BOOK REVIEW


This is admittedly a speculative essay based on a study of the physical and psychical phenomena presented by encephalitis lethargica. It is well realised that psychical factors influence diseases—asthma is a notable example—but in treatment there is often a tendency to be guided too closely by physical signs and tests and to forget Hughlings Jackson’s aphorism that the study of the patient comes before that of the disease. Yet Dr. Newsholme’s book, interesting and suggestive as it is, possibly errs in the other direction and gives undue prominence to psychical disturbance as a controlling factor in all forms of disease.

A short chapter is devoted to syphilis. Dr. Newsholme interprets syphilis not merely as a disease imposed on the individual, but “as a disease due to the interaction of an external agent with a person who is a complex of body and mind of varying poise, varying tension and varying stability.” He considers the spirochæte of syphilis to be vegetative or anabolic in character. Its introduction into the body causes a somatic overbalance; the nervous tissues respond by increased katabolism which will be indicated by an excess of katabolic cells, the lymphocytes, in the products of the nervous tissues excreted into the cerebro-spinal fluid. The spirochætes may retort by producing a more potent anabolic enzyme accompanied by infiltration of the skin, rashes, enlargement of glands and other signs of the secondary stage. Then comes a reverse wave of katabolism, resulting finally in a struggle between anabolic and katabolic factors. If the former predominate gummata are formed, if the latter, the abnormally irritated nervous system displays the mental alterations and excesses of general paralysis of the insane. Syphilis, according to this hypothesis, is thus a constant reaction and inter-relation between the physical changes produced in the somatic tissues and the nervous, mental and psychical reaction to those changes; there is also reaction to the causal spirochæte; the action and reaction mutually regulate each other.

Dr. Newsholme faithfully carries his philosophy and interpretations of disease to metaphysical heights in the concluding chapters.

It is not every one who will find this erudite work easy reading.

A. S. M.