

YOUR "LITTLE AILMENT."

BY A FAMILY DOCTOR.



HERE is one particular proverb which in these papers I believe I have made use of more than once; but, as a good hint cannot be too often given, here it is again: "*In medio tutissimus ibis.*" The words might be paraphrased or freely translated by another proverb which brings us nearer home: "Ca' canny an' ca' lang," *i.e.*, "Drive with caution and you may expect to drive a long time." Scotland being a very hilly country, it is pretty certain that if every old farmer were to drive his old

mare at a gallop, soon there would be no old mares left, nor old farmers either. So in "the land o' cakes and brither Scots," you frequently hear that pithy wee morsel of advice given, "Ca' canny."

The gudewife is constantly giving it to her gudeman, the mother to her son. Perhaps the son is only going to drive to the neighbouring market town, but "Ca' canny, laddie," is the caution that comes from the maternal lips as he mounts the dog-cart. Perhaps he is going to college, or is about to leave auld Scotland to push his fortune in foreign climes; in either case, almost the last words he hears from his mother are, "Ca' canny," and his father repeats them. "Aye, Robbie, man, mind what your mither says: 'Ca' canny, and ye'll ne'er gang wrang; ca' canny, and ye'll ca' lang.'"

I greatly fear that a very large majority of us drive too fast nowadays, simply because our neighbours do so, and we want to get ahead of them, and beat them in the race of life. Perhaps lawless necessity compels us to keep up a good pace, and when we break down, or come to grief, it is more our misfortune than our fault. But necessity compels no one to drive recklessly, and those who do so, even if they do not fall by the way, come to the end of their tether before they know where they are; for time does seem very short when it can only be measured by retrospection. Besides, what do the luckiest of men gain by the acquirement of wealth, which perhaps they have paid for with years of precious life and health? They certainly do not gain the power of enjoying happiness and calm in the afternoon of their earthly existence. Too often, indeed, there is no afternoon, only a brief tropical twilight, succeeding to the fierce fever-heat of mid-day, then—night.

Life at high pressure, or living on the wear and tear system, is in many respects analogous to living under the constant excitement of what are called stimulant narcotics. Both systems are whips to time. Under the influence of either, days fly past like hours, weeks are gone and we wonder where they are, birthdays come and go and we will not believe we can possibly

be getting old. But as after the use of stimulant narcotics, so after life at high pressure a reaction comes, and this reaction is depressive; the fact, therefore, that men of business often live but a short time subsequent to their retirement, is easily accounted for.

But apart altogether from the work and wear of busy life—which, by the way, may be greatly neutralised by living temperately and hygienically, and taking recreation and a complete holiday whenever needed—there are a host of minor ailments that tend to debilitate the frame, and pave the way for troubles of a far graver character.

We must not be constantly doctoring ourselves—that were indeed foolish. Nature knows a deal more about our internal economy than we can ever do, however wise we may be; and sometimes in attempting to dictate to her, our meddling puts everything wrong, and throws the anatomical and physiological machine completely out of gear.

Let me say a few words about some of the most common of these "little" complaints. I use the word "little" because it is so commonly applied to the ailments to be considered. It ought not to be forgotten, however, that a little spark may kindle a great and grave fire, and that the thin end of a wedge is its business end.

"I've just caught a little cold," some one tells me; "but," he adds, "that will soon be all right; I have a marvellous constitution, and a cold does not last long on me."

It is really surprising, the number of men one meets every day who are possessed of "marvellous constitutions," and who pride themselves on their strength of system and recuperative powers. If you question some of these, however, you will be almost sure to elicit the fact that they do get or catch a little cold every spring regularly, and though they seem to throw it off easily, it leaves them a trifle weak and pale for days. The worst of it is that the mucous membranes get thickened after a time, and year after year they become more and more subject to these little colds, which finally are entitled to the name of "winter cough," and very likely end in chronic bronchitis, debility, and a break-up.

We must guard against these little colds. But if we are to do so, we should, first and foremost, know something about the causes that induce them. Unhappily these are only too numerous. On the other hand, they nearly always attack one when the system for the time being is below par. This is a truth which points to the means of avoiding them.

Again, spring is the time they are most likely to occur, so one should be prepared to face the dangers of this inclement season. Light, warm under-clothing out-doors and in should be worn; and when one has occasion to walk out while a cold high wind is blowing, he or she ought invariably to wear a light non-waterproof ulster, *and button it*. A frosty, sunny day,

without any wind, hardly calls for such precaution, as the natural warmth of the body is not stolen from it. It is the wind that robs one of heat, and blows it into space as soon as generated. The body is consequently chilled, the blood may be driven inwards, causing slight congestion of, and increased mucous flow from the lining membrane of the lungs, ending in the irritation of that surface and consequent cough; or there may be simply sluggishness of the whole system. This last state is often sought to be remedied by inducing too quick a reaction. Nothing could be more unwise. We should no more rush into a hot room and breathe hot air, or drink hot drinks, when chilled by exposure to cold or wet, than we should run and hold frost-bitten fingers to the fire. Reaction after a chill cannot be too gradually induced, if we would avoid colds. To give a simple illustration: Take a flower from the garden, say a small plant of *myosotis*, that has been exposed to hard frost for a few nights, and place it in a hothouse; do you think it will live? No; if but left to recover in the open ground, it really is but little worse.

There is one very common cause of "colds," which I have never yet seen noticed, even by my own profession, namely, toxæmia, or blood poisoning by natural secretions which have not been removed from the blood. Some of the great organs, say the liver or kidneys, are out of order, and nature endeavours to expel the poison through other channels, there is a greater flow of mucus in the lungs, and consequently a tickling cough, and the sufferer puts it down to cold or chill. If now he attempts to cure his so-called cold by coddling himself, and taking hot stimulating drinks, he but increases the evil. Cases of this sort are often completely cured by an anti-bilious pill at night, followed by a glass or two of Friedrichshal water before breakfast. Indeed, almost all colds are benefited by a gentle opening of the system.

"I'm a little bilious to-day." The man with the marvellous constitution will often tell you that. His eyes are muddy, his tongue is rough and perhaps furred, his appetite poor, he has a creepy-creepy feeling all over him; he thinks it is much colder to-day than it was yesterday, and that this climate is a wretched one, anyhow, and life hardly worth having. But—he will go "for a spin," he says, and work it off. As often as not it would have been much better to have kept at home and done nothing in the garden. The garden is a capital place to do nothing in, one can spend a whole forenoon in it, among the flower-beds, with nothing heavier in his hand than a tiny long-handled rake. Well, he is almost sure to be hungry before luncheon-time, and if he is most temperate then, and at the dinner-hour, finishing up the day with a bottle of Vichy water and a very mild vegetable aperient, or with half a lemon squeezed into a glass of water, the other half taken before breakfast, very likely his biliousness will be nipped in the bud. He must be careful with his diet afterwards.

The custom of giving a "spurt" to liver or circulation, the day after some little excess, is a foolish one. Ten times better take the course I have recommended

in a former paper, entitled "A Banian Day." The "spurt" is nearly always given by taking cordials, strong tea, or vinous stimulants.

"I have a bit of a headache this morning." It is Mr. Marvellous Constitution that is speaking again. And this bit of a headache also arises from some previous excitement and consequent depression. Well, Mr. M. C. spurts this off also. His experience teaches him that it can be so dispelled. And I am not going to deny that it can, for this reason: it is the circulatory system that is for the moment at fault. It is weak, depressed, and languid, the veins' resiliency is for the time being lost to some extent, and the head is slightly congested from the blood's stagnancy. "Stir up the heart by a stimulant," that is popular treatment; the blood is forced through the brain and the quondam sufferer thinks he is all right now, and that he has done well. The fact is, he has erred on the side of quick reaction, and done more harm than good. Fresh air, a whole forenoon full of it, and that alone is the cure for this kind of headache, but I may add abstinence from food, except what will suffice to support life. Sleep and nerve-calm will follow this treatment, but flies before the spurting system.

"My system has been somewhat bound of late." Still another lament. Well, I fully discussed this in a recent article, only one thing I forgot to say, namely, that it has been the fashion of late years for many medical men to decry the use of even vegetable pills, while advising the eating of vegetables themselves. The abuse of either, in my opinion, is to be discountenanced; at the same time, no greater harm can accrue from a dose of *cascara sagrada*, for instance, than from an extra plate of sea-kale or Brussels sprouts; perhaps not so much; and here let me give a word of warning which will, if heeded, prevent many an attack of painful illness. *Never eat unripe vegetables; they are as poisonous as unripe fruit.* Cabbage, kale, and all vegetables called "green meat," ought to be ripe, and especially should potatoes. New potatoes have many deaths to account for. Those tee-totums of early potatoes look nice, and taste nice, but beware of them, or you may suffer as much as you once did when a boy, after eating a pint or two of green gooseberries.

"My digestion is a somewhat slow one," says another man with a marvellous constitution, "so I go in occasionally for a course of pepsin and peptonic medicines generally." "Meddling again with Mother Nature," I reply; "can't you let the dame alone? You may manage to peptonise the food you have swallowed; you may—mind, I only say 'may'—manage to reduce the chyle to chyme, but how are you going to enlarge your absorbent system or your thoracic duct? It is by what you digest, not by what passes into the stomach, that the blood benefits. Be reasonable, be rational, and learn to let well alone."

I may say, in conclusion, that there is one comfort people with slow digestions may take to themselves, namely, the thought that they will be far more cheerful and light by living abstemiously than the reverse. Digestion is often choked, but seldom, if ever, starved.