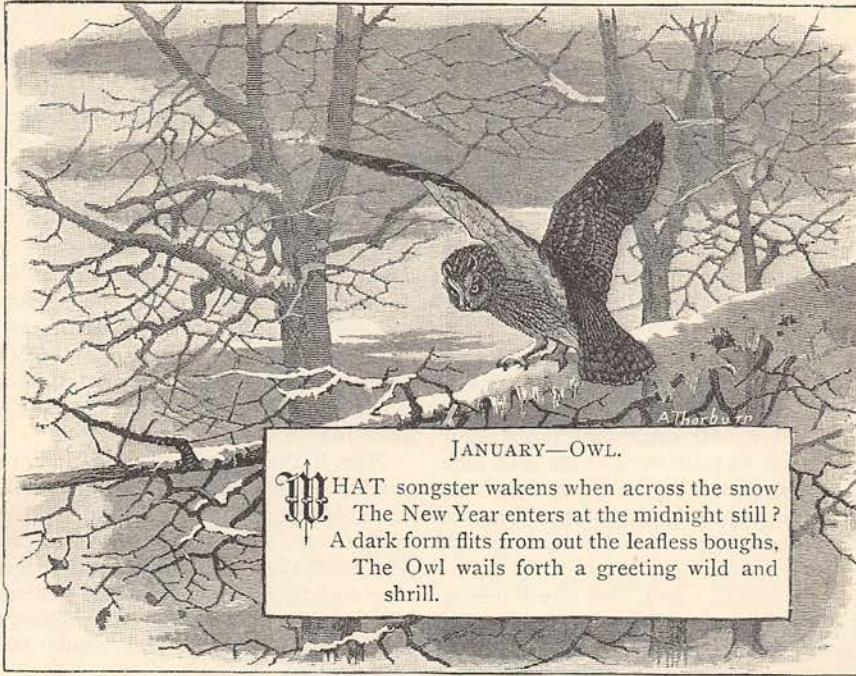


BIRDS OF THE MONTHS.



JANUARY—OWL.

WHAT songster wakens when across the snow
 The New Year enters at the midnight still?
 A dark form flits from out the leafless boughs,
 The Owl wails forth a greeting wild and shrill.

A BANIAN DAY.

BY A FAMILY DOCTOR.



WITHOUT anything approaching to the familiarity of the young man in the poem, who commences his impertinences with the remark—

"You are old, father William
 The few locks that are left you are grey,"

I am always pleased to interview a man who is well up in years without being very old in appearance. The experiences of life—and the mode of living—of such men are seldom without their value from a physiologist's point of view. Moreover, men over seventy are, as a rule, not averse to admit the impeachment of old age. When about ten years older than this, they may even look upon it as a compliment. If still another ten years be added to their span of life, they really sometimes come to consider living as a matter of course, and forget they are old unless thoughtlessly reminded of it. I say "thoughtlessly" because I know men, and even women too, who, in conversing with the aged, constitute themselves downright *memo-mories*, if I may coin a word for the occasion. I do not suppose that even the oldest man in the world, whoever

that may be, wishes to be constantly reminded that, figuratively speaking, he has one leg in the grave. An aged man may be excused for considering a person, whether man or woman, an unmitigated bore who alters their voice when talking to him, who either whines as if pitying him, or shouts at him as if he were as deaf as a door-nail.

I was chatting the other day with an old sea-captain (a wondrously hale, hearty, bluff and brown "old tar"), and happened to say—

"You are talking of things that happened a long way back, but you cannot be much over sixty."

"If you add twenty to that," he replied, "you'll be getting within hail of it."

"Indeed!" I said; "then I'm somewhat out in my guess. To what do you attribute your extraordinary good health, may I ask?"

He laughed. "Extraordinary good health, indeed! Why, I never had any. I've suffered from dyspepsia all my life—or, to speak more truthfully, I would have suffered, and would suffer from that complaint now, if I didn't always manage to steer clear of Scylla, without running foul of Charybdis. In other words, sir, I have what you might call a tell-tale stomach."

I must here explain that on board ship what is

called a "tell-tale" is an instrument consisting of a weighted brass clock-hand hung on a pivot, pointing to the arc of a circle, on which degrees are marked. When the ship rolls, it thus indicates the angle of deflection from the plumb. The captain by glancing at it can tell in a sea-way whether or not he is carrying a dangerous pressure of canvas, and can take in sail before finding himself on his beam-ends.

"Yes, sir, I've a tell-tale stomach; it is easily cap-sized, or put slightly out of order. It is to that I attribute my length of days, and the measure of health I do enjoy. A man who carries a tell-tale isn't likely to crack on too much, and it is better to ease off than to 'turn turtle.' Besides, in every ship I've had the honour to command, I have invariably insisted on a Banian day once a week."

"On a Friday, I suppose?"

"Yes, a Friday; just for fashion's sake. But on that day no meat was eaten; we were vegetarians out-and-out. Indeed, our Banian day often used to be very much of a fast-day. My officers might not like it at first, but they soon learned the advantage of such a plan; and the increase in health and happiness obtained, amply repaid them for the inconvenience of granting to the digestive organs one day's almost total rest a week."

Now the question may be asked, Do I myself believe that benefit to the system may accrue from keeping one Banian day in seven? Well, to begin with, this sailor-captain is himself a proof that the plan is at least a harmless one. But I am prepared to go a little further (because I have considered the question in all its bearings), and advance that thousands of people who are now suffering from so-called chronic dyspepsia, would find themselves benefited, and probably even completely restored to health, by what I may be excused for calling the Banian cure.

Let me say at once that I do not uphold this cure as a panacea for all the dyspeptic ills that human flesh is heir to, nor do I claim for it originality. I am quite content that it should be considered an old cure re-suscitated, so long as some of my readers are willing to *adopt* it and *adapt* it. I may add that it is most likely to do good to that very large and ever-increasing class of people which includes the "only-middling"—people who are never over-well, nor ill enough to be defined as invalids; people whose state of health is undergoing constant fluctuations, whose condition ebbs and flows like the tide, goes round and round with the weather-cock, or up and down with Fitzroy's barometer; people who, like a bold Northumbrian friend of mine, are "not well enough to boast, yet scorn to complain;" which also includes the so-called or *soi-disant* nervous, as well as the excitable—those for whom life seems far too short to do all they wish in, and who never can do enough or go fast enough to please themselves; who are intemperate in their desires, and intemperate in their very work; who are always grumbling at the ways of the world; and who would desire nothing better than to have it all turned upside-down and made over again, so long as they were permitted to superintend. It includes, also, per-

sons very much akin to these, who suffer from irritability of brain, temper, or from boredom, *ennui*, and languor—which last in nine cases out of ten is but another name for laziness. But can these latter be called dyspeptics at all? Certainly they can, for, more often far than not, their mode of life, and methods of eating and drinking, lie at the root of their misery. All cases of dyspepsia are not distinctly referable to the region of the stomach, remember, but to the head, the heart, the nerves, and muscular system generally. Let four men, for instance, dine together, and all be guilty of the indiscretion of eating a too heavy meal, without probably drinking anything stronger than ginger ale; three at least of these will suffer from disagreeable after-effects—dyspepsia, in fact—while the fourth will escape with the minor punishment of depression. But of the three, one may have acidity, flatulence, and liver disturbance; the other, irritability of the nervous system; and the last, simply a disagreeable feeling of fullness and wooliness in the head, with some heat of brow and eyes.

Now, in the good old times the physician or leech would have treated all three cases alike. He would have bled them, or sent them round the corner to the barber's, asking them to call when they came back. He would then have continued the treatment by further depleting them through the system, and next day they would be wiser men. Not sadder, though. Oh! no; on the contrary, they would feel lighter and merrier altogether.

Now then, while fully admitting that the treatment by active depletion is not applicable to the ailments of the present day, still, our dyspeptic troubles are similar in kind, if not in degree, to those which our forefathers (in the tankard-and-joint age) suffered from; the treatment itself should differ, therefore, in degree more than in kind. Hence my proposed adoption of the Banian cure in cases such as I have mentioned. Many who read these lines would, I know, be inclined to go much farther, and recommend the Banian system out-and-out. I should not like to say a word against vegetarianism, pure and simple; indeed I am neither altogether for, nor quite unfavourable to it. My own experience is that a purely vegetable diet would hardly seem to suit all classes in this country, even with the addition of eggs and milk. It suits the natives of India and Arabs well, as it suits the climate and the inherited constitutions of these peoples; but we in England appear to assimilate more easily, and with more genuine comfort of digestion, the blood-constituents as supplied to us from the animal and vegetable kingdoms taken together—though those of the latter should predominate.

Well, I do not think I shall be either contradicted or accused of excessive rudeness if I state boldly my conviction that over-eating is one of the greatest vices of the age. I cannot be contradicted, because society itself confesses to the sin—but society goes on over-eating, all the same. These very words—"Over-eating kills more people than over-drinking"—have become proverbial. Unfortunately, even as men consider all persons mortal except themselves, so they are inclined

to impute gluttony to any other corner of the table rather than their own.

But it is not those in health only who are guilty of intemperance in eating, but even the delicate and invalid as well, so prevalent is the notion that the system must be kept up, whether appetite suggests food or not. Some savages—the Patagonian tribes, for example—seem to have more sense than civilised beings in the matter of eating. They laugh at the white man's notion of having meals at stated hours, whether hungry or not. They eat when appetite dictates; they abstain if they feel disinclined for food.

But I know many invalids who keep on eating all day, and a great part of the night. "Just a little now and then to sustain Nature;" "Little and often"—why, these two hackneyed sayings fill more coffins than any one is aware of. Would that such invalids—nervous they always are, and no wonder—left Nature alone—half her time, at all events. She "kens her ain ken" far better than we can tell her. In other words, Nature has her own laws, and we can only break them at our peril.

"I do not think I eat too much," some one may say. But we are apt to consider quantity more than effect when cross-questioning ourselves on the subject of over-eating. Thus to the self-put question, "Do I over-eat?" comes as answer the question, "Let me see, now; how much did I eat, and what did I eat, yesterday?" But if I dare put myself up as your judge, I should remind you that your feelings to-day and last night are the only witnesses of value in this case. How did you sleep? Calmly, sweetly, dreamlessly? Did you wake refreshed and buoyant? Over-eating causes heat of surface, and slight fever of blood; not

very appreciable, perhaps, but enough anyhow to cause you to turn more than once in bed during the night, and banish all the feeling of buoyancy from your waking hours, without which health is in reality an unknown quantity. Even over-eating in the minor degree during one day causes discomfort in the next—all the forenoon, at all events; for the skin is too dry, the secretions are checked and retained, and languor and depression, perhaps even sleepiness, are the symptomatic results.

Enough said. Now, while strongly advising both the strong and the "only-middling" to live always temperately, I as strongly advise Banianism one day in seven. My cure, after all, depends on a policy of rest; it is to be a real and true "at home" day for the system. Rest for the stomach, rest for the liver, the heart, and the brain. Rest for the body also; but this is not imperative, and hardly necessary—so that the Banian day may be any day of the week.

I do not counsel abstinence from food entirely. Starvation for merely twelve hours would constitute a dangerous shock to many delicate people. But no meat is to be taken on Banian day, and only the very lightest of diet, and the least of that which can be done with. Supper itself is permissible, and even to be recommended; but it should consist only of a few rusks, or a light biscuit, with a glass of peptonised milk.

As accessories to this treatment for indigestion, I recommend a mild aperient about once a week if necessary; and in all cases where not contra-indicated in the judgment of the physician, the shower-bath or sponge-bath every morning, and a Turkish bath once in ten days.

AN UNSENSATIONAL GHOST STORY.

LIFE fulfils itself in many ways, and why should there not be a modern and unexpected side to an experience *en revenant*? There is certainly no law in that variously interpreted code which forbids ghosts to walk at midday, and with chills and chains and winding-sheets omitted. I set off to meet mine, at any rate, on the top of a tram-car, open-eyed, unshrinking, and unsuspecting, and fled from it in the broadest, sunniest light of one of the few summer days that fell to the share of 1888. It was a flat sort of straggling suburb to a seaport town from which that tram-car started, and to the memory that flashed back some quarter of a century along its track, the suburb seemed flatter than of old, its few green dimples smoothed away for the laying of the rail which stretched from the new station to the foot of the one big hill that the district boasted. "Will you walk over the hill or wait for the 'bus'?" asked our con-

ductor, as his passengers—a man with a pipe, another with a scythe, and two women laden with babies and baskets—preceded us down the ladder. Walk? wait? we did not know; we lost his meaning for a minute—that matter-of-course inquiry had a magic in it. "Over the hill!" the words set all sorts of memories moving, jostling one another almost. "Over the hill!" it was the one excursion of our town-bounded youth, our one glimpse of a beyond, from a life shut in and shut out, as it seemed to us, by small stony streets, with a pervading flavour of stores and tarpaulin about them. An enchanted land lay "over the hill;" a land of woods and streams, of wonderful wide skies, and waving cornfields; a land where flowers grew and cows were milked, and where trees meant swings and birds' nests, and not woolly impossible "copies" to sketch from in lead pencil. "No, we would walk," we told the bewildered conductor at last, feeling though, as the 'bus presently passed us, that had we been as honest as Uhland's hero, we