

This impairment of the nerve centers secondarily involves impairment of the whole organism. There is a lowering of all the vital forces. The sympathetic system becomes irritable as manifested by the symptoms dependent on its disturbance. A vicious circle is set up. Primarily the fatigue of the central cells depresses the action of the organic sympathetic centers; then the metabolic processes being disturbed in this way, secondary irritations arise due to the imperfect assimilation and elimination of the products of metabolism, and continuously operate on already devitalized nerve centers. The higher or psychic centers are the ones primarily affected, making neurasthenia a psychic disorder.

With Gower we feel that "no description, however lengthy, would embrace half the varied manifestations of mere nervous weakness." The lengthy history, with its varied, variable and vague symptoms, constitutes a true characteristic of the disorder.

The first symptom is often a disturbance of sleep. As the highest centers are involved, and in them their highest capacity, we find as early symptoms, mental irritability and excitability, diminished directing power, or capacity for continuous thought, lessened ability to fix the attention, incapacity to perform either habitual tasks, or the complex relations of social life, great depression, inability to make decisions, difficulty in recalling memory images, self-concentration and morbid introspection preventing outer concentration, lessened spontaneous mentation, conditions of fear and apprehension, great physical fatigue, a conscious difficulty in mental and physical exertion, headache.

In addition there may be symptoms on the part of all the special senses though these are generally functional and usually of a painful character. General sensibility is not greatly disturbed. There may be pains dependent on a neuritis, or paresthesias which may be purely subjective or also dependent on a neuritis.

The motor symptoms are weakness, tremor, exaggeration or depression of the deep reflexes. The digestive, circulatory, respiratory and genito-urinary systems may all add symptoms to this picture; as well as the various secretory glands. The disturbance of the vasomotor system gives characteristic symptoms. There may be painful flushings, blushing, dermatographia, or edemas. This instability of the vasomotor system is in great measure the cause of the extreme variability of the symptoms and inconstancy of the same. A certain set of nerve cells at one moment may receive an increased blood supply through vasomotor dilatation at the expense of neighboring cells, so there is no harmony of action; and, this dilatation being soon followed by constriction, the cells are again rendered inactive. This inconstant blood