenia and yet have no causal relation with it. Furthermore local derangement may be simply a symptom or result of neurasthenia. Finally, we may have cases of true neurasthenia with all their characteristics, in which the existence of some local affection aggravates and prolongs the main trouble. This class of cases will be referred to more particularly in the chapter on Galvanism.

One fact must be borne in mind in this connection, and that is that a fully developed case of neurasthenia, no matter how developed, must be looked upon as a morbid entity in itself. Whether purely functional in its nature or due originally to the irritation produced by some local lesion, it must be treated to a great extent as an independent disease, and not as a mere secondary affection.



Gaylord Eros.
M.D.
Syracuse, N. Y.
1881.

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In spite of the difficulty in the diagnosis of this affection, it is not desirable to spend much time upon it here, for this little work, as the title implies, is to be devoted to treatment.

The chief symptoms of the affection are as follows: Irritability and restlessness. Inability to concentrate the mind upon anything; when he reads the newspaper he cannot recall what he has read. Great weakness of the will; little things seem a mountain to him; he cannot make up his mind to a fixed course of action. Melancholy is always present, which may even go on to despair. The mind is plagued by all kinds of morbid and unreasoning fears, such as fear of being alone or of being in a crowd, fear of everything, and finally fear of being afraid. Another very characteristic symptom is a terrible but utterly indescribable feeling in the head. Pains of all kinds may be felt in any part of the body, from the head to the feet. Sleeplessness is almost always present in a more or less aggravated form.

For a full and complete account of this disease with all its symptoms, the reader is referred to the admirable work of Dr. G. M. Beard.

As to its frequency, it is alarmingly prevalent, and among the best and most intelligent class of our people. I say alarmingly, because a certain proportion of the cases lead to and end in that terrible mental death, insanity. It is almost impossible to obtain the statistics of this disease, but all indications point inevitably to the fact that it is on the increase in our land. The terrible competition in all kinds of business, the overmastering desire for wealth and station, stimulated as they are by the tremendous advantages which a comparatively recent civilization offers to everyone of an energetic disposition, tend to bring about a condition of things which is terribly wearing on a sensitive nervous organization. Many are keyed up to the highest pitch by the excitement of the struggle, and as long as all goes well they