

BRAIN WORK AND OVER-WORK.

BY JOHN FERGUSON, B.A., M.B., L.R.C.P.

The first proposition which I wish to lay down is, that the care of the body is a duty. Some think that it is selfish to care for the body. They imagine that it is a great thing to care for the soul, and even fancy that sometimes we can better care for the soul by mortifying the body. Both of these propositions are fallacious in the extreme. It is a patent fact that no solid superstructure can be raised without a firm foundation on which to rest; yet this foundation may itself be concealed from view. So it is in the matter of body and mind, between the thinking activity and the bodily health. It follows that, above all things, students should be careful of their health. Strange to say, however, this is often one of the last things a student thinks about. The more eager he is in the pursuit of learning the more likely he is to be a sinner in this respect. It would be well for every student throughout his entire course fully to realize the fact that sedentary habits, especially when combined with continual mental effort, are decidedly injurious to health. This is emphatically the case with persons who are naturally weak, and in whom the tendency to constant study is generally more marked than in those of stronger physique. Every mental act has its correlate physical movement; it is utterly absurd then to suppose that when the body is out of order we can as well discharge our duties as when the entire organism is working freely and healthily. This is not only true with regard to study, but it is equally true with regard to our moral nature. The man of poor health is

subject to many temptations. To prop up the flagging energies many resort to the use of stimulants, while others fall into careless habits, and quickly lose all interest in their work. The sum of Christian duties is to love God and our neighbour. But when can a man so well love God or his neighbour as when he is happy and in the enjoyment of health. For the full development of this feeling of love there is required a certain satisfaction and contentment within; and a certain admiration for the beauty that is everywhere around us. This we cannot so easily possess when out of health.

A series of diseased conditions arise from excessive nervous activity, from over mental strain or mental shock. These diseased conditions we find mainly in persons engaged in art or science; in politics; in commerce and speculation; and in the too laborious student. Whatever may be the position of the man, the phenomena indicating that he is subjected to mental strain exhibit great similarity. They are links in the same chain; and they depend primarily on a deficiency of power in the organic nervous system. This undue mental strain abstracts too much of the nerve energy, and consequently the heart, the stomach, and digestive organs are not sufficiently supplied. These important organs perform their respective duties in an irregular uncertain manner, ending in impairment, if not total ruin of the whole animal economy. In this madly striving age the pressure of business absorbs so much of the daily store of energy, that the digestive or-