

ALL ABOUT MYALGIA.

By "MEDICUS."

"MYALGIA," you ask, "what is it at all? Is it a flower?"

No it isn't a flower; it isn't a sweetmeat, nor a new kind of soap, and it isn't a town in Algeria. But it is something that in this weary work-a-day world we all get to know something about now and then, and some of us know it very much to our sorrow.

It is a compound Greek word, and signifies muscular pain. It is a handy term in a physician's mouth, rather musical than otherwise, and sounds "kind o' learned," as a Yankee would say. As a rule doctors—present company excepted—are a trifle shady in their Greek and Latin, unless they have had a University education, and kept up their classics. There are three sorts of ordinary Latin—some of it is very ordinary—there is dog Latin, gardener's Latin and doctor's Latin. I am not conversant with the first; I have often talked Latin to my dogs, but never succeeded in eliciting a very intelligible reply. Perhaps there was something wrong with my pronunciation; perhaps I rolled my R's too much. Anyhow, I've always had to fall back upon the Gaelic, that is far-sounding and fetches any dog. Gardener's Latin is principally remarkable for a reckless mixing up of genders. He gets hold of a big mouthful of masculine noun, and trots out a feminine adjective to bring up the rear. No good trying to tell a gardener that substantives ending in *um* are neuter; regardless of grammar, he weds them to male adjectives and there is an end to it. I really think the modern gardener had better go to school again.

As to the third sort of ordinary Latin, that of the doctor—present company always excepted—the peculiarity is the absence of terminations of any kind. This is a cute and a handy way of writing Latin, it hides ignorance, and steers clear of grammatical and orthographical errors. For example, if he writes down *Vin Ipecac*, how are you to know that he couldn't spell the whole word *ipecacuanha*, even if you were to promise him a new gig.

But about myalgia, perhaps a rose by any other name would smell as sweet. And perhaps not, anyhow the word in question may stand for a good many others. It may mean, mere stiffness, or soreness, such as we suffer from if we take hard exercise when not in good form or up to the mark. A good example of this sort of myalgia may be borrowed from the harvester, who after the first or second day's hard work complains of being "hipped." Myalgia may also mean cramp, a common example is what people call "stitch in the side," which one may suffer from when walking fast or running, and which is nature's way of warning one not to hurry.

Any group of muscles that have been overworked may become the subject of myalgia, and this is often put down to rheumatism. Thus we have back-ache, shoulder-ache, neck-ache, or aching in the calves of the legs or ankles.

In young folks what are called growing pains are but a mild form of myalgia. Aching in the sides is common enough next day after one has spent an evening listening to a laughable play such as Toole puts on the boards.

You will note then that myalgia is the result of over-exertion of any part of the muscular frame. If this were all, however, I should not trouble myself to devote a special article to it. But it is often a most painful complaint, and it is nearly always a symptom of debility, a sign that one is under par, or has been pulled down in some way or another, and

therefore it needs to be treated both locally and constitutionally, not as a symptom only, but as an actual disease.

Myalgia is sometimes extremely alarming, because not only may it simulate chronic rheumatism, but many other even more dangerous maladies. For instance we have pleurisy and we have pleurodynia. Both come on with acute or lancinating pain in the side. A doctor can easily distinguish the one from the other, but how can the head of the family do so. It is necessary that he should, because in a case of pleurisy the sooner medical aid is obtained the better, whereas pleurodynia is amenable to simple treatment, such as rest and hot fomentations. Well, no paterfamilias or materfamilias ought to be without a clinical thermometer in the house. It is the good fairy that can be brought in at any time to tell you whether or not a pain is the result of inflammation. The animal heat is registered at 89.4. A rise in temperature of even two or three degrees should alarm one, and if it goes much above the hundred, there is danger to life, and the sooner your family physician is summoned the better.

Some of the most ordinary occupations of life may bring on an attack of myalgia, even although the work done was of a pleasurable kind, such for instance as too much practice on the piano when a girl is not over strong.

A sudden attack of myalgia or cramp of the heart is a terrible thing and very often fatal. When strong swimmers drown, it is usually said they have been attacked by cramp, and this is imputed to chill in the water. Now I am myself a good swimmer, and have more than once had to swim for my life, once in the Greenland ocean, but I have never had cramp in a single muscle. Cramp in the limbs will not pull a good swimmer under the water, but cramp of the heart does, because under such circumstances it means sudden death. There is one spasmodic jerking up of the arms, perhaps one agonised glance shorewards, and all is over. So one should never swim far if out of form, and she or he should never swim too hard. There is plenty of time; a stroke once in ten seconds will keep you afloat in a sea-way, and keep up the animal heat also.

For every reason we ought to try to keep our bodies or systems up to par, or in other words up to the standard of health. Oh, it is a grand thing to be in good form, a grand thing for either woman or man, girl or boy. You can walk all day or work all day and never feel tired or weary, and your duties are pleasures to you, every single one of them. Your head never aches nor does your back, and your very feet seem to spurn the ground on which you tread. Then your sleep at night is sound and good, and you awake in the morning refreshed and happy, and are not only willing but even eager to begin the duties of the day.

But alas! what a difference there is when you have fallen below par: then everything you do appears a positive weariness to you; the time lags drearily on your hands; every sound jars on your nerves; the sky isn't so blue as it used to be, and the fields and trees are not so green, while pains chase each other all over your body or concentrate themselves like hostile enemies in groups, to plague and annoy you. You're not happy, you're cross, and peevish, and tired, and weary, and I don't know what all, and when you have at last a chance of resting yourself you are almost too tired to take it. As for refreshing sleep at night, why, it is out of the question, and you get up in the morning hot-headed, hot-eyed, and just as tired as when you lay down.

There is one kind of myalgia that not unfrequently attacks the weakly girl, and which often causes her considerable anxiety, namely a pain in the left side in front about the region of the heart. Perhaps she imagines that she has got heart disease, and her spirits sink to zero in consequence. But this kind of pain is not a symptom of heart complaint. Those who have real heart trouble may not even know it.

Pain in one shoulder is not infrequent, it may be myalgia or it may point to some disturbance of the liver.

Pain between the shoulders is sometimes a distressing enough symptom and indicates a generally debilitated state of the system.

But probably the most common form of myalgia is that which, among girls who work long hours, especially in shops or at desks, affects the loins or lower part of the back. Girls who have to lift articles into positions above their heads, or who have to carry weights, often suffer from this. Sometimes it is more of a down-dragging kind of weariness than actual pain, but it may amount to real agony, which even days in the recumbent position fails to relieve.

This back-ache, I should remind my readers, may at times be symptomatic of weaknesses quite apart from those caused by hard work; but these very weaknesses may have been brought on by muscular exertion in the first instance.

Well, a reasonable amount of hard work does not hurt any girl if she keeps up her strength; and, as long as she obeys the golden rules of health, and can eat and sleep well, it is not likely that the labours of the day will have any bad effect upon her. But the strength must be kept up by honest solid food and not by slops. A most unhealthy and unwholesome kind of diet is that which is called a tea-dinner. Meat should never be eaten with tea, unless you want to tan it, in which case you might as well eat old shoe leather and not go to the expense of tea.

A cup of tea or even two taken in the after part of the day are very refreshing, but scarcely anything should be eaten therewith. Coffee, if it agrees, is better for breakfast, and good cocoa better than coffee because more nourishing.

Now as to the treatment of myalgia, there are so many different forms of it that I can do little more than generalise.

People who suffer from myalgia are of the faint-hearted diathesis, if I may so term it. Perhaps that sounds somewhat disparaging, and it would be more correct to say that they have nervous constitutions. They possess a deal of vitality, but are easily cast down when any trouble seems very real. Well, a person of this sort would naturally conclude that any sudden attack of myalgia was something very serious indeed, and she will hardly believe the doctor when he tells her that there is no danger at all.

But the pain nevertheless may be very acute indeed for the time being, and nothing seems to afford any mitigation of it.

Well, one thing is certain, myalgia, unless it be a mere flying pain or two, cannot be cured without rest. And it is rest that the doctor—if you seek the services of one—will order you first. I am well aware that it is all but impossible for many girls who have to work and slave nearly all the year round to obtain rest. But nevertheless it is imperative, or worse may follow. To begin with, I should enjoin rest, not in an easy chair but in bed, and if the girl were very delicate I should order her

down to the seaside for a whole month after the acuteness of the attack was got over. Alas! though, if the girl is poor I know I might just as well order her to borrow the Queen's crown and wear it for a week or two. This fact leads me to say that however poor a girl is, and however small her wages may be, she ought to put aside a little sum every week to meet the requirements of a rainy day. There are many little cottage-homes by the sea, kept up and superintended by ladies who have the welfare of suffering humanity at heart, where respectable girls can be received and boarded for ten shillings a week. That would be only two pounds a month besides the fare down, and odds and ends say another pound. Such tiny institutions as these are boons and blessings to many a working girl, and I wish there were more of them.

As I have written a paper entitled "Rest for the Weary" for this year's summer number of THE GIRL'S OWN PAPER, I shall not pursue this subject further than to suggest that girls can nowadays insure against sickness for a very small annual sum which entitles them to a weekly allowance when ill.

Well, rest with hot turpentine fomentations to the painful part and an aperient pill or two, will usually remove the acuteness of the attack in a few days.

I must tell you here that it is on troubles of this kind that a large number of quacks grow rich and fat, so never be prevailed upon to throw away your probably hard-earned money on advertised nostrums.

One of the worst features about myalgia is that it is likely to recur, and that if it takes a fancy to a particular group of muscles it is apt to become a frequent and troublesome visitor.

Well, some kind of local rest or support may be needed. Supposing that it is the back, for instance, I do not know of anything better than the porous plaster of the shops. Get the best or get none at all.

Stays afford rest, but they must not be too tight else they will actually bring on an attack of myalgia, because tight-lacing not only interferes with the play and work of internal organs and so debilitates the body generally, but it weakens the external muscles by preventing their due nutrition, and I can assure you, gentle reader, that many girls saddle the wrong horse when they blame work or study for their ill-health, which, correctly speaking, should be put down to tight-lacing.

Constitutionally the treatment for myalgia is similar to that for debility, and the removal of any existing complaint which, until the attack of myalgia, may have been considered quite trivial. Anæmia I have spoken of often in the "G. O. P." Iron is our sheet-anchor in the treatment thereof as far as medicine is concerned. The tincture of iron may be taken in doses of ten drops three times a day in a little water after food for a month. Ten drops would mean ten minims, you know, so that if counting the drops from a small phial you would have to allow a few more, and probably count fifteen. The iron is indicated if the

girl is pale in face and gums, and not thriving generally.

But good nutritious food, not sloppy, and plenty of open-air exercise are a *sine qua non*.

A constipated habit of the system may increase the frequency of myalgic attacks. But this is not to be cured by medicine alone, although an occasional antibilious pill may be taken. Beware of advertised pills and syrups, they mostly consist of aloes, which is a good servant in a doctor's hands but a tyrant master to the amateur.

Here is a little prescription for such a habit of body that is both safe and simple. Confection of senna three ounces and a half, sublimed sulphur six drams; dose: a teaspoonful or two when needed.

The health can be greatly invigorated by using the cold or tepid bath every morning—the cold bath is best—and by sleeping with your window open, though there is no reason why you should let the draught blow across the bed on which you sleep.

Girls very often neglect their health by eating food that causes dyspepsia, by neglecting exercise, by lacing too tightly, and sleeping in stuffy rooms. Well, to such as these I may conclude by saying, one smart attack of myalgia may prove an unmitigated blessing. They won't forget it, and if it causes them to live so as to bring natural roses to their cheeks, rubies to their lips, and the glad sparkle of health to their eyes, the trouble won't have been thrown away on them.



THE WARDS OF ST. MARGARET'S.

By SISTER JOAN.

CHAPTER XIX.

FRIENDS FOR LIFE.

"A blessed thing it is for any man or woman to have a friend, one human soul whom we can trust always, who knows the best and the worst of us, and who loves us in spite of our faults."—C. Kingsley.

THE P. and O. steamship *Acgarth* was lying alongside the Albert Docks, flying her Blue Peter, the signal of departure. All was bustle both around her and on board; passengers of all sorts and descriptions were mounting the gangway, and being shown by busy stewards to their respective quarters; porters were hurrying backwards and forwards with trucks laden with boxes, and a large crane was at work hoisting up huge packing-cases from the quay and depositing them in the ship's hold, many of them not to be disturbed again until the voyage was over.

As the time for starting drew near, and the last whistle sounded, the scene could not fail to present a fascinating picture to one who made a study of human character; indeed, to

an ordinary looker-on it seemed full of interest. Comedy often mingled with tragedy, and the actors played their parts with a reality too deep to call forth applause.

On the bridge stood the captain with a careworn, weather-beaten face, suggestive of the storms and perils through which he had passed; yet with an air of pride as he issued forth his orders in a tone of stern command.

Suddenly the din and tumult ceased. The ship's crew loosed her moorings and made fast the anchor; and whilst on-lookers stood in silence gazing at the majestic vessel, she began to move, slowly—gently—almost as if by magic, further and further from the shore, and as the last signs of farewell passed between those on board and the friends who were to be left behind, the distance gradually widened and the ship was soon fairly under weigh. On the deck at the fore-end amongst the first-class passengers, might be seen two figures dressed in grey; it was evident by their long veils that they were nurses, and anyone knowing the uniform with the circular cloak and neat bonnet would recognise them as belonging to

Her Majesty's Nursing Staff. One was Constance, or Sister Wilson, the other was a stranger. Her name was Hope Cunningham, a tall handsome woman with fair sunshiny hair, and a clear complexion set off by deep-set dark-brown eyes and two rows of even pearly teeth. She was one of the sisters who had joined from the Albert Hospital; she had had longer service than Constance, though she was a year or two younger, but she had travelled a great deal and seen much more of the world, and would have been taken for the elder of the two.

They were both leaning against the side of the vessel as if spell-bound, gazing at the fast receding land. They did not appear to be talking, and looked deep in thought; Constance's face was almost sad.

"We should be wise, I think, to go below," said Hope at length, turning to her companion; "it is so much more comfortable getting settled whilst we are in smooth water. Are you not a good sailor?" she added, catching sight of a wistful expression on Constance's face as she turned to follow her.