

## ON GETTING UP ONE'S STRENGTH AFTER ILLNESS.

BY A FAMILY DOCTOR.



THE following is the story of a terrible illness and a well-managed convalescence therefrom, related to me recently by a naval medical officer. It was told in the course of an evening's conversation, and I may as well give it in his own words:—

“We were doing duty on the East Coast of Africa, against the Arab slavers. This shore is not so fatal to Europeans as the

West Coast. It has fewer swamps and fewer dark deep forests, so malaria and fogs, on which the Angel of Death loves to float, are rare. But the work was hard. We would be away in open boats for weeks, sleeping in our clothes, scant of provisions, and destitute of decent water, which was often so thick that a sixpence could scarce sink in it. We had now and then cases of jungle fever, and I—the only surgeon of the ship—got ‘down to it’ at last. I don’t think I missed medical treatment very much. I was too low to treat myself, but I had the kindest of messmates, and a jewel of a captain. Their kindness well-nigh led to my death. In this way: down below the heat was stifling, what with the engine fires and the want of proper ventilation. The air was not over-pure either, for cockroaches swarmed in millions. So my messmates rigged for me on deck a hammock, but they hung it in the draught of a sail. That draught was pleasant at first, but it soon began to chill me, and pains in the arms and legs were the consequence.

“The fever left me, but the pains grew worse and worse, and by the time we reached Bombay I was in a miserable plight indeed. There was nothing for it but to send all my sick to the hospital (an army one), and go myself to sick quarters offered me by an Indian surgeon. If the kindness of my messmates had led up to the rheumatic fever, from which I now suffered agony and horror indescribable, the kindness of this doctor pulled me through, added to that of a native servant. I never wanted for anything by day or by night, and no mother could have nursed her sick child more skilfully and affectionately than that Mahratia man nursed me: a proof, I think, that nursing in sickness is half the battle.

“Then began the period of convalescence, the first few hours out of bed, the languor, the weariness, the deep refreshing sleep that followed; the daily bath, so painful at first, but gradually becoming refreshing and invigorating; the first-days out of doors, borne along in a palanquin; the dropping off to sleep therein. Then step by step as I grew better, and hope came into my heart, my happiness grew. Everything in this land of sunshine was bright and new, and, to my thinking,

joyous. It was as though I had been born again, and born in paradise. No, I shall never forget that convalescence. What a sweet and happy reward it was for all my previous sufferings!”

Well, reader, you see it was care and skill and nursing in convalescence that pulled my friend through. No dangerous after-effects presented themselves, and though getting on for fifty years of age, he is as hardy to-day as an Arab.

He attributes his safe convalescence in part to the fact that he had neither the shadow of a care while ill, nor the ghost of a worry, and from this the sick-nurse may learn a lesson, for care is a sad depressant; it lowers the vital powers, while worry fevers brain and blood.

Knowing that many illnesses are apt to relapse, and others to be speedily followed by dangerous complications, I must earnestly warn those who have charge of the sick against the folly of believing that all trouble is at an end when health *begins* to return. Rather should they redouble their efforts as guides and nurses, for the ship they are steering is still among the breakers, albeit the day may be dawning, and there is many a hidden rock on which she still may strike, and in her weakened condition strike only to fall back and founder.

The convalescence from an attack of acute rheumatism should be most carefully conducted. The ailment is often hereditary, but it may be accidental, and the diathesis may be acquired. Granting that the heart itself has escaped injury during the acute attack, a chronic form of rheumatism not uncommonly follows, and is often difficult to get rid of. The least irregularity of the system, indigestion, errors in diet, or exposure to damp and cold, to say nothing of fatigue, may induce the painful and all too well known symptoms.

From the very first day of getting up, therefore, the utmost care of the patient is imperative. The skin must be kept in good action by the daily tepid bath and friction, and warm under-clothing should be worn. Flannel is best, and it must be worn continuously, and changed twice a week. However strong a person may have been, or may have thought himself, previous to an attack of acute rheumatism, he must ever after remember that he is vulnerable, and liable to the complaint in its chronic if not its acute form.

The bed should not be a too soft one, and it is best to sleep in woollen sheets, and even to wear a flannel night-dress.

As to medicine in the convalescence from rheumatism, the doctor had better be consulted; but if the complaint becomes chronic, great benefit may be expected from an iodide of potassium mixture. There are many other remedies recommended, but I shall only mention one more, namely, lime-juice. This is well worth a trial. It should be taken to the extent

of about two table-spoonfuls six or even eight times a day, in water sweetened and flavoured with orange syrup. The system should be kept open, though not relaxed.

The local application of flowers of sulphur often does good, and more especially if it be taken internally in twenty-grain doses three times a day.

Hot baths, the Turkish bath, and morning tub also do good, by keeping the skin pliant, and enabling it to throw off the acid from the blood.

The diet should receive particular attention. Nothing that is difficult of digestion or in the least likely to disagree should be taken.

The convalescence from fever should be especially watched. When all danger of infection is at an end—the patient, we must suppose, has been isolated—the rooms he has occupied must be most carefully cleaned, scrubbed, and disinfected. Not only should hot water and soap be used in washing wood-work, floors, &c., but carbolic acid must be added to the last water. Of course clothing and bedding should all be washed, and mattresses taken to pieces and thoroughly teased and fumigated. Then, to finish up withal, brimstone should be burned in the room, the doors and windows being closed and the key-hole stuffed.

It would be well for those who have the care of any one during the state of convalescence from severe illness, to treat their patient as if he were a nervous and growing youth. The weakened tissues of both nervous and muscular matter are undergoing repair, and this is analogous to growth. In the ordinary state of health a man does not require food to build up his frame, so to speak, but simply to repair the waste that is constantly taking place in work, or even in thought. After sickness it is different.

The appetite is sometimes almost voracious, but it should be remembered that the slightest over-indulgence is most dangerous. Little and often must be the rule as regards eating, and while the dishes are tempting and appetising, they should be most nutritious, and at the same time easy of digestion. Frequent changes should be made, too. At first solid foods will be injudicious, but gradually as the health and strength return they should be resorted to, and will be found far more staying and invigorating than spoon foods. The hours for meals should be regular. I need hardly add that excessive indulgence in stimulants may induce irreparable mischief.

The doctor must also prescribe the tonic. It should not be forgotten that tonics taken without judgment may do much harm. The safest are quinine and iron, in small doses, and cod-liver oil.

The patient must be safeguarded from cold and damp, but this does not mean that he is to be kept in the house; quite the reverse, and the more hours spent out of doors in the sunshine, the more speedy and perfect will his return to health be; only he is to wear warm under-clothing, and warm but not heavy over-clothing as well.

A patient during convalescence may sometimes be peevish and discontented. This is by no means a good sign, and every care should be taken to keep his mind contented and easy. Amusement greatly tends to hasten the coming of health. Out-door exercise should be commenced early, but it must be of the most gentle kind at first—riding in a bath-chair or pony-carriage, for example, or little walks on level ground—sauntering in fact.

If he can afford it, he ought to seek for change of climate. The place chosen should not be of an excitingly-bracing character, and if by the seaside so much the better. Of course he will not start until able to bear the journey, or a relapse might be the consequence. A really good quiet hotel is often better than a lodging-house. It must be an hotel, however, where the cooking is as near to perfection as can be expected.

Next in importance to nutritious and well-cooked food is sleep. Sleep is certainly Nature's sweet restorer to the convalescent. He ought to have long hours, and it will be well if supper is not taken within two hours of retiring.

A nap on the sofa or easy-chair after dinner will also be most refreshing. The exercise taken in the open air will usually be found to be the best narcotic; at any rate, he is not to resort to the use of sleep-producers, which he would only do at the greatest risk.

The sea-bath is a very great restorative, and there are many ways of using it. At first, and while the patient is still far from strong, the warm sea-water bath about three hours after breakfast will be best. At most seaside places there are establishments where these can be had. If not, they may be taken in the bed-room.

The convalescent should not bathe in the sea before breakfast, and when he is strong enough to take the invigorating dip, he should stop but a very short time in the water, and rub himself thoroughly dry with rough towels when he comes out; then dress slowly and go home. If drowsiness supervenes, let him take a nap by all means on his return. By degrees, as strength is acquired, the usual occupations of life may once more be taken up, and this, so far from being injurious to the convalescent, will in reality complete his cure.

