

COMMON-SENSE ADVICE
FOR WORKING GIRLS.

By MEDICUS.



HAVE at least two classes of readers who peruse these papers of mine on health with more or less of interest; to one belongs the hard-working girl, the girl to whom every day brings its share of toil that must be tackled and of duties that must be performed, often, indeed, with little health and less heart; to the other class belong the delicate and the invalid girls, whose whole life is little save a weariness, not only of body but of

mind likewise. I am desirous of doing my duty to both these, and speaking a word in season to each. The troubles of confirmed invalids would not, I feel sure, be so hard to bear if they had good advisers, who not only counselled them to submit to the inevitable but assisted them to do so. Their lives would then have more of rest and comfort in them, for the simple reason that they would not be constantly engaged in a struggle—which is of all struggles the most trying to the nerves—to get well, or to appear as others are who enjoy that greatest of earthly blessings, excellent health. I have in preparation a paper specially addressed to this class, in which I shall endeavour to prove that no one's life need be utterly dull and devoid of pleasure, if it be but rightly guided. Meanwhile, I wish to give a few words of well-considered advice to our girls who work; they deserve attention first merely from the fact that they are happily a thousand times more numerous than the others.

Well, if the strongest and most healthy girl that it is possible to imagine were now in my presence, I do not think I could refrain from reminding her that, after all, the very health and bounding life that she felt so proudly conscious of is not a limitless possession, that at any moment it may be taken from her, and that she may be laid on a sick bed to arise therefrom but the ghost of her former self. Probably I should not be thanked for my pains in vouchsafing so unpleasant a reminder, yet I should be doing so with good intent.

I wish to remind my readers that strength and the will and power to work should not be overtaken at any time, nor should they forget that the prevention of illness is always preferable to its cure. These are two truths that are very easily mastered, and there are others that, like these, are not difficult to carry about with one. For instance, that health and strength constitute a kind of capital—the only sort of capital, indeed, which millions of people possess—and, like money, it cannot be squandered without the certainty of ultimate poverty. Now poverty of wealth is bad enough, but poverty of health is infinitely worse. Some turn of the tide may regain for a person the wealth spent and squandered; but, alas! and alas! when health goes it is too often for ever and aye.

You are young and strong at present, the future of middle age seems a very very long distance off; you may not live to be middle-aged, perhaps you do not wish to. Ah! but then you may. There is the rub, and middle

age with poverty of health, and a consequent difficulty in procuring the necessities of life, to say nothing of its comforts, is, to borrow a phrase from the homely Doric, "a weary bide."

And so I counsel our girls so to work and so to live now while still young, and still in robust health, as will be best for them when years have gone by.

I shall now mention a few of the mistakes that earnest hardworking girls are most likely to fall into, and which almost universally lead eventually to results which I can only term deplorable. The first of these is overwork. The temptation to do more work than accords with the strength is often very great. Perhaps the little labourer is not toiling for herself alone; she may have others depending on her exertions for the bread they eat. And many there are to whom hard work is a dire necessity, a terrible "must be" from which there is no apparent escape in life. But even this latter class may do a deal to lighten their labours by so living that the back becomes fitted to the burden. Indeed, it is a *sine quâ non* with such as these, that they live by rule until the good habits which guide their lives become second nature with them. If they do not, a break up sooner or later is inevitable. Digestion generally goes first, and after that anything may supervene; the blood becomes poor, and unable to properly nourish the body; the heart itself gets weak, the lungs and other vital organs degenerate, then the poor busy-bee finds herself in bed some day suffering from an ailment, to which the doctor gives a long name, because he is bound to call it something, but which is only, after all, hard work. She finds now, when probably too late, that she has been a spendthrift of the most foolish sort, that she has squandered her health-capital, and that if a continuance of life be granted to her she will have to depend, to some extent, on the generosity of friends. We all know what misery that means.

Another mistake working girls fall readily into is that of not properly timing their hours of labour, so as to have sufficient intervals of repose intervening with periods of recreation, without which all labour is worse than slavery.

Still another mistake they frequently make—and a grievous one it is—lies in not taking that kind of nourishment which is best suited for the labour to be performed, or in taking it in insufficient quantities; or the food may be all right, both as regards quality and also quantity, but the meal may be hurried over without observing those simple rules of diet that alone can insure healthy digestion. Nor are the majority of our girls so careful in the matter of clothing as they might be, nor about the air they breathe in their own apartments, nor about the position of body which they maintain during the time they are actually working.

It may be well here to mention a few of the signs and symptoms that ought to warn girls that there is danger ahead, and that they should pull up in time and commence to regulate their mode of life so as to prevent future illness. The very first of these is a general feeling of lassitude or weariness, a feeling of want of all pleasure in the work that used to be carried on without the slightest fatigue, and with the best of spirits. With this there will usually be some slight degree of indigestion; at all events, food will not now be partaken of with the same relish that it used to be. There may also be, sometimes, acidity of the stomach, with or without heartburn. This last is a very dangerous symptom, much more so than it is generally considered. Next comes want of good, nerve-nourishing sleep; and even if the sleep may have been sufficient as regards time, it has not been refreshing, and the girl awakes in the morning feeling positively tired and weary, and looking forward to the day's

work as to a penance. Affairs are bad enough when they have reached this pass. There may also be back-ache, either constant or coming on with the slightest exertion, and many other symptoms which need not be mentioned, only they all point in the same direction, and give proof that the body is badly nourished and the nerves overstrained. What is to be done in cases like these? What working girls usually do, is to fly for relief to the medicine bottle or some so-called infallible pill or other, a most unwise proceeding, because medicine has no effect on any ailment or trouble of any kind until the cause is removed. The cause here is overwork. Matters must be looked straight in the face. There can be no mincing them and no shirking them either. The sufferer must either lessen her hours of actual labour, or change it entirely for something more suitable, or make up her mind to troubles ahead. A change of the kind of work and a change of air is often most beneficial in such cases, and this is surely more easily obtained than is generally supposed. The same kind of work is carried on by the same kind of people in every town of the realm, and so, I say to those who have no home ties, "seek for change; it has saved many a life when nothing else could have done so."

On the other hand, I have to admit that however beneficial a change might prove, it is not often possible. Can I suggest another remedy more available? I can, and it lies in a complete alteration in the sufferer's mode of living.

I must, in the first instance, insist upon more time being spent in outdoor moderate exercise. Here I will be met with the objection that time spent in outdoor exercise means time deducted from hours of labour, which can neither be obtained, nor afforded if obtained. But I believe that this objection is seldom insuperable; and if you will consider the matter for a moment, I believe you will agree with me. Is it not the case, then, that most girls, let them be ever so industrious, spend a great many hours of each day in doing nothing, or worse than nothing, which might be passed far more profitably in honest healthful recreation or outdoor exercise? Oh! I am willing to make appeal to figures if you wish me to do so. There are twenty-four hours in each day, are there not? During eight, or for the sake of the argument I will even say ten, of these you are hard at work: well, fourteen remain, and, after deducting three hours for meals, and giving you seven in bed, or even eight, you have still three or four hours for exercise and recreation. Though I have said three hours for meals, I expect that dressing and healthful ablution will be included in that time. I will give no longer time for sleep than I have stated; it is no excuse that you are not sufficiently rested in that time, because you might remain a month in bed, and be no better at the end of it. What I maintain is, that if you get up at the proper time one morning, even although you may not have slept at all, you will be more likely to sleep well next night. I wish you to get into a habit of going to bed at the same hour every night, and getting up at the same time every morning. That is half the battle; because it gains you time, and time is a precious boon. Have then, I beseech you, if you value your health and your future welfare, three, four, or, if possible, five clear hours of every day that you can call your own. As much as possible of that time must be spent in outdoor exercise, and mark this, it must be exercise that you really enjoy. No meaningless moving about is of any use; it should be exercise that lightens the mind; it must be taken regularly every day until it becomes a habit; it must never be overdone, nor taken spasmodically, as many girls take

their exercise. You are often so tired and weary after a day's work, that it is a positive pain to you to exert yourself. In this case, it is the fresh air more than active exercise that you want. Do not deprive yourself of that, at all events.

Be as regular in your meal hours as you are with your walks. Take time to eat. Eat only good wholesome food in moderation. Do not fill the stomach with liquid in the shape of either weak soup or tea, and imagine you are taking nourishment, for solid food alone is nourishment to a person in health. A working girl feels greatly refreshed after a cup of tea, and the temptation to partake of that "cup that cheers" is one which she too often falls into, to the great detriment of her health and happiness. Tea-drinking is to blame for about one half the number of cases of nervousness we find among the girls in this country. If, therefore, it cannot be taken with moderation it should be avoided entirely, and cocoa—not coffee—substituted.

I do not think that many working girls often err in the matter of over-eating. I need only say, therefore, that, if the stomach has to labour to get rid of a larger amount of food than is necessary for the support of the body, work of any kind, whether mental or physical, becomes a weariness, and is never more than half done. Drinking too much fluid is also very injurious to the constitution; it throws more work on important internal organs than they can easily or comfortably perform; the nerves are thus weakened, and the blood is rendered gross and impure. I have warned our girls against: hurry in eating; let them also beware of eating while the body is fatigued. Try to so arrange matters that a quarter of an hour's

rest is obtained not only after but also before meals.

Another thing that should be well studied by girls is the healthfulness and purity of the rooms in which they sleep. Either from want of time, from thoughtlessness or carelessness, this is almost constantly neglected, and ill-health is the inevitable consequence. I say that no girl can be in happy, robust health who neglects to keep her bedroom sweet, well aired, and perfectly clean. It should be remembered that about eight hours out of every twenty-four are spent in one's bedroom, and as fresh air is necessary to life—and the purer and fresher it is the better—we cannot be too careful in having that room well ventilated. Not only should fresh air be plentifully admitted—in summer the window should be left open all night unless the girl be very weakly indeed—but nothing that can in any degree contaminate the air should be left in the room a moment longer than is necessary. Girls often have flowers in their rooms; but these flowers should not be left until they begin to decay, and the water about them should be very frequently changed. Flowers are sometimes hurtful, but green plants in sunshine always purify the air. Dust in a bedroom is a great enemy to health, but this is seldom thought of, and even those girls who are careful to dust their rooms regularly, do so more for convenience's sake than anything else.

If a hardworking girl does not obtain enough refreshing sleep, she cannot long remain in good health, and she is bound to go on from bad to worse. We constantly hear of people who are what is called light sleepers, whom the slightest noise awakens or alarms.

Now these persons are really and truly in a bad state of health, and instead of looking about for all sorts of cures for sleeplessness, as they generally do, they should endeavour to rectify their mode of living, for, depend upon it, there is something very wrong somewhere.

A healthy girl should be able to sleep almost anywhere or under any circumstances, so long as she feels that she has well earned her night's repose; the bed itself may be as hard as a bag of flints, all the cocks in the neighbourhood may be crowing and all the dogs barking, but she will slumber quietly on till morning, and awake as fresh as a mountain daisy. Working girls will find great benefit to their health by studying how to dress in comfort: and in that word "comfort" the whole secret rests. The clothing should neither be too heavy nor too light; it should be warm but never hot, and accord with the kind of work to be done. Out of doors, inclemency of weather ought to be carefully guarded against, more particularly wet and extremes of heat and cold. Girls who use the morning cold or tepid bath hardly ever suffer from coughs or colds.

In every case, then, where a girl feels herself out of sorts, or tired and listless without being actually ill, she will be consulting her own interest if she at once proceeds to reform her general mode of life; she will be surprised at the change for the better that a few weeks of rational living and strict obedience to the simple laws of health will work on her, for she will be able once more to go about her duties with courage, and the labour that now seems so difficult to accomplish will become a pleasure to her, as honest labour should ever be to us all.



TAUGHT HIS WAY.

THE STORY OF A LIFE'S PURPOSE.

CHAPTER I.

"To obey is better than sacrifice."

A MERRY party of young girls are gathered round the dinner-table at Owlets Hall. Perhaps the merriest is Florence Hamilton, the only daughter of the house, a graceful, vivacious girl of some eighteen years. Though nearly the youngest of the little circle, she seems to be the very centre of its life and fun, and her father's eyes often wander to her sunny, smiling face with a look of fond admiration, and sometimes amused surprise when the ripple of her gay laugh, or her words of sparkling merriment fall on his ear. Florence lost her mother just when her dear, wise and loving control was most needed, and it is easy to see whose will now rules the household. The bright young girl is the delight of her father's heart, and he very seldom dreams of thwarting any of her wishes or plans. If it pleases "Flossy," and is not desperately unreasonable, why oppose it? As a child Florence was not easily spoiled, having a sweet temper and a

warmly affectionate nature, which won the hearts of those about her; but, now that she is leaving childhood behind, her strong self-will, though it is neither imperious nor deliberately selfish, often grieves her father by its thoughtlessness of the desires and comfort of others, and even of his own commands, though he never has the heart to check or reprove his darling. Having no sisters, schoolmates and friends are invited for prolonged visits to the Hall, and it is of such companions that the merry circle is now composed. They have been discussing arrangements for the afternoon during the early dinner.

"Flossy," said Mr. Hamilton, as the meal over, the girls were leaving the table, "you had better take Peggy if you drive into the village this afternoon. Vixen hasn't been out for a week, and is too fresh for you to drive. Besides, the basket chaise would be too small for a party."

Florence's brow clouded, as she replied, a little impatiently—

"Oh! Peggy is so slow, father, dear; we might almost as well walk;" adding further,

with the most winsome promise in her pretty face, "We'll take care of ourselves, pater, dear, and Vixen too. If she's frisky, Withers shall take her for a run before we start."

Mr. Hamilton made no reply, and Florence, having won the day as usual, danced away up the broad oak staircase to prepare for her drive. But, as the girls chattered gaily as they dressed, plans underwent a sudden modification, and it was decided that an expedition be made to the wood in search of early primroses. Only one of the party, Phoebe Statham, was to drive into the village with Florence to execute the shopping commissions.

"Why, we are to have Vixen after all," exclaimed Phoebe, as she saw the pretty little dappled creature, fresh from the manger, and ready to jump out of her harness with fire and spirit, being led up the drive, drawing the little basket carriage.

"Oh, yes," returned Florence; "father only meant that Vixen's chaise would not take us all, but now that only you and I are going it would be absurd to have that other lumber-