

ON SOME AILMENTS INCIDENTAL TO OLD AGE.

BY A FAMILY DOCTOR.

"Ah! age hath weary days,
And nights o' sleepless pain.
Thou gowden time o' youthfu' prime
Wilt never come again."



HE lines are pretty, but they really contain more of pathos than of fact. The man, too, who wrote them was not a physician, but Scotland's noblest bard, and he himself died at the early age of thirty-five. The knowledge, therefore, which he promulgates at random

in the first two lines, he could not have gained from study, and certainly not from experience.

A green or, as some call it, a "hearty" old age is what we all hope to live to, if we hope to live to be old at all. Whether we do so or not depends greatly upon how we use ourselves in the days of our youth and prime of manhood. But, contrary to what the poet says, I hold that it is not at all necessary for the aged to have, as a rule, "weary days and nights of sleepless pain." No, nor for the old to wish youth to come again. There is a land where youth blooms eternal; let us rather look forwards than backwards. There is no greater blessing that can be enjoyed in old age than that of contentment. In the case of the aged contentment really is a continual feast. It is a habit, therefore, that ought to be cultivated, if only for these two reasons: first, that fretfulness aggravates any ailment or chronic disease one may be suffering from—owing to the effect the mind has over the body; and, secondly, that a fretful man (or woman) is less likely to be loved by those around him, upon whom he is really dependent for the comforts of his daily life; for let him be as rich as Croesus, and able to command all the luxuries life can give, I think it is better to deserve than command, and better to be loved for one's self than toadied to for one's wealth.

As I have said in the beginning of my article, it is not at all necessary that age should always ache, and by proper precautions many ailments incidental to old people may be warded off, and nearly all that have been acquired may be mitigated if not entirely cured.

The disease known by medical men as senile bronchitis comes uppermost to my mind; it is little else than a bad cough, with copious expectoration of frothy phlegm and matter. It is usually easiest in summer and on fine sunshiny days, and worst in winter and dark gloomy weather. In other words, the secretion is diminished by life in the warmth of the sun, and increased by cold; diminished by the exhilaration of spirits caused by a fine day, and increased by the gloom of a dull one, and this latter is simply a proof of what I said just now about fretfulness always aggravating any present disorder. Take a case in point: an old man who, verging on eighty, has always been used to

an active out-of-door life, and, although suffering from severe senile bronchitis, still takes walks abroad every fine forenoon, is confined to the house on a rainy day; he will still take his exercise up and down the room, pausing oft to gaze longingly through the windows, and wondering, while he bemoans his hard fate, if it ever means to clear up. This very worry of mind then increases both cough and expectoration; he at once thinks he is "booked" for another world. "Bless my heart," he will say to his wife, "did ever you see the like? Did you ever in your born days hear such a cough? Ah! my dear, you won't have me long now."

But presently the sun "blinks" out. He brightens up—foregets his cough, and lays aside the cordial mixture, both objects of untiring interest to him all this forenoon.

"I'll take my stick," he says, "and run down and see how poor old so-and-so is to-day."

He goes out, and a couple of hours after he returns humming a tune, looking, aye, and feeling just twenty years younger, and his very first question to his wife is—

"Dinner ready yet, my dear?"

This is no imaginary sketch, and I could give you fifty, nay, a hundred like it.

On the other hand, do you not think with me that the following case is also instructive? Old John W. W.—, not so old either, having only just seen the allotted span, spends a small fortune over physic, and the whole of every day in his huge arm-chair, all too close to the fire. He coughs a deal, groans and grumbles a deal more, is always sure he won't live many hours, but generally manages to pull through somehow. Wouldn't have the window open an inch, though I know it would do him a yard of good; says he couldn't walk half a mile to save his life, though I know he could run the distance with the same end in view. His wife and daughter are kind to him, and dread him a little; his grandchildren fear him, and I should require the inducement of a bigger fee than he has ever yet paid me, to remain longer at a time in his bed-room than five minutes, so stuffy is it. Now, do you not think with me that he is not only guilty of making himself and every one around him wretched, but also of shortening his days? To speak kindly to the aged, to be ever patient with them, and to listen with some degree of attention to their whims are sacred duties that the medical practitioner has to perform, yet one cannot help at times being cross with a case like this.

Well, I fear that to many the symptoms of senile bronchitis, or the catarrh of old people, are too well known to need description; and those who so suffer

will do well to take good care of themselves, without over-doing it. The exercise should be moderate—that is, never carried to the verge of fatigue; at the same time it is no reason, on a fine day, why a patient should come to the house at once, when he feels a little tired; let him take heart of grace and rest for a short time in a sunny corner, out of the draught, then continue the walk. Bath-chairs are useful where the feebleness is very great, but care must be taken to wrap up well, and that the feet be not cold. The food should be the best procurable; if the teeth are bad the meat ought to be minced with one of those handy patent masticators. Time should be taken in eating, and a moderate allowance of good wine taken with the meal. Occasionally a short course of tonics may help to strengthen the system and increase the digestion. One of the best I know is made of compound tincture of bark one ounce, hemlock juice six drachms, ten ounces of camphor-water, and a few drops of peppermint; dose, an ounce three times a day.

Cod-liver oil does great good in these cases, when it can be borne; if it is not well borne, however, it should be discontinued after a good trial. A mixture of ammonia, spirits of chloroform, and squills, which any intelligent chemist can compound, will do good service. About fifteen drops of Friar's balsam in a cup of tea three times a day will give great relief in many cases, and those who are subject to this complaint should never want an inhaler in the house. Five drops of turpentine with about ten of laudanum may be added to every ounce of hot water in the inhaler, and deep long breaths be taken—once or twice a day is sufficient. When the chest feels very bad, warm turpentine should be rubbed over it, and an aperient pill taken.

Rheumatism is often associated with bronchitis, and until you have got rid of the former you will hardly succeed in relieving the latter. For this end avoid, for a time, wine, beer, spirits, and everything likely to produce acidity; wear thicker flannel, dusted inside with sulphur, and try a dose or two of colchicum at bedtime. On the other hand, to the aged rheumatic I could well recommend a course of the iodide of potassium with bark—such a prescription as this, for example:—Twenty grains of iodide of potassium, two drachms of the tincture of henbane, a drachm of bicarbonate of potash, and nine ounces of the tincture of yellow bark; the dose, two table-spoonfuls twice a day.

Elderly people are often subject to apoplexy, especially such as live too freely, or who are subject to

fits of rage and excitement. Such people should never overload the stomach, should sleep in a well-ventilated room, and bathe the head well with cold water every morning. If there is occasional giddiness it may arise from too much blood, and indicate purging and spare diet; but if the person himself is of spare habit the giddiness calls aloud for good food, an iron tonic, and draughts of milk fresh from the cow in all cases where the stomach can stand them. All that friends can do when an attack comes on is to send for the doctor speedily, put the patient in a well-ventilated room, in a reclining chair, with the head well back, apply cold water to the head, and place the legs in hot water with a handful of mustard in it.

The aged sometimes suffer a great deal from itching skin eruptions—what medical men generally term eczema; it is a most troublesome complaint, very trying, often keeping the patient awake at night, and tormenting him by day. There are but few signs to denote the disorder to an unpractised eye save a roughened reddish appearance, generally in patches, in some parts of the body, with itching. It is seldom accompanied by constitutional disturbance, and probably in the aged is in some measure due to poverty of blood, which accordingly suggests good but regular living, aided by the use of tonics and the application of some slightly stimulating liniment or ointment, such as that of the benzoated zinc or tar. There is a new ointment and oil coming now into use in London practice, and which I myself have found very serviceable in many disorders. It is called Chaulmoogra, and was first used in India.

Sleeplessness is a common concomitant of gathering years. I but mention it to warn my readers against the use of sleeping draughts, which do but act artificially and hardly ever fail to ultimately shorten life; pure air, very well-ventilated bed-room, exercise, and a light supper, with perhaps a glass of wine negus or even hot spirits with water and a pipe a short time before retiring, are the only safe narcotics in old age. Old people, by the way, do not need so much sleep as the younger folks, and if they retire early they ought to be up betimes.

I may add in conclusion that the aged, being very sensitive to cold, should wear warm though light clothing, with flannel next the skin—the clothes being loose, not tight; they should have their bed-rooms and bed-clothes well aired, and for the purposes of warmth and ventilation a little bit of fire in the bed-room. The bed-clothes should be soft and warm without being heavy, and the surroundings cheerful in appearance.

