

## PART II.—REVIEWS.

*The Pathology and Treatment of Neurasthenia.* By Prof. O. BINSWANGER. Pp. 440. Price 9s. Published by G. Fischer, Jena, 1896.

Most general practitioners and every specialist in nervous diseases must, at some time or another, have been amazed by the multiplicity of symptoms which neurasthenia can manifest, and perplexed by the difficulty of curing them. Any work, therefore, that throws light on the one, or gives assistance in the other, is to be cordially welcomed. That Prof. Binswanger's monograph does both will be readily acknowledged by anyone who reads it. The book, as the author states in the preface, is the outcome of a series of lectures delivered to the students of his clinic. That a professor of psychiatry is able, from the material at his disposal in the institute under his charge, to illustrate with over 100 cases a subject not in this country included under mental diseases, though very closely related thereto, offers an instructive example of an undoubted advantage which German students possess, but which we here unfortunately do not. Besides this illustration of its origin the book is likewise thoroughly German in its methods, that is to say, the author not seldom sacrifices interest and freshness for the sake of minute accuracy and laboured thoroughness. This may be no fault in the eyes of an enthusiastic specialist, but the student, to whom the book is primarily addressed, and who approaches the subject for the first time, is apt to have his interest exhausted before he gets to the end. Exception may also be taken to the arrangement of the subjects of the various lectures. The first treats of the general pathology and pathogenesis of neurasthenia. In it the author makes an attempt to define the limits of the disease and to give a definition of it in general scientific terms. This, however, is such as no one not already pretty familiar with the disease could fully appreciate. It is only when the last lecture is reached that he gives the means for obtaining a satisfactory clinical diagnosis, and the result is that, until that point is reached, the reader's ideas of the disease as a whole and of its distinctive features are exceedingly hazy. This might easily have been remedied by giving at the outset a general description of its prominent

symptoms, so that a definite picture might be present to one's mind when such abstruse questions as the pathogenesis and etiology are discussed. As it stands, one is apt to miss the full significance of the early chapters without the knowledge supplied in the later ones.

In the first lecture, when discussing the question of pathogenesis, the author emphasises the fact that neurasthenia presents the most protean forms, and may assume the characters of almost every other neurosis and psychosis. In fact there is no strict line of demarcation between neuropathic and neurasthenic symptoms. He then gives a summary of the theories which have been advanced to explain the essential nature of the disease. In promulgating his own view he laments the unsatisfactory condition of the pathology of the disease, and acknowledges that there is very much that is purely hypothetical in any explanation that can be offered. He discusses the physiological phenomena of fatigue and exhaustion, and draws a parallel between them and the symptoms of neurasthenia. He considers the parallel so close that he is inclined to regard the latter as due to a prolonged condition of over-fatigue. In the second lecture, which treats of the etiology, the cause of this condition is traced, in most cases, to a congenital weakness of nerve-power. In this connection he discusses at some length the *role* of heredity, but the limits of a review will not permit of more than a reference to this most interesting and important question. His views well repay careful study. In the third lecture the special etiological factors are considered, and he lays much stress on the necessity for great care being exercised in the adaptation of the environment of all those who possess a hereditary neurotic weakness. In these days when nervous diseases of all kinds appear to be on the increase, this is a point to which more and more attention will have to be directed. In the end the treatment of all diseases is mainly a modification of environment external and internal, and in diseases of the brain this is specially true. A person cannot alter his heredity, and, in the present condition of public opinion, the State is powerless to control it; so we are reduced to do what we can to make the environment conducive to keeping latent disease in abeyance.

The next seven lectures are devoted to the symptoms of neurasthenia, and these are classed under various headings in the following order:—Disturbances of sensation and

ideation, of muscular power, of the circulatory system, of metabolism and nutrition, and of sexual function. This part of the subject is treated very fully and satisfactorily. He gives many clinical illustrations of various points which lend variety and furnish an additional means of emphasising certain features of the disease.

The eleventh lecture gives the author's views as to the various types of neurasthenia. He bases his classification on the outstanding symptoms in each case, and as a result he finds five varieties. As the symptoms may, however, vary from time to time, the same case may pass from one to another variety at different periods of the illness. His five types are the *psychical*, the *motor*, the *dyspeptic*, the *angio-neurotic*, and the *sexual*. The psychical form he further subdivides into the hereditary, the acquired, and the hyperalgesic, while the motor form also includes two varieties—the irritative and the parietic. The nomenclature explains itself, so that it is unnecessary to enter further into a description of their characters. In the next lecture the course, prognosis, and diagnosis are treated of. In it he draws attention to the close relationship between neurasthenia and mental disease, and many of the clinical cases he describes also illustrate this. He considers that the occurrence of neurasthenic symptoms in puberty is strongly indicative of mental instability and of the necessity for care being exercised to prevent actual insanity from developing. He also notes that even after recovery from an attack of neurasthenia there is apt to be some permanent mental weakness, just as frequently happens after an attack of insanity. In regard to the diagnosis, he says this is often arrived at only by a comparison of cause and effect. It ought to be made only (1) "if one is satisfied that the local symptoms are the outcome of inherited neuropathy, and if the former, in themselves slight, can evoke the whole series of symptoms of nervous weakness; or (2) if one is satisfied from the clinical investigation of the case that from the local disease general weakness of the nervous system has been developed." He issues a warning at this point against regarding isolated symptoms as sufficient to justify a diagnosis of neurasthenia. This should only be done when they are associated with others which characterise one or other of the types he has described. There are, however, certain symptoms which have come to be regarded as "neurasthenic stigmata," and the existence of these should

always suggest that disease to one's mind. They are (1) Feeling of pressure on the head; (2) Disturbance of sleep; (3) Pain in the back; (4) Muscular weakness; (5) Dyspepsia; (6) Sexual disturbances; (7) Mental disturbances. When two or three of these exist together the diagnosis is comparatively easy.

The last three lectures are concerned with treatment, and the author rightly considers this of great importance, and goes into it very fully. No class of case is a greater bugbear to a physician than a chronic neurasthenic, and he is often at his wit's end as to what he can do. As has been already said, the author lays great stress on the regulation of environment as a prophylaxis against the disease, and he is equally insistent on its importance in treatment. In fact the latter in his view is largely a question of making the surroundings as favourable as may be in each case. He attributes some importance to the effects that may be brought about by simple suggestion. He condemns the actual production of the hypnotic state, but confesses that much good has been done by the French school by showing what may be done by simple and persistent suggestion. He gives also the results of his extensive experience of the effects of change of scene, isolation, rest, active and passive exercise, massage, over-feeding, and hydrotherapeutics, as well as of various drugs which he has found useful in the treatment of special symptoms. Those who are anxious to get suggestions about the use of any or all of these cannot do better than turn to Prof. Binswanger's book. Before closing he issues a warning which he considers much needed, to the effect that one should never forget that it is not a disease but a sick person that has to be treated. This is the best guarantee that could be given that his point of view in treatment is broad-minded and thoroughly rational.

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*I Sogni e il Sonno nell'Isterismo e nella Epilessia.* By Dr. SANTE DE SANCTIS. Roma: Società editrice Dante Alghieri, 1896. Pp. 217. Price lire 2.

Dr. Sante de Sanctis (an energetic young alienist at Rome), who has devoted special attention to the pathological and psychological aspects of sleep, has in the present noteworthy little volume made a careful attempt to investigate hysteria and epilepsy from this point of view. His object was to