

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR.

*\*\*Correspondents are requested to be as brief as possible. The writer's name is in all cases required as proof of good faith.*

*On request in advance, one hundred copies of the number containing his communication will be furnished free to any correspondent.*

*The editor will be glad to publish any queries consonant with the character of the journal.*

## Nervous Diseases and Civilization.

IN Dr. Brinton's note on "Nervous Diseases in Low Races and Stages of Culture" in your issue of Dec. 16, he holds that those are in error who claim that "diseases of the nervous system have greatly increased with the development of civilization." My own very positive conviction, based upon a somewhat extended experience in the treatment of neurasthenic cases, is quite the reverse of this. In hospitals, in dispensaries, and among the very poor everywhere, a typical case of neurasthenia is difficult to find, but among the well-to-do and the intellectual, and especially among those in the professions and in the higher walks of business life who are in deadly earnest in the race for place and power, this peculiar impoverishment of nerve force that we term "neurasthenia" appears with alarming frequency.

Dr. Brinton says also that "civilization, so far from increasing this class of maladies, is one of the most efficient agents in reducing them in number and severity, especially when freed from religious excitement and competitive anxieties."

It should, however, be remembered that these "competitive anxieties," this worry of business and professional life, are the very conditions that civilization fosters and intensifies, and therefore civilization itself, with all that the term implies, with its railway, telegraph, telephone, and periodical press, exciting in ten thousand ways cerebral activity and worry, is the primary cause of this increase of nervousness among the higher classes in all countries. American nervousness is becoming almost a distinctive phrase, and it cannot be denied that in this country there are climatic conditions, and business and social environments, to the influence of which the nervous system is peculiarly susceptible, especially if complicated with evil habits, excesses, tobacco, alcohol, worry, and special excitements. In the older countries men plod along in the footsteps of their fathers, generation after generation, with little possibility, and therefore little thought, of entering a higher social grade. Here, on the contrary, no one is content to rest, with the possibility ever before him of stepping higher, and the race of life is all haste and unrest.

It has been aptly said that "the human body is a reservoir of force constantly escaping, constantly being renewed from the one centre of force—the sun." A perfectly healthy man has a large amount of nerve force in reserve, and this reserve is not often exhausted, even approximately, by the necessary toil and wear of mind and muscle. A nervously exhausted man has a small amount of nerve force in reserve, and this reserve is often and speedily exhausted.

The margin on which he can draw is narrow, may be almost wiped out under the calls of emotion and of mental and bodily labor, but, just as with the strong man, the force is renewed from without by food and repose, so, like the strong man, he can keep on thinking and worrying until he dies, which may be long after the death of the strong man. While nervousness makes life painful and irritating, it does not of necessity shorten life, nor does it always destroy its usefulness. "The Indian squaw, sitting in front of her wigwam, keeps almost all of her force in reserve. The slow and easy drudgery of the savage domestic life in the open air, unblest and uncursed by the exhausting sentiment of love, without reading or writing or calculating, without past or future, and only a dull present, never calls for the full quota of available nerve force; the larger part is always lying on its arms. The sensitive white woman—pre-eminently the American woman—with small inherited endowment of force; living indoors; torn and crossed by happy or unhappy love; subsisting on fiction, journals, receptions; waylaid at all hours by the cruellest of all robbers, worry and ambition, that seize the last unit of her force, can never hold a powerful reserve, but must live, and does live, in a physical sense, from hand to mouth, giving out quite as fast as she takes in,—much faster oftentimes,—and needing

longer periods of rest before and after any important campaign, and yet living as long as her Indian sister,—much longer it may be,—bearing age far better, and carrying the affections and the feelings of youth into the decline of life" (Beard's "Sexual Neurasthenia," edited by A. D. Rockwell, M.D., E. B. Treat, New York publisher).

While Americans are undoubtedly a particularly nervous people, it is well to remember that a large number who think themselves nervously exhausted altogether misconceive their real condition. There is a vanity of disease as well as of dress. Many would rather be thought nervous than bilious or gouty, and are pleased with a diagnosis which touches the nerves rather than the stomach, bowels, or liver. As a matter of fact, the nervous system in many of these cases is strong enough, and would give no trouble were it not poisoned by the abnormal products of digestion that enter the blood and circulate freely through every tissue of the body, and the practical and all-important point is, to differentiate between these two classes. The array of symptoms in each class of cases is so much alike that real impoverishment of nerve force due to overwork and worry is often confounded with a poisoned condition of the system, the result of indolent habits and an excess of food; and, instead of rest, quiet, and soothing draughts, there is need of mental and physical activity,—less not more food, depletion rather than repletion.

New York.

A. D. ROCKWELL, M.D.

## Observations on the Cretaceous at Gay Head.

SINCE my good friend Mr. David White has thought it worth while to give me a gentle reminder that I have been "a little confident and hasty in naming the various terranes at Gay Head," it seems becoming and necessary that I should offer a few short remarks in elucidation of my statements published in these columns Sept. 23, 1892, and somewhat more fully in the Transactions of the Maryland Academy of Sciences, 1892, pp. 204-212. The points of difference between Mr. White and myself are not so great as to cause questions of moment to arise from their statement. It seems evident to me that if we could visit Gay Head together for only a few hours he would not be able to resist the evidence of observation which results from clearing away the covering of the face of the bluffs. My statements were derived from an examination of the body of the hill behind the loose, or thrown, material spread upon its faces. In order to get at the beds *in place*, and which really constitute the promontory of Gay Head, it was necessary to dig away a few feet, or inches, of sand, clay, marl, and other slipped material from many parts of the face of the bluffs. This I did with the assistance of men from the neighborhood, and by this means it became possible for me to see that the axis of the whole system was a lead-colored clay, and that upon this eroded ridge of clay, which descends below lowest tide-level, all the other geological members rest in their usual nearly horizontal order of sequence, as in Maryland and New Jersey. Since my return home, I have compared this clay more thoroughly with samples from the Woodbridge and Amboy districts of New Jersey, and the conviction is pressed upon me that the two are identical, as far as regards elements and type of structure. Nevertheless, as I have not found fossils in this clay, it is not possible for me to decide as to its exact horizon. From its relative position in the column of strata, it should belong near the middle of the Alburpean formation, and therefore it should be a homologue of the dark member of the clay which occurs in the upper middle portion of the terranes at both Amboy and Woodbridge. The fact should not be forgotten that there are three distinct types of "Variegated Clay," and that these three belong to levels wide apart, and in three different formations, viz., the Potomac, the Alburpean, and the Raritan. All these become variegated by disturbance and saturation with iron-bearing waters, while in their unchanged condition they are either lead-colored or drab. The use of the term "Potomac" in the papers above cited was in deference to the usage of Messrs. McGee and Darton, but with the accumulated evidence now present to my mind it does not seem likely that the axial clay of Gay Head and Martha's Vineyard can be referred to the "Variegated Clay" of the Potomac formation as designated by Professor Fontaine and myself.