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SELECTED ARTICLES.

HYSTERIA.

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To the general practitioner of medicine no diseases are so perplexing, so little understood and, generally speaking, so unsatisfactory in the results achieved by treatment as are diseases of the nervous system, with their varied and complex symptomatology, their frequent association with other acute and chronic affections, and the consequent difficulty experienced in distinguishing primary organic disease in the nervous system from conditions which are functional, reflex or secondary. This is especially true of hysteria, a disease with which every one is familiar, but which no one understands; a disease which is constantly before the physician in one or other of its varied forms, persisting for months or even years, or vanishing as by a magician's wand, or as suddenly being transformed into a new being clad in a garb new and strange and dancing before the discouraged physician as though scoffing at him in his impotence.

What hysteria is, where it begins or where it ends we know not, and a clear definition of the border line between the hysterical and the non-hysterical is as difficult to give as it is to say where sanity ends and insanity begins.

It was once believed that hysteria originated in the womb, and it was even thought that this organ traveled about through the body setting up the various symptoms in its train. This ancient idea has long ago been abandoned, and, occurring as the disease does in males, and in females, even when the uterine functions are inactive, it is now believed that there is no direct association between it and the female generative organs, which have no other influence than that of sometimes reflexly exciting the attack.

We now apply the term hysteria to an undefined morbid state of the nervous system, with its primary derangement in the higher cerebral centres, but affecting secondarily the functions of the lower centres in the brain, spinal cord and sympathetic system, and characterized by psychical disturbances with or without various disorders of the motor, sensory and vaso-motor systems.

What the exact nature of this derangement is either in the higher or lower centres is not clear. Certainly no macroscopic or microscopic changes have been observed by the pathologist that could in any way explain the various symptoms of the disease. On the other hand, careful and systematic examination of the nerve tissues by all the modern methods known to science goes to show that no abnormality of any kind can be discovered. Certain structural changes have occasionally been found, but they are undoubtedly secondary, as was the sclerosis