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Special Articles

DIET IN NERVOUS DISORDERS

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The astonishing neglect of the scientific method in the therapeutics of nervous disease is nowhere more striking than where diet is concerned. Grasset's work, bristling with references, devotes hardly a page, and that in only the most general way, to the subject of alimentation. Oppenheim's scattered remarks about diet are traditional merely, indicating that he has given no real thought to the significance of the subject. Of works in English the unsatisfactory nature must be known to all of you. It is true that a few scattered articles, more especially in the French literature, have drawn attention to the importance of a diet mainly of milk and vegetable products in persons supposedly predisposed to nervousness by a constitution which the French call arthritic and former English writers lithaemic. But since the work of Weir Mitchell I know of no important presentation discussing the role of diet in the management of the sufferers from affections of the nervous system.

Moreover, the conclusions of "Fat and Blood" were largely empirical and cannot be entirely endorsed in the light of our

better recent knowledge. The irrationality of forced feeding, even in tuberculosis, is established and the practice has lost favor. The idea of nerve starvation has been found only partially correct; for the defective activities of the nerve elements are now generally attributed not to deficient aliment, but to excess of waste products or other deleterious substances. That is to say, intoxication has become a dominant interpretation. I am not prepared to say how far the not infrequent success of the Weir Mitchell method can be accounted for on this principle; for the method, as you know, is one with many factors, and was applied to a variety of cases differing in pathogenesis. But many of the failures of the method may, perhaps, be accounted for by the presence of a toxicosis which none of the numerous procedures reached or which was, perhaps, even exaggerated by the abundant diet ingested. Of course, we are well aware that in depleted conditions, even when these are toxicogenic, large amounts of nourishment can be assimilated. Convalescence from wasting diseases is a familiar illustration.