

**THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY  
OF A NEURASTHENE: AS  
TOLD BY ONE OF THEM**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649132522

The autobiography of a neurasthene: as told by one of them by Margaret A. Cleaves

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**MARGARET A. CLEAVES**

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# THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A NEURASTHENE

AS TOLD BY ONE OF THEM  
AND RECORDED BY

MARGARET A. CLEAVES, M. D.



BOSTON  
RICHARD G. BADGER  
THE GORHAM PRESS  
1910

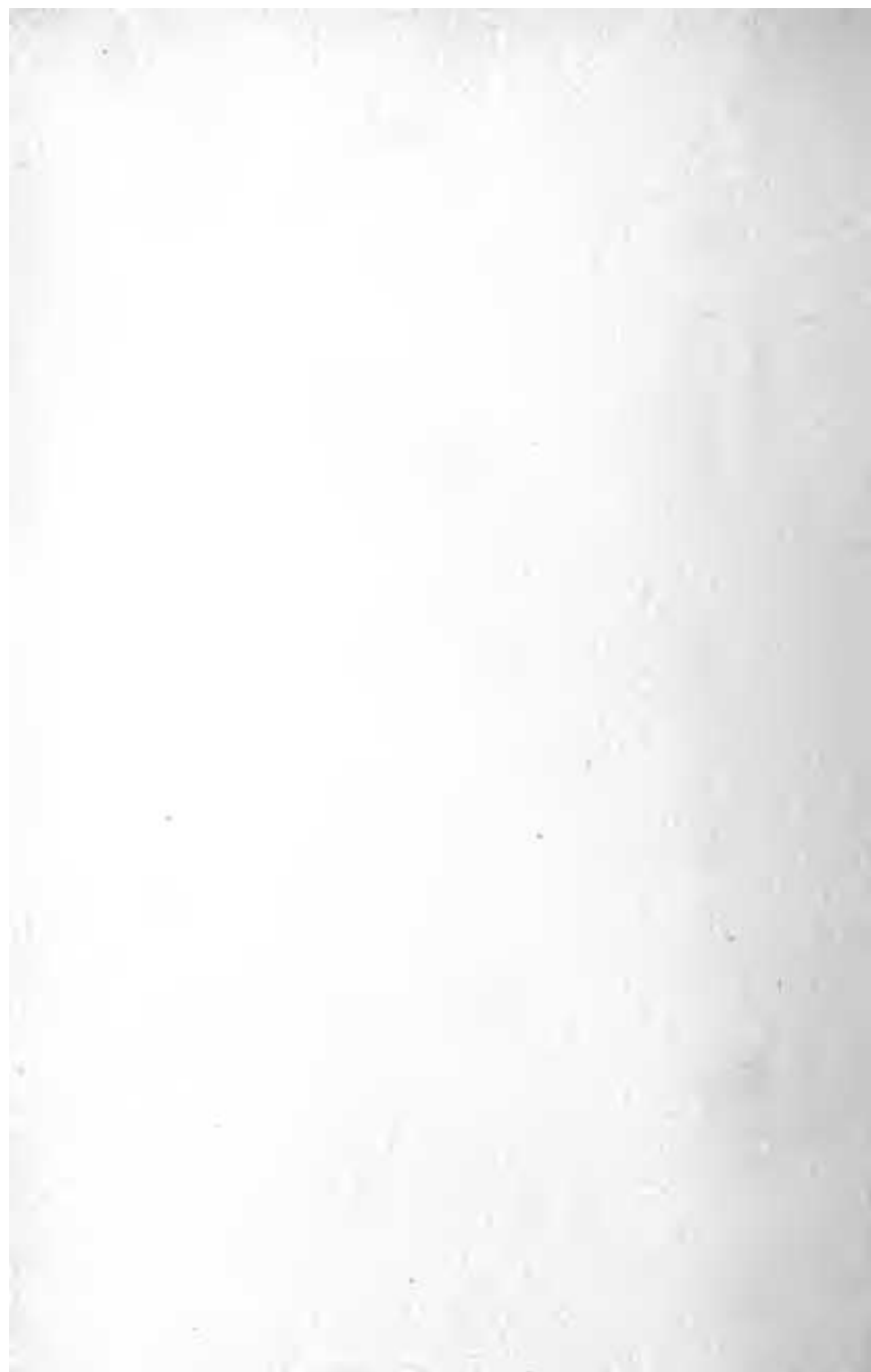
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THE GORHAM PRESS, BOSTON, U. S. A.

*Dedicated  
To Another  
Physician, Friend and Counsellor*





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## INTRODUCTION

**T**HIS is the biography of a physician. The actual conditions are recorded. It does not matter whether it was really a man or a woman. The complete exhaustion of supreme nerve centres as in this case rarely befalls a woman. So far as the fulfillment of professional duties, the achievement of a definite purpose with this tremendous handicap is concerned, it was done. The physician whose story is told, and also the physician in attendance both knew from their own experience the worst of this condition without a pathology, but which evidences a definite pathological physiology. Never for one moment did either the one or the other abate their interest in their professional work, nor their manifold duties in relation to life. The physician in attendance did not know from his own experience the anguish of pain, inability and all it meant to keep up courage and activity until after fully eight years of attendance upon the patient whose biography is recorded. There had been premonitions as early as at the time of his patient's complete break. While he never coddled himself and while he has always been the quiet, calm,

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self-poised and kindhearted physician, he has had since his own experience a better appreciation of the condition of his patient, and while there is neither fretting nor moaning on the part of the one or the other, there is a stronger bond of mutual confidence and understanding between them than before.

The patient felt at times that her condition was not fully appreciated by him, but after all his optimistic view, his constant effort to encourage the use, not the waste of such energy as was possessed, was infinitely better than the opinion given him by an eminent neurologist, to whom he confided the story of his muscular contractions, similar in nature to those of a progressive spinal cord lesion, of the intense neuritis, the loss of power to the same extent as with the patient whose story is told, so that objects would fall from his hands. The patient had been through the same experience. It was with the greatest difficulty at one time in the experience of both to even use knife and fork at the table, while the routine carving was an impossibility. It was difficult for him to get about to make his professional calls because of the weakness of the leg muscles, while at night the cramping was of such a nature as to bring him out of bed with a bound. The throat muscles and all those essential to mastication and deglutition in both cases grew very weak as well. There were uncomfortable dreams,

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terrors and profound depression. The specialist whom he consulted told him that he had seen three similar cases, but that they all died. The physician patient, as did I, told him he had neurasthenia. He is not only not dead, but feels so well as to say he could not live if he felt better. I, who record this history, know the condition of both intimately and as a physician my professional experience has been largely with nerve and mental conditions.

This story is written with the definite purpose of removing, if possible, the sting and opprobrium which the essential neurasthene bears because of the long continued pose of the neurasthene who does not exhaust neuronc energy, but poisons it by his way of living. The one is just as unphysiological as the other, but it not infrequently happens, as in these two instances, that the stress and strain of meeting life's obligations is too much even though life is lived carefully and without dissipations of any sort. A symptomatic neurasthene who has been under my professional observation for the past seven or eight years, was told many years since by a practitioner that she had an arthritis, that she never would be well and that she could eat as she pleased, it would make no difference. She has set herself resolutely to the carrying out of his prognosis and following his advice in the matter of eating—she weighs two hundred and