

tion of fatigue. He also became undecided, even in small matters; ceased to have any inclination to go out and mingle with the public, and grew more and more averse to political movements. He reached a point, finally, when to meet strangers caused him great distress, excited the circulation, and induced a cold sweat.

As it became indispensable that he should resume the canvass, he made a strong effort, and, notwithstanding the fatigue, mental and moral depression, and exposure of public speaking, hand-shaking, and other matters of political expediency, he actually improved somewhat. The insomnia, irritable bladder and hypochondriasis, however, continued, but to a less degree. In a few weeks, by means, chiefly hygienical, I succeeded in stopping the chloral; natural sleep was resumed, although it remained somewhat fitful. Suitable dietetic regulations, baths, exercise and medicines, *pro re nata*, removed, or at least greatly modified the principal symptoms. Two weeks at Atlantic City accomplished no little good, and when he return to Philadelphia last week he appeared to be nearly his old self.

COMMENTARY:—In this case we have exhibited that complexus of symptoms entitled neurasthenia or nervous prostration in its anæmic form, produced by several factors—moral and somatic. The moral were very influential, but, unless the conditions producing bodily depression had occurred, the former cases could hardly have effected such results. Long-standing dyspepsia had prepared the way; malarial intoxication and fatigue contributed an important series of changes, and upon this weakened bodily state were precipitated crushing moral influences.

These cases, whose histories I have just read, are typical—each is the representative of a group. The causes are complex; the effects are not limited to one organ, or set of organs, but involve the system in general. To name this malady from the disturbance in one's system seems to be an error unless the definition is sufficiently elastic to include all the functions affected. Neurasthenia names one, only, of the parts involved. To entitle this the "American Disease" is a strange misnomer. It might, with more propriety, be called the "French Disease," for a condition known as the "nervous state," as "nervism," as "neurasthenia," and similar terms, has been recognized and frequently described by French writers from an early period in this century. In France have existed the causes in the most influential form. The frequent political convulsions, the exacting social life of the great cities, and the harassing struggle for existence, inseparable from the state of the great mass of the population, induce, if any mere external conditions can, that which is called nervous exhaustion. There are two factors supposed to be especially influential in this country—work, and our exciting political and social life. I believe that the effect of these is greatly overrated.

The brain, of all the organs of the body, illustrates in the most perfect manner that which has

been happily styled "the principle of least action;" that is, to execute given tasks, it expends the least possible force, or, to express the same idea in another form, its work is done with ease, with the minimum of effort. Given a certain amount of repose (sleep), and supplied with proper nutriment (healthy blood) the brain will do its allotted work continuously during its working (the waking) hours. So far from being injured by severe labor, carried on under normal conditions, the brain is improved by it. Mental activity, like muscular exercise, keeps the brain in a healthy state. When, therefore, a man says he is suffering from the effects of mental overwork, I want to know what his vices are. Worry may be one of these; worry is exhausting. The worries of life do infinitely more harm than the work of life, how onerous, soever, it may be. The cases I have just read illustrate this.

I deny that life is more exciting on this side of the Atlantic. The one prize of life is money, and to get possession of it is the supreme purpose, to the attainment of which every energy is put forth. Is it less so elsewhere? Who are the people that despise money and make no effort to obtain it? Here life is less exciting, because our political condition is stable, and but comparatively little exertion is required to secure a comfortable subsistence. I am speaking now of the mass of the population, and not of the few consumed by ambition for political and social distinction or led by a pitiless greed. It is the very ease and luxury of our American life that causes mischief. It is the indulgence in eating and drinking, the abuse of alcohol and tobacco, sexual excesses, sedentary habits, and too luxurious lives generally, that induce the state of the system called nervous exhaustion. If I had time, each of these should be considered in relation to this subject. In the first case I narrated the pleasures of the table and disordered assimilative functions caused the trouble. In the second case, dyspepsia, malarial toxæmia and unusual fatigue were the pathogenic factors. In both, the effects of these causes were increased by moral influences, in one, the anxieties involved in vast business enterprises; in the other, the excitement of a hot political contest. These moral causes would have no injurious effect, had not the somatic conditions been unfavorable.

I come now to the most difficult part of my subject. I have to answer this important question: Why are the somatic derangements caused by the conditions referred to, in some cases accompanied by the mental and nervous symptoms which belong to neurasthenia? Why do some subjects with indigestion and assimilative disorders, or with the results of dyspepsia and malaria, suffer from the derangements of the mental and nervous functions, and not others? I might here take refuge behind an accepted generalization, and say that the presence or absence of the neurotic type of constitution explained the difference in the result. There is aptness in this explanation, but it is not entirely adequate. There