

WHAT IT REALLY MEANS.

BY A FAMILY DOCTOR.



HOW am I afflicted thus? What can it all mean?"

He stood in my study in the fading light of a beautiful summer's evening—pale, weary, woe-begone, and his voice had that irritable peevish ring in it, which speaks of debility of the whole system. He had come miles to see me, and, as he candidly confessed, he expected to go back again as hopeless as he had arrived. I determined he should not do that, at all events, for I believe in giving hope whenever it can be honestly given. He had been telling me all about himself, his symptoms, his struggles to get well, his despondency, his almost despair, till only politeness forbade my asking him to stop. But I had got up from my chair at last, and walking to the casement window, looked out at the evening sunshine playing among the clustering syringas. The hint had the right effect. He ceased talking, and I turned round.

"Perhaps," I said, smiling, "you will now permit me to have a word or two?"

"Certainly, and I really pray you will forgive me for taking up so much of your time."

"Of course I do, but you are no worse than many other patients, who fog their physician, if I may call it so, by their verbiage, till he has almost to 'glamp' in the dark for the diagnostic symptoms. Now let me see—your first marked deviation from health consisted in a feeling that you were not so happy and well as you ought to be; there was loss of appetite, which you tried to stimulate; there were fits of despondency, which you did your best, not in the right way, to banish. There was disturbed sleep, silly dreams, which made you start and toss and tumble, and left their effects on your nervous system during the whole of the day, or the greater part of it. You felt weaker, you perspired too easily, you were 'soft,' and you thought the system wanted keeping up, and you tried to keep it up, again, not in a rational way. You thought you were looking paler, your skin washed-out, as it were, and your eyes far from clear. Then, acidity of the stomach made its appearance, amounting at times to positive heartburn. For speedy relief you took large doses of the bicarbonate of soda, and this soon became a habit. It neutralised the acidity, it is true, but you soon found that your digestive powers were getting weaker, and this isn't the worst, for you now suffer from sciatica, of a periodic and most painful character, commencing in the lower part of the left side of the spine, and extending down the leg. This pain is always unpleasantly present, but comes on in fits which cause you agony and make, as you say, the sweat stand in drops on your brow. Of course your nerves are all awry, and the whole blood-making process enfeebled, and next to *nil*."

I need not continue the history of this case, dear

reader, I but quote it for two reasons: first, to show how much pain and suffering may accrue from a very simple departure from hygienic rules. This gentleman was a clerk in a dockyard. He was hard-worked and had reasons of his own—which did him credit—for "hanging on," as he termed it, to his duty, as long as possible. But he *might* have taken exercise. Better he had done so at the dead of night than not at all. Secondly, I quote the case to show the evil effects of treating acidity as a disease instead of as a symptom, and dabbling with antacids. Nor is this the only case I could cite of painful neuralgia, sciatic, or otherwise, following the abuse of antacids, especially soda, and being cured by a more rational treatment of the digestive organs. Attention to diet, indeed, is of the first importance in the treatment of this terrible complaint, which, however, is at the worst amenable to reason.

Those who possess medicine-chests—and every *paterfamilias* ought to—should know a little about the therapeutic effects of the agents they contain, and they should certainly never be too familiar with the little mahogany case. The seldomer the key thereof is turned the better. "Oh! I know a remedy for that," you may say, and forthwith, for the relief of some trifling ailment, out comes some deadly drug. You relieve the trouble, perhaps, but after all what have you done?—merely dosed a symptom, and one which may return again and again. Better you had sought for the cause, left the cure to nature, and determined that if possible the prime cause should not have the same chance to work mischief again.

Hear what Nelligan says about antacids: "The action of medicines of this class is manifestly only temporary and palliative, as they do not correct that peculiar state of the digestive organs which causes the formation of acid; their protracted use, indeed, produces a tendency to acid secretion in the alimentary canal, and few individuals can bear the use, for any length of time, of free or carbonated alkalies, a state of general anæmia, usually attended with oxalic deposits, being caused thereby. When administered in full doses, or their use continued for some time, the fibrin of the blood becomes diminished in quantity."

So it must be evident to the lay reader that there is danger lurking even in such simple medicines as the bicarbonate of soda or potash.

As to soda, I must lift up my voice against the vile habit—it is nothing else—of putting a little of the carbonate in the tea. We swallow enough alkali in the shape of lime, in many parts of England, without adding more.

"The peculiar state of the digestive organs," referred to by Nelligan in the above quotation, "which causes the formation of acid," is just as often as not brought about by a badly-acting liver.

For want of, say, active exercise, want of the bath and rough skin-invigorating towel, owing to over-

eating, stimulating the system in any way whatever, and from many other causes, the liver gets out of order, is congested or what not, acidity follows, indigestion follows acidity, the food is spoiled in the system, the body is not nourished, and the sequence is debility, thin blood, and nervous exhaustion, with all sorts of sorrows and ailments, imaginary or real, bringing up the rear.

Well, that is the sequence. Are we to begin at the wrong end in our treatment?

"I'm horribly nervous," says a man to himself, "I'll take phosphorus, I know that is a good thing."

"Nonsense," I say, "look at the sequence given above, and you will find that debility has caused the nervousness and the shakiness you complain of."

"Well," my patient replies, "iron and quinine are fine things for the blood; I'll go in for these."

"Again glance at the sequence: the debility is caused by indigestion, and indigestion by acidity."

"Well," he says, "now we have it! I'll correct the acidity."

"No, no, again. Back we go further."

"The liver?"

"Ah! *now* we have it. *Now* there is hope for us." And this leads me to say a word or two about biliousness so called.

We are a fast-living people, our cookery is too refined in many cases, hence the craving for stimulants, wine, beer, spirits or tea, which retard digestion and, therefore, in one way may be said to counteract the evils brought on by the over-studiousness of the French cook. But how often is the cure a thousand times worse than the disease!

Well, as a rule, the amount of food taken into the system is out of all proportion to the amount of bodily exercise taken. Hence the miseries of five out of every ten cases of those who live at home at ease.

It is the middle-aged, those between forty and fifty-five, who are most likely to suffer from biliousness from errors in diet. The errors are those of kind and quantity; I shall mention presently what should be avoided in diet.

The symptoms of biliousness are unhappily but too well known. They differ in different individuals to some extent, however. A bilious man is seldom a breakfast-eater. Too frequently, alas! he has an excellent appetite for liquids, but none for solids of a morning. His tongue will hardly bear inspection at any time; if it is not white and furred, it is rough at all events. The digestive system is wholly out of order; diarrhoea, or constipation, may be a symptom, or the two may alternate. There are very often hæmorrhoids, or loss of blood even.

There may be giddiness, and often headache, and acidity or flatulence, and tenderness at the pit of the stomach. The pain felt in the right shoulder would indicate an extra bad case, but apart from this, there are aching pains and even stiffness in the limbs, with more or less of cramps in the limb muscles, or burning in the palms of the hands, with hot perspiring feet.

There may be drowsiness and torpor by day, and sleeplessness at night, and all sorts and conditions of mind, especially irritability: fits of bad temper that come on suddenly and go off again, and that none are so thoroughly grieved at as the poor patient himself.

Bilious people generally fly for relief to aperient pills, and there is no doubt that they often afford temporary relief by relieving the over-gorged liver. This really is antiphlogistic treatment, but it assuredly is not radical. When a fish-pond overflows its banks, we may let off a portion of the water, but after this we ought, methinks, to find our way to the other end of the pool and lessen the inflow.

Well, just a word about treatment. First and foremost, then, in sudden bilious attacks, that are often accompanied by great prostration, and by urgent vomiting, it is best to send for a medical man. Such attacks generally come on in the morning, at the time the body is most weak. I do not think upon the whole I should be justified in suggesting medicinal remedies in this paper, for the simple reason that cases differ so. The mineral acids and bitter vegetable tonics often do good. So does nux vomica, and aconite. Then there is dandelion, and chloride of ammonium, and alkalies. But I can only generalise. A blue pill and colocynth, followed next day by a glass of Pullna water, will ward off many an attack, if the patient goes in for preventive measures afterwards, and follows a course of rational living. The podophyllin pill, from a quarter to half a grain of the extract, in three to five of extract of hyoscyamus, may do as well as the blue pill, if not better.

Soda-water or lithia-water and milk should be drunk next day, and very little solid food taken, though beef-tea mixed with arrowroot will be found very nourishing; or a raw egg beaten up in milk.

Little good will accrue from treating a case like this, however, if, when he is once more well, the patient returns to his old non-hygienic habits of life.

"What am I to do then?" may be asked. I will tell you what you are not to do. You are not to over-eat; you are not to use sugar or fat to any extent, potatoes, puddings, pastry, or cheese. You are not to touch alcohol. You are not to sit in over-heated rooms. You are neither to over-work nor over-worry yourself. And you are not to shirk the morning tub, nor plenty of exercise.

What are you to do for the acidity? Abstemiousness, and regulation of diet and habits, will entirely banish it, and you will have the pleasure of knowing that its absence is a sign of rejuvenation of the liver.

If you but try a week of the treatment I suggest, I feel convinced, you will once more feel a pleasure in life, and an interest in all your surroundings.

But acidity often leads to rheumatism, and on this subject I hope to have more to say another day. I shall be quite satisfied with my present paper if it puts a few of my readers on the right road to health, and that can only be got at by seeking for and removing first causes instead of treating symptoms.

