

kind, each may serve separately as a determining cause. Fear acts powerfully on the nervous system, and frequently becomes, in times of epidemics, a veritable breeding place of nervous affections, which further incumbers the locality or its environs with a nucleus of contagion. The demands of *aristocratic life*, with the multiplicity of "distractions" that it imposes upon the initiated, with the reversal of normal life and habits, with its rivalries, its triumphs and reverses of self love, of which no reflection should pierce through the mask smiling under all circumstances, provides, creates and maintains neurasthenia. Levillain cites another influence enervating and depressing, viz., immoderate indulgence in music, literature, and the theatre. Certainly it is annoying and often prejudicial to be ignorant of what is going on; but this would be, it seems to us, expanding too widely the sphere of neurasthenia, rather than comprehending the nervous stimulation produced by the satisfaction of artistic or literary inclinations.

*Abuse of the generative organs* (coitus, onanism) has been equally blamed. One finds, it is true, similar excesses in the antecedents of many neurasthenics; but with Lasèque, one may ask, whether they were the cause or the effect, whether like indulgences have produced nervous affection, or rather, constituted its first manifestation. Some authors have especially denounced the abuse of *coitus interruptus*, practiced continuously to avoid the risks of an increase in family. The question of *muscular excesses* is still more open to question. Neurasthenia is rare indeed among inhabitants of the country, in conditions where the muscles work more than the brain, and where out-door life, strengthening and regulating the nervous system, makes the man happier, more contented, and better balanced. On the other hand, the influence of *traumatism* at the present time is undeniable, the nervous shocks produced by trauma, and often out of proportion to the extent of the injury, has sometimes, as a *result*, a mixed nervous affection, partaking both of hysteria and neurasthenia; this is *traumatic neurasthenia*, of which we will treat further in the chapter on Hysteria.

Certain forms of poisoning also appear to play a part; the abuse of tobacco, of tea, of coffee (Krishaber) have been invoked, but it might be well to make some restrictions as to the last two

substances and to ask oneself *whether* to lay the blame upon the exciting beverages or the excess of work they were destined to favor. The excessive use of morphine, ether, cocaine, and iodoform, are equally blameworthy; here again, would it not be proper to return to the origin of these abuses.

Several *general affections*, acute or chronic, merit a position in this etiology. Among acute affections we would mention, grippe, typhoid fever and pneumonia; among the chronic conditions, they have included particularly (and recently) syphilis, tuberculosis and the uric diathesis.

In short, certain local diseases, lesions limited to a single organ or part, can as time passes, by simple persistence, and thanks to the constant pre-occupation bestowed upon them, engender neurasthenia. For instance, diseases of the stomach, of the liver (whence the name *hypochondria*, given by the ancients to certain form of nervousness), of the genito-urinary organs, etc. "In addition to psychical neurasthenia, there is also organic neurasthenia."

But all that is not sufficient; it is not enough that there is excessive fatigue, a poisonous substance or an illness, to have formed pre-occupations, or suffered from a wound, to become neurasthenic. One sees individuals whose existence has been one long series of misfortunes or of vices, a career interrupted by fatigues or evils, and who have still escaped neurasthenia; preserving in the midst of their miseries, the equanimity and well-balanced temper of the philosopher, indeed even gaiety. Therefore, something more, which is predisposition, is necessary in order to become the prey of this nervous affection; there must be a previous *failure* of the nervous system, hereditary or acquired, a relative feebleness of the nerve centers which makes it impossible to resist successfully the effect of the causes heretofore enumerated.

It is customary, in short, to seek among the personal or hereditary antecedents of the neurasthenic as among the greater number of nervous diseases, some nervous defect, organic or functional, and it is not rare, on the other hand, to discover associated with neurasthenia some other disease of the nervous system. We will review these facts when we treat of the pathogenesis. Neurasthenia once constituted, one of the causes which contributes most powerfully to its maintenance in many cases, is the influence of the environment, of the