

## FIRST DEPARTURES FROM HEALTH.

BY A FAMILY DOCTOR.



NLY a little oozing, master. It won't affect the mill at all."

"I wasn't thinking about the mill just then," said Mr. Black with an uneasy look down the valley.

It was a very pretty and smiling scene that was spread out before him, too, on this balmy morning in early summer. A strath, or glen, about ten miles long from where the men stood, and from half a mile to three miles across; it went widening away to the sea, from which, however, it was protected by a barrier of grassy sand-dunes; and over this the ocean could be seen to-day, a long line of brilliant blue. The bottom of the strath was as level as a tennis-lawn; a silver thread of a river trailed through it, winding here and winding there, making all kinds of excuses for not flowing straight ahead and being done with it, as if loth to leave such cosy quarters.

There were villages and hamlets by the score in the valley, and a tall chimney or two besides, towering as high as the church-steeple; and there were fields with prettily-coloured kine wading knee-deep in buttercups and daisies; and a perfect cloudland of trees, chiefly elms, ashes, and limes, with here and there a poplar to give it an air of picturesqueness.

It was evident to all that in the far-distant past the sea had been all over here. The lay of the land would have told you that; besides, the soil was a sandy one, and a very thirsty one; digging wells did not pay, and the strip of river was quite unequal to the task of supplying the good people with water and keeping the mills going. But nature suggested a remedy, for at the head of the strath the hills met, forming almost a natural reservoir; at all events it only needed a huge wall or dam to make it complete; and it was near this place that Mr. Black, miller and reservoir superintendent, with his man John, was standing to-day.

The mill was not far off; just down there among the rocks and hazels, a quaint old brick building, its brown walls dashed here and there with the greys and greens of age, and its broad dark wheel only held together, one might say, by water-weeds and the incrustations.

"No, John; it isn't the mill so much; but supposing the racervire was to burst, supposing he gave way all of a suddint like, see what a thing that'd be."

"Some folks will croak," said John.

"Eh? What?" cried the miller, turning almost fiercely on his man.

"I wasn't alloodin' to you at all, sir, but to Tom Bryant and Jim Steeve, and the likes o' they. Why, they be always a-croakin'. That same little hole or crack, as you might call it, where the water is a-spoutin' from now—why, it opens and closes again often enough; and, as I tells Jim, 'Jim,' I says, 'ye

needn't croak; if the racervire was to have busted, it would have busted long ago."

No more was said about the matter then. The summer went on, and went past; only now and then the crack spurted ominously when the water was up. Then autumn came, and one night the rain began to come down in torrents, and the wind blew strong from the east; but still no one in the valley suspected or dreamt of anything very dreadful. But soon after midnight there were shouts and screams rising high over the roaring of the wind, rising high over something far more terrible, for the reservoir had burst at last, and the waters were tearing and surging around the houses. It would require a graphic pen indeed to describe the scenes that took place that night during the darkness, the storm, and the flood. Nor need I tell of the houses that collapsed, or the many lives that were lost, for the calamity is to some degree historical; but people far and near, when they heard of it, shook their heads and said: "Well, it is a sad and sorrowful affair; but we cannot forget that the poor people had many a warning that they never heeded."

Hydrostatic force is a fearful power. Given a tiny crack or opening, like that I have mentioned above, in a reservoir, and you have the thin end of the strongest imaginable wedge inserted—a wedge that at any moment may be slowly but surely driven home, till every barrier gives way before it.

Now I am not going to be like Jim Steeve of my story, I do not intend to "croak," in this paper, but I would like to ask my readers this simple question: Do you think we are always right in looking upon warnings as mere trifles where our health is concerned?

These warnings may appear very insignificant, very trifling; but the first departures from health in those among us who have to struggle against time, in our trades and professions, are often very deceiving. We can hardly believe that the thin end of the wedge has been inserted till the crash comes. And yet a stitch in time would nearly always save, not nine or ninety, but the whole hundred—that is, life itself.

Yet when there is anything the matter with us which we do not understand—anything unusual, I mean—if it interferes in the slightest degree with our business in life, we simply try to forget it. If we say anything about it to a companion, the reply is usually somewhat as follows:—

"Caught a cold, I suppose."

"You're nervous, old man."

"Liver out of order, my boy; I know the feeling precisely. Take a pill, and knock off something."

And we are just as ready then, as a rule, to think light of the matter as he is, and console ourselves by such hackneyed phrases as—

"I've got a constitution like a horse; if I hadn't, I should have been dead long ago."

But stay, my friend; I say nobody is suggesting the probability of death at present. Apart from the fact that you consider all men mortal but yourself, there is still the chance that a warning unheeded may end in disaster—the disaster of ill-health. It may be the vanguard of that most insidious of all ailments—dyspepsia, in whose train comes a regiment of ills laden with misery untold.

The wise man, therefore, will take time by the forelock, and, not forgetting that he is mortal, see at once to the repair of his constitution on the very first signs of his departing, or deviating, from the paths of health. How is he to do this? By taking medicine? Medicine alone will often afford but temporary relief; and each time the trouble, whatever it may be, returns, it will return reinforced, and lay stronger and stronger siege to the citadel of life.

As I have mentioned dyspepsia—or, in plain English, indigestion—I may just as well say at once that this complaint is one of the very earliest symptoms of departure from health.

Its advent is usually very slow, but none the less sure; and as it depends on so many different causes, it is correspondingly difficult to get rid of. The patient at first treats himself; his stomach, he believes, is a little out of order, and an aperient or anti-bilious pill or two will soon set that to rights. Very likely he does feel relief for a time, though his trouble returns; and in his next attempt at self-cure he probably thinks he needs setting up. He is below par, he needs an extra glass or two of generous wine with his meals, and tonics. In nine cases out of ten this plan of mending matters is a mistake, for the stimulant will not improve the liver, which is already over-worked, and the tonics induce constipation. For this new symptom more aperients are taken, and so matters go from bad to worse; and, do what he will, the sufferer finds it impossible to “drive the disease out of his system,” as it is called. Well, he goes to a doctor at last with as jaunty an air as he can assume; he only “wants a little medicine,” he says, “to put him straight.” Oh, that blind faith in physic!

He almost feels ungrateful to the doctor because he asks him questions that show he wants to probe the disease to the root, and find out the cause; for everything lies in that. The doctor will, of course, administer medicine, but he will also be careful to tell his patient what to do, and what to take and avoid.

If, when symptoms of indigestion come on, we would at once commence to live by rule for a time, it is unlikely we should require either to go to a doctor or to take medicine. For remember this, Nature is very kind, and the removal of the cause for departure from health will usually enable her to get to rights again without further interference.

I am not writing an essay on dyspepsia, so need not give its symptoms; but I warn the reader against the abuse of aperients, tonics, and vinous stimulants as cures. Plain diet must be taken, and not too much of that; and anything that is known to disagree must be carefully avoided. It may be well to give up even tea and coffee for a time, using cocatina instead. Im-

provement is sure to follow; but, mark me, do not be misled by this improvement, and jump to the conclusion that you are well, and that it was the tea or the coffee that was to blame for your trouble. The giving up of any stimulant—of course tea and coffee *are* stimulants—nearly always results in temporary improvement; and this latter may be made permanent by careful regulation in diet. Above all, do not take much fluid of any kind, either with meals or at any other time. A cupful of *hot* water, with a squeeze of lemon and a small tea-spoonful of glycerine, drank about ten minutes before breakfast, may do much good; and, at all events, it is harmless.

A cold is a departure from health, and should really be attended to at once. Do *not* let it cure itself. Get rid of it soon. Do not feed it, though, but starve it. One cold after another nearly always ends in thickening of the mucous membrane of the bronchial tubes, and before you are aware of it you become the victim of winter cough.

The morning tub (cold, I mean) is a very sure preventive of colds. Never over-clothe nor over-heat yourself. The neck should be kept cool. Keep away from fires in-doors if you are subject to colds.

Cough, if not the result of simple laryngeal or bronchial catarrh, may mean a very serious departure from health; and the sooner one sees a doctor in such a case the better. Do not be afraid to consult him. Remember, it is only those that delay who suffer in the end. I do not advise you to rush away to a physician with every trifling ailment, but—it is better to be sure than sorry.

Many people would benefit much by taking cod-liver oil for a month or six weeks about the changes of the season. Probably the diet would have to be lowered a little, and an occasional mild aperient taken.

Getting thin is another serious departure from health. One generally does lose weight in winter, and regain it in summer; but a slow and steady decrease in weight calls aloud for medical interference.

Want of sleep and restless nights are symptoms which cannot be overlooked. The cause must be found and removed. The trouble may certainly arise from over-work and worry combined, but in most cases the stomach and digestive system are the roots of the evil.

Nervous people worry most, but they also work most. Well, the question one is inclined to ask himself when he feels something wrong with his health is: “Am I over-working myself?” I would answer thus: If you really enjoy working, it cannot injure you very much; but, on the other hand, if it is force-work, and you find little pleasure in it, then it will tell on your constitution.

But many people cannot afford rest. Well, but wonders can be done by taking exercise; by breathing only fresh air night and day, in-doors and out; and by careful regulation of the diet. In conclusion, let me entreat of you, as you value your happiness, not to neglect first departures from health. The story of the reservoir has really a moral for every one of us.