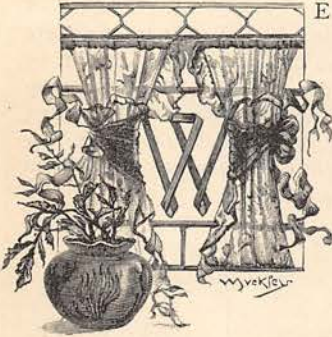


DISAPPOINTMENTS AS A CAUSE OF ILL-HEALTH.

BY A FAMILY DOCTOR.



E are always very ready if we are in an unhappy frame of mind to attribute our despondency to some derangement of a bodily function. We generally blame the liver, which is stimulated to increased activity by a thousand and one popular remedies. We are too apt to forget

that the mind reacts on the body just in the same way as the body reacts on the mind, so that the old proverb, "A healthy mind in a healthy body," well expresses their mutual relation.

I propose in this paper to call attention to some common instances in which bodily health and well-being are influenced by the state of the mind.

The light-heartedness, and joy, and good health which follow the receipt of welcome news, the "broad-paunched content" that accompanies a successful career, are examples of such influence, and many more will occur to my readers.

Just as the body is thus affected for good, a baneful influence may be exerted on it by a reverse state of mind, and this is rather the side of the question I shall consider. The highest of man's faculties is the faculty of judgment and self-control. He acquires it last, for it is developed by his experience of life; and it is most easily lost.

When a man becomes excited—whether as a consequence of ill-health (in the delirium of fever), or of profound emotion (excessive joy or fear), or of poisons (the action of alcohol and other drugs), it is well known that he becomes beside himself, and often commits acts or says words which in his calmer moments would have remained undone or unspoken. In these cases cause and effect are easily recognised, but very frequently the effect does not follow the cause so directly: it is less intense, but more lasting, and more far-reaching in its results.

In the instances I have mentioned bodily health is rarely affected permanently by the excitement, for it soon passes away; occasionally, however, a terror may induce long-continued nervousness. Many cases of St. Vitus's dance—a disease chiefly affecting children—are attributable to fright. When the emotion is less intense and more prolonged, the faculty of self-control is weakened, profound mental disturbance results, and an unhealthy state of mind is induced, which reacts in turn, causing bodily ill-health (loss of appetite and sleeplessness, with the long train of their attendant consequences). The chief causes of such disturbance are (1) Disappointment in

love—chiefly affecting young women. (2) Failure in business or want of success in the competition of life—chiefly affecting men. (3) Loss of friends by death. Men and women are very differently affected. Men become cynical and morose, or give way to excesses; comparatively rarely does a direct influence on their health result.

Women, on the other hand, are more prone to suffer physically. This difference seems to depend upon the greater activity and the more busy occupation of men, which prevents them to a certain extent from dwelling unduly on any emotion. The influence of emotion is first a nervous exaltation, followed afterwards by nervous depression—best instanced by religious fervour and despair.

In the every-day things of life similar influences are experienced. Let us take an extreme case of the state of being in love. In the earlier stages the poetical and sentimental predominate. Life is viewed through rose-coloured spectacles, and the lovers breathe an unreal atmosphere and live in an unreal world. This is the stage of exaltation, and it has little effect on bodily health other than tending to induce neuralgia. But too frequently it is followed by the stage of depression.

Mutual disappointment may occur—the disillusion may occur before marriage, and the engagement is terminated. The lady's disposition becomes warped and soured; her health declines, and she develops into a moody, irritable, nervous invalid. At first there is little organic disease, and if she be of well-balanced mind she soon throws aside her lassitude, and emerges a better, kinder, more sympathetic woman on account of her suffering.

But if she dwells on her disappointment and fails to occupy herself, she becomes permanently nervous and hysterical, and as a necessary consequence her bodily vigour is affected. She is no longer capable of useful work, for she can take no interest in anything. A life may be similarly spoiled by excessive indulgence in grief. The hopeless longing for the dead (for this feeling there is no sufficient word in the English language—it is best expressed by the Latin word *desiderium*) causes the life to be centred in retrospection and remorse, with consequent ill-health.

Lastly, want of success in life constitutes a disappointment which reacts on bodily health. Any prolonged worry or even a sudden shock experienced by adult persons—particularly after the beginning of the down-grade period of life—result in profound disturbance. The relation of intemperance to ill-health has even yet not been fully recognised. I have no doubt in my own mind that much of the excessive drinking during the later years of life depends upon an unhealthy state of the brain, induced by business anxieties and disappointments. Retrograde changes have begun in the various organs, which are, in consequence, more susceptible to injurious influences.

How are these conditions best remedied? Change of scene is to be recommended and active occupation to be provided. But, as in so many other conditions, much depends upon the individual. A determined effort must be made to overcome weakness—a continual endeavour to cease from morbid brooding; attention must be directed from self and concentrated on others, and as time elapses less and less difficulty will be experienced in realising that, after all, there still exists an interest in life. When this stage is reached complete recovery is not far distant.

I have directed attention to what may be termed the major disappointments of life, but it must not be

forgotten that little disappointments, especially if they are frequently repeated, exercise far-reaching influence. Those of us who take interest in children and their little ways know well how bitterly they feel the non-fulfilment of a promise too often lightly made and soon forgotten.

Apart from the possible influence on character, there is no doubt that sensitive children suffer in health by such neglect. They grieve and brood over what they consider a serious slight, and lie awake, unable to sleep, and rise in the morning unrefreshed to begin a new day. It ought to be a matter of conscience to perform every promise made to a child.

A NIGHT ON A LIGHTSHIP.

BY HERBERT RUSSELL.



IN THE GLEAM OF THE FLASH LIGHT.



HE sight of the tiny bright spark, regularly waxing and waning far out upon the windy blackness which shrouded the stormy ocean, put it into my head to wonder what manner of life it was on board a lightship; and the thought brought a resolve to im-

prove my acquaintance with the calling of those who man that familiar object of our home waters—the floating coast beacon.

I was spending a short holiday at the quaint, breezy old town of Deal, abreast of which stretches that most perilous of all shoals, the Goodwin Sands. It chanced that during the morning following the night on which I had stood watching the winking spark dancing out upon the deep, as I strolled along the shingle slope of the beach, I came to where several longshoremen were making ready to launch one of those famous boats locally termed a galley-punt.

They were bound away on a cruise to look out for ships requiring assistance, and invited me to accompany them. I sprang over the gunwale, the others followed, and away sped the little craft, souse into the surf that was making the pebbly shore resonant as mountain-crags in a thunder-storm. We sailed the bleak Channel till nightfall, but the foaming waters were as destitute of ships as though we had been out in mid-Atlantic.

I had been seated for upwards of an hour upon the floor of the boat, to get some shelter from the