

ON FAILURE OF BRAIN-POWER

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JULIUS ALTHAUS

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BY

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PREFACE.

IN the following pages I have endeavoured to elucidate the nature of certain nervous affections on which, hitherto, much misconception has prevailed. I have likewise drawn attention to a new plan of treatment, which I have carried out for some years past in suitable cases, and I trust that the facts and opinions which I have brought forward may serve to advance this important department of Medicine.

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MARBLE ARCH, W.,
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January, 1882.

ON

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RECENT physiological and pathological researches on the localisation of faculties and functions in the brain and spinal cord have thrown considerable light on the nature and mode of production of many of the most important diseases to which the nervous system is liable, such as the various forms of paralysis, epilepsy, insanity, and others; and it appears to me that they may also serve to furnish us with a key to the more accurate definition of those very frequent, although less serious, functional disorders which have from time to time been comprehended by the names of hypochondriasis, nervousness, nervous exhaustion, neurasthenia, spinal irritation, neurosismus, neuropathy, etc. Morbid states of the nervous system, in which there is failure or perversion of energy without organic disease of nervous tissue, have unquestionably always existed, but have recently, in consequence

of altered conditions of life and the greater severity of the struggle for existence, become more frequent, and have therefore attracted the attention of physicians to a greater degree than formerly. Briquet, Bouchut, Fordyce Barker, Erb, and Beard have shown that the symptoms of neurasthenia frequently simulate those of organic disease, and given a more or less detailed description of them and their common causes; but no one has as yet attempted to trace the different symptoms which are clinically observed to their special sources, or shown them to originate from impaired nutrition of specially defined areas of the brain and other portions of the nervous system. For this reason the description of symptoms has been somewhat disjointed, and the treatment of the disorder has not been pursued in sufficiently strict accordance with its localisation.

Diseases of the eye, throat, womb, etc., are at the present time treated chiefly, although not exclusively, by local remedial measures; and while oculists, laryngologists and gynæcologists have no doubt occasionally been guilty of a degree of exaggeration as regards local interference, yet success has on the whole been proportionate to the skill with which local treatment has been devised and carried out. The same tendency is perceptible in the modern treatment of diseases of the lungs by inha-

lation, etc. On the other hand, the purely constitutional treatment of local disorders has been carried to a foolish extent, and resulted in such notorious solecisms as sending patients on a voyage to Australia for improving their stamina and constitutional powers, when all they wanted was a pair of suitable spectacles!

While fully conscious of the importance of constitutional conditions in the production of nervous diseases, and of the value of constitutional treatment in the same, more especially where the presence of one of the more important dyscrasie, such as syphilis, gout, malaria, struma, etc., can be ascertained, I have yet long been of opinion that many apparently constitutional or general diseases of the nervous system are in fact local affections of certain areas of nervous matter, and require local treatment as much as other local maladies. I have therefore, in cases which have appeared to me suitable, endeavoured to carry out this idea; and some of the results thus obtained I have recorded in "Brain" for October, 1880, and April, 1881. In the present essay I purpose to treat of certain functional diseases of the brain, which have as their characteristic feature *loss of power* (asthenia) in different spheres of the organ, and of the localised application of the constant voltaic current for their cure.

The brain is not, as was formerly believed, a