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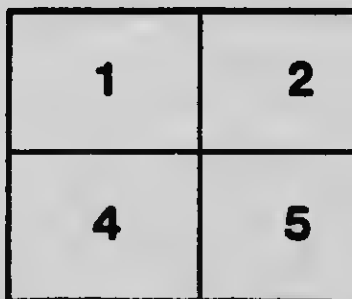
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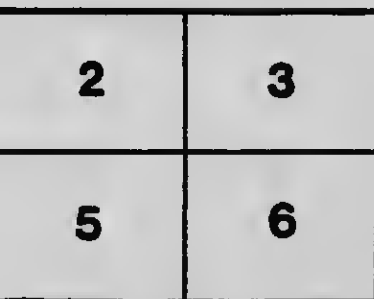
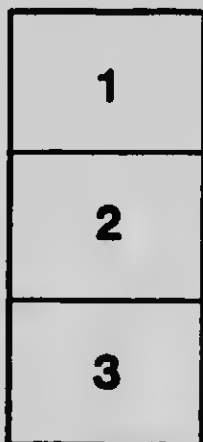
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NERVOUSNESS IN CHILDREN—ITS CAUSES AND PREVENTION *

CHARLES F. NEU, M.D.

INDIANAPOLIS

There is probably not another term in the realm of symptomatology used as frequently by the sick as that of nervousness in attempting to describe their feelings, especially when suffering from diseases of the nervous system, whether of so-called functional or organic basis. It is also pretty safe to say that there is not another term in medical literature applied to as many different conditions. This being the case, it naturally follows that any attempt to describe or interpret it as a tangible specific subject meets with the relative difficulty encountered in one's inability to limit its application to a specific condition or group of conditions.

Again and again an attempt has been made to elicit from patients enumerating nervousness as a complaining symptom, definitely and specifically what condition or meaning it was desired to convey, with the almost invariable result of being informed that there was present an indescribable feeling of discomfort and negative feeling-tone, frequently apart from and in addition to any manifest physical or mental instability. Not only is it difficult to define just what is meant by

* Read before the Indiana State Medical Association, Indianapolis Session, 1912.

nervousness, but it is also just as difficult to draw the line between what may be termed pathological or normal conditions of nervousness and abnormal states. On the other hand, it is comparatively easy to recognize what is pleased to call a nervous temperament or nervous constitutional make-up. It is not possible to describe entirely all of the elements that go to make up that temperament or make-up. It has been said "that when an individual is able to endure the ordinary difficulties and conditions of life, or the natural physiologic functions of the various organs of the body without manifesting outward distress and disturbance, it is probable that there must be some natural infirmity or weakness of the nervous system.

The essential difference between the normal adult and the neurotic child is one of degree, modified by the influence of numerous and varied experiences, as well as of a more mature mental and physical development. The child, being under the control of judgment, reason, and the emotions, will react more prominently and definitely in relation to the disturbing influences. These reactions are almost wholly outward and objective manifestations, whereas in the adult many of them are inward or subjective in character. As a consequence, the neurotic child is characterized physically by evidence of normal nervous balance, signs of irregular nervous action in the various movements of the musculature, particularly of the extremities, and speech. Mentally, there is impairment of the power of attention, not necessarily an

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intelligenc, but more particularly a defective,
 inefficient power of control. Obsessions are often
 a marked feature in neurotic children, their
 weaker minds being more apt to become the vic-
 tims of predominating or overpowering ideas.
 Moral obliquities, such as lying, thieving, etc.,
 are also common in such children, more the re-
 sult of an exuberant, romantic, riotous imagina-
 tion than of any direct conscious or preformed
 reasoning or judgment.

In attempting to determine and analyze the
 conditions or factors which are instrumental in
 laying the foundation of a temperament or con-
 stitutional make-up of this nature, it will be
 found that for all practical purposes they may be
 included under three distinct groups, namely:

1. Hereditary influences.
2. Nutritional and hygienic conditions.
3. Educational and disciplinary influences.

We cannot with any degree of definiteness ex-
 plain how it happens, yet at the same time it can
 scarcely be doubted that every individual inherits
 in his or her substrata, not only parental, but also
 ancestral qualities and characteristics of physical
 and mental make-up, which are ready to spring
 into activity of function at different periods of
 life, so that the qualities of one ancestor may
 come into existence at one period, and those of
 another ancestor become evident at another
 period of the individual's life. The single sperm
 cell, integrating the qualities of generations of
 male and female ancestors, unites with the germ
 cell, which in like manner has incorporated the
 qualities of male and female progenitors, and

this combination gives rise to a new or-
 duct, which, minute as it is, contain
 form all of the potentialities and ac-
 plays during the evolutionary process
 the characters and qualities of the a-
 both sides, and in addition, evinces ne-
 as a result of that combination, proper-
 are unlike the constituents which en-
 such original combination. This pr-
 hereditary transmission is fully recogn-
 who have studied the subject throu-
 whole realm of creation, not only in t-
 but also in the vegetable kingdom. T-
 ple, furthermore, is being daily put t-
 usefulness in the production and devel-
 a better and more highly organized pro-
 various phases or forms of organic li-
 man. The human organism is subject t-
 organic laws, passes through the same p-
 as its corresponding part in the ult-
 of the creation. It may differ to some-
 the degree or form of change and in th-
 quired for their evolution, but the esen-
 tial principle is the same.

In considering the question of the
 factor or factors transmitted, it is cus-
 to speak of certain predispositions, ten-
 dencies, or properties in the make-up of the i-
 either physical or psychical, or a combi-
 nation of both, as the hereditary element. Th-
 these vary in intensity and number,
 and are said to be more marked in the transmiss-
 ion maternal than of the paternal charac-
 ter, and more in males than females, and more in t-

se to a new organic prod-
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after the manifestation of definite disorders than before their appearance.

It is still a matter of controversy whether or to what extent so-called acquired characters are transmitted, yet it seems reasonable to assume that even if not transmissible they at least exercise a modifying influence either directly or indirectly on the constitutional make-up of the individual. This fact seems to be fully established when one considers the injurious effects on the offspring of such conditions as alcoholism, syphilis, tuberculosis and so-called functional types of nervous and mental disturbances. Von Ziehen states "that after heredity, chronic alcoholism is the most important factor in the transmission of neuropathic and psychopathic states." It is said that in at least 25 per cent. of individuals afflicted with epilepsy a history of alcoholism can be obtained in one or both parents. In 1,000 cases of mental defectiveness examined by Fournier, there was a history of alcoholism in the father in 471, in the mother in eighty-four, and in both parents in sixty-five. It is also a rather common observation that children of alcoholics manifest lessened vitality, a low nervous tone, weakened vital organs, less competent to resist and endure disease or fatigue, less power of recuperation; are almost certain to manifest more or less incompetency or non-resistance, and, as a consequence, readily fall victims to the strains, temptation and unsanitary conditions of life. As regards syphilis, no less an authority than Ziehen has found positive indications of syphilis in 10 per cent., and probable syphilis in

17 per cent. of mental defectives, in tuberculosis, it may be said that while normally healthy children a history of tuberculosis is obtainable in 15 per cent., yet in defectives the percentage is much higher, ranging from 23 per cent. (Piper) to 56 per cent. Also taking epilepsy as an example of a functional nervous disturbance, the heredity is indicated by the fact that in 25 per cent. of epilepsies a history of epilepsy is traceable in the ancestors or relatives. There is a family history of epilepsy in two-thirds of the inherited cases, in one-third and both in one-tenth.

Improper food, some becoming overfed, others unsuitably fed, and others, through lack of care and hygiene, never give rise to a normal standard of physical or mental development. Many children, as a consequence, are unable to resist and endure well those conditions which sap and poison the system when the text comes says "that there is not the shadow of a doubt that on the methods of feeding and rearing of infants during the early stages of existence, the health and strength of the child depend." In fact the strength and physique of a child are determined. One is almost justified in asserting that the health and physique of the nation vary as the food supply during infancy and childhood." Insufficient and improper feeding, malnutrition, stunted growth, imperfect development, inattention, want of concentration, instability, irritability and other evils are the result of imperfect and retarded cerebral develop-

tal defectives. As to tubercular disease, it is not true that while even in men a history of tubercular disease is present, yet in mental defectives it is much higher, varying from 25 to 56 per cent. (Koliez). As an example of so-called nervous disturbance, the influence of epilepsy is shown by the fact that in 35 per cent. of the history of epilepsy or insanity in the family history of epilepsy in the same cases, insanity in one-tenth.

The child becoming half-starved, and unsuitably fed, improper feeding give rise to a good standard of development, and such children are unable to resist long or even the slightest test which saps the vigor or the shadow of a doubt in the child's mind. The feeding and rearing influences of existence depend on the physique of the nation. In asserting that the nation varies directly with infancy and early childhood, improper food means a weak physique, with imperfect physical development, and other evidences of defective cerebral development. If

not actually more prone to contract disease, they are undoubtedly more prone to suffer severely when sickness does overtake them. Just as it is said that a sound body makes for a sound mind, so it is true that a feeble body is often the possessor of a feeble mind or unstable nervous mental make-up.

Proper and sufficient rest and sleep for the young child is only second in importance to that of good and proper food. Regularity in the hours of sleeping, feeding and awake infuses a sense of order which remains with them throughout life. Want of fresh air and sunshine, exposure to extremes of heat or cold, insanitary dwellings and surroundings often lay the foundation of the future instability and susceptibility of the nervous and mental make-up of an individual. Bad light, for example, may cause a great deal of harm to a child, even though the eyesight be good. Often the child seems stupid and slow, nervous, cross and irritable, when in reality the condition is due to the strain of tired eyes and the continued straining of the eyes must be a strain on the nervous system. These induce a more or less morbid restlessness, both mentally and physically, which eventually results in an enfeeblement of will and mental power which renders ineffectual the means employed to correct evils resulting therefrom.

The presence of physical defects or diseased conditions are very often responsible for abnormal nervous manifestations. Defective and bad teeth interfere with the proper mastication of the food, and this in turn leads to digestive distur-

ances and malnutrition, or to the septic products from an unclean or injurious products of the impaired process. Obstructions in the nasal cavity, or catarrhal conditions of the nasal cavity, or enlarged tonsils interfere with the process of respiration, leading to deafness, and all the conditions that may be a pernicious habit. Defective hearing, often makes the child seem dull, inattentive and irritable, and manifests nervous and mental deficiencies or abnormalities. Visual defects likewise produce disturbances, greatly interfering with the functioning of the nervous and mental system.

However great and strong may be the primary tendencies or predispositions, for all are what are transmitted, these are important or powerful in the evolution of the organism that comes into the world as are appropriate and judicious nutrition and training, which can also modify and neutralize many defects and weaknesses dependent on a bad heredity. It is truly said that the time of most vital improvement in a human being's life is from birth to the age of two to three years. The most characteristic of the new-born child is its helplessness for life. The brain centers are in a state of undevelopment. Its speechlessness at birth, its long period of dependence on outside aid is rich in biologic and evolutionary significance. It presupposes a special

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development of the protective and fostering care of the parent.

Injudicious education and training alone may not only aggravate or intensify an inherent mischief, but may also give rise to an individual susceptibility or predisposition to nervous or mental derangements. Parents not only transmit the taints and vices of Nature, but too often foster their growth and development by bad example, by foolish training when the mind is very, if not the most susceptible, and a direction given to actions and conduct decisive for life. Parental harshness and neglect, repression of the child's natural feelings, stifling its natural desire for love and affection, thus tending to drive it to a morbid self-brooding, or compelling it to seek solace in a world of weird, vague and unhealthy fancies. Foolish indulgence, from which it never learns the lesson of self-control or of respect for or recognition of the rights of others is, on the other hand, just as injurious as the former conditions.

Parental affection may be well founded, but too often the parental responsibility seems to begin and end with silly indulgence of the child. Often artificially fed, then pampered and spoiled, it grows without discipline to its desires, without a knowledge of the relations to those about it, and thus handicapped, it becomes domineering, resenting any interference which may oppose its desires, and overbearing on the one hand, or indolent, dissipating and intemperate in the habits of life on the other hand. There is a vast difference between the individual who has been

schooled to meet some of the hardships of life, and the individual weakened by protection, whose nerves have been heightened by education the one apparently recovering from in a few months, the other often many years.

The natural pride of some parents in the accomplishments of their children leads them toward educational and other demands far beyond their capabilities, and a collapse follows, from which they never recover, and, while not deprecating the value of higher education for those who can follow it in every way fit, it is safe to say that the gains gained at the expense of an overworked body and mental organization is certainly not a wise investment in life's securities. There is no doubt that such morbid tendencies could be avoided or rendered harmless by directing them along healthier channels by the influence of a liberal education and sound training. Chubb says "that a defective education that omits the cultivation of self-control, that subjects the child for the rude shocks of a hasty and a predisposing cause of neurasthenia."

Cramming to meet the various examinations and tests tend to make mere machines of children, to impair their ability to think, to produce instability and irritability of mind and mental activities. The evil influence of overtaxation and strain is often seen in the tendency of many children to act queerly, to appear from home or to run away from

of the hardships and difficulties of the individual who has been on, whose nervous reactions are by education and training; covering from a breakdown the other often requiring as

of some parents in the their children often urges normal and other attainments abilities, and, as a result, in which they practically while not depreciating the tion for those who are in life to say that a diploma of an overworked physical on is certainly a poor in- ities. There is no doubt ncies could be neutralized y directing their activities s by the influence of good raining. Church writes tion that omits discipline self-control, thus illy fit- ide shocks of life, may be neurasthenia."

the various examinations mere machines of some ir ability to reason, to irritability of the nervous he evil influence of this is often seen in the ten- to act queerly, to dis- run away from school

toward the close of various school terms, such manifestations more frequently occurring in children having a neurotic family history.

Morbid sexual desires, instincts and habits are often generated by pernicious methods utilized by girl nurses in their efforts to quiet the restlessness and discomfort of some children, and such habits eventually lead to grave mental and moral delinquencies.

The psychological influence of those about them is often responsible for the nervous restlessness and waywardness characteristic of many children. There is still another question of a sociologic and economic nature which bears a more or less direct relationship to and influence on not only the development, but also the resistance and vitality of the organism. It has been fully demonstrated in other forms of animal life that the size of the offspring can be directly influenced by the character of the diet and state of nutrition of the mother, and if this be true of other forms of animal life it must also be true of human life. Furthermore, it cannot be otherwise than that where during the pregnant state or even while nursing her offspring the mother is subjected to unwholesome nutrition, unhealthy environment, overwork physically, worry or excessive strain mentally, has her system saturated with poisons introduced from without or arising from diseased processes within the body, must lower the vitality and vigor of the offspring.

Another feature is found in the social condition which objects to and interferes with the state of motherhood. Selfish motives, extra

expenses, restriction of liberty, additional responsibilities incident to the care of children, desire to wait until conditions are reached, means that prevent motherhood, one and all cause worry and strain that is so nerve-dread-inspiring that many previous mental, physical and moral stability and hysterical, neither fit for motherhood. When such are compelled the pregnant state to run its course accept the situation philosophically the duties and functions of mother factorily. Under such conditions instinct cannot be expected to overcome deficiencies of education and preparation of that function. Maternal cannot recover the energy spent anguish, nor is it probable that the of the offspring is not influenced by conditions.

From all of these considerations solutions may be offered as dealing with difficulties to be overcome. First, we that the unborn child is entitled to care. It has the right to life. It has the protection from hereditary taints of degeneration has the right to health and those conditions conducive to health. It has the Nature's food, which is mother's milk in its normal, healthy condition. It has the right to natural protection, proper care and education and training. These rights, when committed, they demand the recognition

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duties and obligations, amongst which may be mentioned a clean and normal life on the part of both parents, both before and after conception; constant supervision and regulation of the mode of life of the mother, particularly during pregnancy and after birth; proper care, feeding, education and training after birth, for if born healthy, babies can generally be brought up healthy by clean, sensible feeding and by reasonable attention to the hygiene and sanitary conditions surrounding it and by proper training of its mental and intellectual faculties. A prominent authority has said "that it is to the condition of the women and children, mentally, morally and physically, that we must look if we have regard for the future of our land." These can be improved by better education of the mothers, by the creation of more favorable conditions of life, and by the prevention and correction of physical defects and faulty tendencies during the early period of growth and development, for, as Goodhart writes, "It is in childhood, if at any time of life, that the opportunity offers of educating the individual out of faulty habits into a better regulated state of his nervous system."

While the solution of the problem involves sociologic, economical, educational and disciplinary difficulties, yet paramount to them stands medical supervision and direction. Consequently, on us as physicians lies the responsibility and rests the duty of advising and assisting to institute those measures looking to their solution. It is a duty enumbent on the medical profession.

and one that they owe to humanity not shirk, to educate those who are in the rearing and training of children should endeavor as far as possible to give such information as will create a healthy opinion which will not only aim to correct existing evils, but will also seek to prevent their production by restricting procreation to those fit for preventing procreation by the unfit. It is true that too often but little attention is given and much medical advice is wasted on account of ignorance, carelessness, indifference or neglect of those to whom it is given, but there is no excuse why they should waver in the discharge of their duty to their fellow-creatures. Often this lack of influence of medical advice is due to the lower moral standards of the physicians themselves, for one could not expect advice of this character to have much influence if given by those who have been accustomed to any interference with Nature's laws. To inculcate higher standards of morality in the public opinion it is necessary for the medical profession as a whole to themselves maintain a higher standard.

Assuming a child to be healthy and to be properly fed and clothed, to have a proper school course proper games and gymnastics, there is no reason why study should impair his health, either physically or mentally, if it is properly supervised and directed. Constant brain work with very little exercise, with insufficient sleep, with improper food, with faulty positions, with bad habits, with uncorrected physical defects,

to humanity and should those who are in charge of the raising of children. They should be as possible to promulgate and create a healthy public which only aim to correct existing evils and seek to prevent their progress. Recreation to the fit and to the unfit. While it is given, little attention is given, because of indifference or criminality it is given, yet that is a waver in the performance of their fellow-creature. Too much reliance of medical advice and the moral standard of the day for one could scarcely expect to have much influence who have been accessory to Nature's laws. In order to bring standards of morality into conformity for the medical profession themselves maintain that

healthy and robust, to be raised, to have as part of their education games and gymnastics, which should impair their mental powers. Constant brain work with insufficient or improper positions, attitudes or physical defects, with

unhygienic surroundings, will tend to impair or destroy the strongest constitution. Long hours of study without recreation interspersed is a trying thing for children to do, as they are probably much more diverse in their ways of thinking than our theories suppose. Certainly there is great risk in overloading the memory of the child with little details and impairing the development of the mental powers. The mental training of childhood, youth and early puberty is a question of paramount importance, as it calls for an education for the daily increasing requirements and competitions of modern life, which are apparently reaching higher and higher standards. One cannot fail to frequently observe the great discrepancy manifested between the views of some doctrinaires of education and the views of those who have practical knowledge of the laws of Nature, and too often the demands and exactions of the educationalist, aided by the over-indulgent and aspiring home influences, determine and produce lasting effects in the lowering of the vitality and resistance of the young child.

To sum up, it may be said that the solution of this problem can never be reached by the sociologist alone, or by the economist, or by the educationalist, or by the disciplinarian, or even by the physician. We can only hope to attain the desired goal by the closest cooperation of all. The sociologist must seek constantly to improve the social and moral conditions of life; the economist to determine ways and means to alleviate the intense struggle for existence; the educationalist to better understand and direct the intellectual

capabilities; the disciplinarian to instill self-reverence, self-knowledge and self-control, and the physician to supervise and direct all such measures as will be most conducive to the development of a healthy body and mind.

An analysis of the situation discloses the fact that an immense amount of money and a great deal of energy is being spent in caring for the nervously unfit individuals throughout the country who are rendered incapable of caring for themselves adequately, and while this is humanitarian and absolutely necessary from every standpoint, yet if the same amount of money and the same amount of energy were spent in determining means and measures to prevent the production of these beings and to give them appropriate rearing, education and training after their creation, a great deal more good would undoubtedly be accomplished. Before radical measures can be carried out, however, the people must be educated to recognize its usefulness and necessity, and the responsibility of this educational propaganda devolves almost wholly on us as physicians.



