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**Selections: Medicine.**

**THE NATURE AND DIAGNOSIS OF  
NEURASTHENIA (NERVOUS EX-  
HAUSTION).**

BY GEORGE M. BEARD, M.D., NEW YORK.

Nervous exhaustion (neurasthenia) is in this country more common than any other form of nervous disease. But in spite of its frequency and importance, neurasthenia, though long recognized, in a vague way, under such terms as "general debility," "nervous prostration," "spinal weakness," "spinal irritation," "cerebral and spinal anæmia and hyperæmia," "irritable ovary," "irritable uterus," and sexual exhaustion," yet until quite recently no attempt has been made to formally introduce it into science, by describing in detail all its symptoms and showing their relation to each other and to the morbid nervous condition of which they are all the results and expressions. The purpose of the present essay is to study in detail the differential diagnosis of neurasthenia and of the functional nervous diseases allied to it and to which it leads.

The importance of making a differential diagnosis between maladies of the type here referred to and organic or structural diseases of the brain and spinal cord is incalculable; mistakes of the most solemn character are constantly being made. I have been frequently consulted by physicians, with reference to themselves, for symptoms which were supposed to indicate ataxia or some form of organic disease of the spine or brain, when in reality they only had symptoms of neurasthenia. Some of these medical men were greatly alarmed, es-

pecially after reading upon the subject in German authorities.

Distinguished from organic or structural nervous diseases, the points in the differential diagnosis of neurasthenia from organic disease of the brain and spinal cord, which it simulates, and with which it is so often confounded, are as follows:—

1. The symptoms of organic disease are usually fixed and stable, while very many of those of neurasthenia and allied states are fleeting, transient, metastatic, and recurrent. Very many of the signs of neurasthenia and allied states appear in organic affections, and in both conditions they are precisely the same, so that of themselves alone they would be no guide in the differential diagnosis; spinal tenderness, impaired nutrition of the skin and hair, shooting and stabbing and boring neuralgias, cardiac palpitation, insomnia or drowsiness, failure of memory, sexual exhaustion and emissions, mental depression, pain and heaviness in the head and back, disturbance of the nerves of special sense, hyperæsthesia and anæsthesia local or general, coldness of the extremities, twitchings of muscles—all of these and other results of the functional nervous disorders we are considering manifest themselves in spinal congestion, in ataxy, in muscular atrophy; but in functional troubles they come and go, and change about and alternate, appear and disappear and reappear without any clear cause, and sometimes utterly vanish even without treatment; in the nervously exhausted these symptoms fly about from one part or organ to another, as from the head to the stomach or back, from the upper to the lower part of the spine, from the front to the back of the head. After an organic malady