

ON OVER-DOING THINGS.

BY A FAMILY DOCTOR.



HERE'S a midst in a mire," say the Scotch, and there is, as far as I know, hardly a nation on the face of the earth that does not cherish a saying much to the same effect. There is a mean we call golden, by which we should measure our actions, and which should be our guide in our journey through life, if we would steer clear, as far as possible, of the numerous ills incidental to our nature—in other words, if we would enjoy perfect health.

Now the questions which always occur to me when sitting down to write my monthly paper are—first, "Who are the people whom I wish to address?" and secondly, "Who are they who are likely to read my article?" The answer to the first question to-day is this:—

"I wish to address those who are still, to a great extent at all events, in the vigour of health."

And I must tell them at once, that the good that may accrue from a perusal of the present paper is more prospective than immediate.

But, alas! the answer to the second question is:—

"Probably the very people I wish to address are those whose ear I may not reach."

These may throw down the Magazine, or pass over it with some such remark as "Oh! that will keep till a more convenient season," so unwilling is any human being to take time by the forelock in order to prevent future illnesses. That prevention is better than cure, every one is perfectly willing to admit, but then the very work of prevention—that is, the living in obedience to the laws of health—seems so troublesome and irksome to many of us, that we much prefer going on living careless, reckless lives, and riding our hobbies to death, or until they get so worn and useless that they will no longer bear us.

The title I have chosen may frighten some of my readers: it is a strange one, not perhaps a very taking one; but it must be remembered that there is many a good nut within a ragged shell and rough, so I may have something good to say after all. And now, before proceeding further, let me try to correct an impression which I *may* have made on the minds of some by something I have said in a sentence above. I have in that sentence connected the words "living in obedience to the laws of health," with the adjectives "troublesome" and "irksome." But I do not mean to imply that living as one ought means constant and perpetual mortification of the flesh. Still, take the case of a man who at the ripe age of, say, forty, finds himself in somewhat failing health. All his life he has been living free and easy, never denying himself anything his inclinations pointed to as likely to contain an atom of pleasure. He has been guilty of excess in

many ways—he did not err through ignorance, however. Perhaps he had a blind faith in the strength of his own constitution—often a fatal mistake—perhaps he had a blind faith in the curative capabilities of the medical profession, thought they could work miracles, and said to himself, "I'll be happy and jolly as long as I can; when I do fall ill, I can call in Dr. So-and-so—he'll put me to rights very soon." But by-and-by it has dawned upon him that, after all, there *might* be a right way and a wrong way of living, that it was within the bounds of possibility that the virtuous might be just as happy as the vicious. The thought gaining strength, and prompted probably by the pleadings of an over-worked liver which groans in every lobe, he resolves to turn over a new leaf and live by rule. He does not do things by half-measures, he forsakes his old haunts, he forsakes his boon companions, in a word he "goes in" for living as one ought who values health. Having taken hold of the plough, he is too brave to look, far less turn back, and so in a few weeks he finds himself wonderfully improved in health. But then comes a period of reaction, and he is fain to cry out with Charles Lamb, "What have I gained by health? Intolerable dulness! What by early hours and moderate meals? A total blank!" It will be well now for this man if, in spite of feeling it troublesome and irksome, he keeps boldly on in the "midst of the mire;" if he returns to wallow in it like the pig that has been washed, his last state will be worse, by far, than his first. If he does keep on though, if he can maintain the courage of his convictions for only a short time, he will no longer find it irksome—living aright will have become a habit—oh, happy habit!

Let me now say a word or two about some of the things which people often over-do, to the detriment of their health and comfort.

Work, whether mental or physical, must be performed, if not by all, at all events by most; and the happiest man is he who has work to do, and is spared in health to enable him to perform it. But there is work and there is over-work, and on the other hand, there are two kinds of over-workers. The man who has to *toil* at his work to support himself and family I honour as a martyr, but, at the same time, pity as I would one suffering from an incurable disease. And the man who toils and over-works for the mere sake of the over-weening ambition of being richer than his neighbours, I despise as I do a gambler, and only pity in the same way as I pity a suicide. Work with a will by all means, work honestly and cheerfully—it is work that keeps the nation where it stands—but do not over-work, however much you may be paid for it; else a time may come when, old before your time, all the money in your coffers will not purchase you an hour's freedom from pain, nor bar by a minute the advance of the grim destroyer.

From work to exercise the transition is easy.

Work itself is sometimes exercise, it is sometimes mere play, but exercise to do any good should never partake of the nature of work. As soon as it does, weariness and fatigue step in, and for the moment the constitution is broken down, so to speak. Nor can it be restored to its former strength until a sufficiency of rest is taken. But, surely, exercise that not only craves for, but makes it imperative that rest shall follow, is worse than folly. Time has been thrown away and mischief done, therefore exercise of this kind is taken to no purpose.

As I have said before, exercise that is unpleasant is only deleterious; it is not true exercise; it is as different from true exercise as two hours on the treadmill are from two hours spent in climbing a mountain to gaze upon a summer's sunset. Probably the truest kind of exercise any one can take, is that obtainable from his favourite out-door game. What a noble, healthful pastime is our national game of cricket! and the same may be said of lawn-tennis, at which even ladies play. If there were more play-grounds in our country for adults of both sexes, there would be far less sickness and far less vice and crime.

But to over-do exercise is, as I said, great folly, and yet how often is this not done? I will only mention two kinds of exercise which are too frequently over-done, namely, walking and bicycling—and the latter especially. A bicycle is a very pretty present, and many times a most healthful one, to make to a young man; but if he is delicate and over-rides, it is easily seen that it may be positively injurious. The possession of such a machine is, it is true, an encouragement for him to get away out from the smoky city, in which he might find means of spending his money and holiday hours in ways not conducive to longevity; but if he makes too long journeys, the returning is sadly wearisome work, sadly fatiguing, and sadly provocative of refreshment stronger than the usual soda-and-milk. To say nothing of that, to say nothing even of the languor and fatigue felt on the day following too long a ride, I cannot believe that the practice so common among 'cyclists—whether *tri* or *bi*—of rushing hills, especially when in parties, is otherwise than most trying to the lungs, and therefore to the heart. Parties of 'cyclists go out together, and among them may be one or two athletes: it is not painful for the latter to rush the acclivities, but the weaker go to the wall. They feel a pride in keeping up with their leaders, a pride that unhappily may at some future day be productive of attenuated right hearts, or hypertrophy itself. Spurting on a bicycle or tricycle is worse than the spurting of rowing, for the simple reason that rowing men are usually put in training for the work they have before them.

On athleticism I will not give an opinion at present, as I may take up the subject on some future occasion, but moderate, pleasure-giving, regular open-air exercise is a wonderful health-restorer. Try it, ye who never did. By the way, if exercise is ever taken soon after a full meal it should be of the gentlest, say driving or sauntering, but nothing that entails a bending up and down of the body. "Why?" you ask.

Because, intelligent reader, it excites the stomach too much—irritates it, almost—causes it to throw out more gastric juice than is required—hence acidity, and perhaps an attack of indigestion.

I have no wish to rush the hill of intemperance in either eating or drinking, though I do sincerely believe that the former is to blame for a good deal of the latter. But if people only knew how much better they would be by partaking of less food, and how much greater a chance of long life it gave them, there would be far fewer gourmands and epicures in the world. By over-eating one renders himself less calm, and consequently less happy, more nervous, because more excitable, and therefore on the whole less able to conduct the business of life and gain what the world calls fortune. But there—I really am "rushing" the hill of intemperance. I'll dismount at once, and get on to easier ground.

There are few greater admirers of the *bath* than I myself am. I like almost every plan of bathing—with the exception, probably, of the Russian moudjik plan of getting in under the stove, and burying yourself in hot ashes. I have never tried that, but doubtless it has its advantages—to a moudjik. However, I must say there is such a thing as over-doing even the bath. Although I should wish that every one in this country were like myself—amphibious, so that if thrown into the water he would only ponder, while quietly swimming out again, where the nearest place was at which to procure dry clothes and a cup of coffee, still it must be remembered that men are not manatees. We could not live most of our time in the water, like those interesting aquatic mammals. People should neither bathe too often in the day, nor remain too long in the water at a time, else they will over-do it, they will have too much of a good thing. The after-effects of the bath should in all cases be studied, as well as the state of the general health. Moreover, the temperature of the water deserves consideration: it may suit some people to break the ice on their matutinal tub in winter, with a frozen sponge for a mallet, but a dash of warm water is to be recommended when the mercury crosses the line 32°. One bath in winter, and two in the heat of summer, I would call not over-doing the thing.

People may over-do, to their detriment, the most simple things. A cup of good tea or pure coffee is a simple thing, but over-indulgence in either is most hurtful. Probably I ought not to have classed tea and coffee together, because in my humble opinion there is much more harm done by drinking tea, than coffee with plenty of milk. At the same time, taken in moderation, and when free from adulteration, either is good. The upper classes in this country often over-do their amusements, and so do the middle classes when rich and idle. Too much amusement palls upon the adult mind, as too many sweets do on the stomach of a schoolboy; but a case of boyish dyspepsia may be summarily treated, not so a case of genuine *ennui*. This disease has not as yet found its way into our nosological tables, and yet it is as little a compound ailment as hundreds to be found therein.

It is a disease of utter nerve prostration, and deterioration of brain power, and even muscular energy. Any one suffering from it may be roused, it is true—so may a dying lion—but it is only momentarily in either case, relapse is sure to follow. *Ennuï*, if not cured, may lead either to insanity or death; the cure is usually difficult to accomplish, for it must be in every way radical; and, besides, the patient is generally too listless to care whether he is cured or not. As often as not, he seeks to cure himself by flying to stimulants. Then the end is certain.

I ought to say a word on the subject of clothing. This is one of the things that are greatly over-done. I do not refer to dress at all. I have nothing to do with fashion, except perhaps to condemn the habit of over-tight lacing, and wearing uncomfortable boots and shoes. But the one great fault people commit is too much wrapping up, in-doors and out, by night and by day. Colds are often taken by day, but very often the seed has been sown the night before. The body has been kept too warm, and so enervated; there may have been a fire in the room, the windows may have been closed, and too many bed-clothes worn.

Probably there are as many people die during the

year, in England, from the evil effects of over-clothing as from cold itself. Hot, stuffy bed-rooms largely increase the annual death-roll.

We should dress each day according to the weather and temperature. The idea of summer and winter clothing is very absurd, with the month of June so often a sneak, and July an arrant humbug. Never trust either of them farther than you can see them—they both want watching—and the worst of it is, the other ten months are not a whit better. Rough and all though it be, January is generally the most honest month of the twelve.

How many of us meet our deaths, I wonder, in a single year by over-doing physic? Not by overdoses, but by constantly flying to medicine with every trifling ailment! People may guess—although it is usually only a guess—the kind of medicament they need, but they err by taking it at a time when they would be infinitely better without it. A medicine-chest is a capital thing to have in a house, but in nine cases out of ten it is far better when the key can't be found.

One other thing which may be over-done is a man's subject. Lest, therefore, I commit that error, I close it.

GARDENING IN OCTOBER.



ONLY too rapidly are we once again parting with what little is left to us of the summer. The Londoner who has not been able to get away until now, tells us in a practical way that it is the last month for which "tourists' tickets" are issued, while those with whom we have more to do, and whose lot is cast amid shady lanes and more peaceful scenes, where—

"All the air a solemn stillness holds,
Save where the beetle wheels his droning flight,
And drowsy tinklings lull the distant folds,"

tell us that those shady lanes are daily becoming more musical with the crisp footsteps of the eddying leaves than with the joyous notes of the birds, who are just now only the auditors of a quaint duet between the "dignity and impudence" of their feathered tribe—cock-pheasant and cock-robin. It is unjust, however—not to say fruitless and senseless—to be always complaining of the weather and the seasons. No one can say that we have had no heat, no summer, in the months that are past. It is, we believe, now on record that on one occasion in the month of July last our thermometer in many places stood actually higher in the shade than that of Madras or Bombay! Our hay

for the most part was got in well, save where in some localities a drenching thunderstorm made havoc of it; but now it is October, and we are already beginning to think gravely of our last autumn and our last winter; nor have we forgotten, first of all, that singular phenomenon, about this time last year, of the early snow-storm which weighed all our trees down, with their foliage yet thick upon them; and when those who were walking immediately afterwards through any woods or forests in the south, heard ever and anon a sharp report like the crack of a rifle, caused by the sudden snapping asunder of the overlaid boughs and limbs of our giant oak. For it is upon the oak that the foliage remains the longest, and the oak, therefore, at that time suffered the most. But we have more to do in the garden than with the forest, and in this time of the year—the first month when we begin to carry out any extensive alterations in our shrubberies—we see to our sorrow that there are many blanks to fill up, as so many of our evergreens were killed outright last year by the intensity and severity of the winter. We would suggest, then, that when application has to be made to the florist for a few shrubs to replace those that are gone, the very hardiest kinds be asked for. We shall hope, however, that our evergreens, and some other trees and shrubs that appeared to be killed, were not too hastily removed in the spring or summer of the year that will soon be fading from us. Those who watched more narrowly the state to which they were reduced must have remarked that many shrubs which in the month of February or March we took for dead had got the principle of life in them in many places. The absence of rain, too,