

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS.

LADY MATILDA asks, "Why, when I pay a doctor to visit me, does he not tell me the name of my complaint and its probable duration and termination? And why does he write his prescriptions in Latin? Is it so that I should not read them? Is it from fear, lest they should be criticised, or is it merely from habit? It seems far more rational for a physician to tell his patients everything, and so secure their help towards curing themselves."

Many people, beside yourself, have asked these questions, and, as far as we are aware, they have never yet been answered. That it would be better, in most cases, for the physician to tell his patients everything we most readily admit; but there are two sides to the question, so we will consider the pros and cons of each part of the argument.

Should the doctor tell his patient the nature of the disease from which the latter is suffering?—Yes; for it gives the patient a better idea of his own condition. It tells him if his state is serious and if it is advisable to appoint a substitute to do his work during his illness; or, if the disease is a very serious one, whether he should make or revise his will, and make other preparations before leaving this world. Everyone, when he is ill, imagines that his complaint is very serious, and it is a relief to him to hear that it is more trivial than he imagined. No; he should not tell his patient the name of his illness, for the latter may be thoroughly unnerved by hearing that he suffers from cancer or consumption, and in serious affections it is always necessary to keep up the patient's spirits. Again, tell a man that he has consumption, and he imagines that his case is hopeless, whereas it is often not so.

Is the physician to tell his patient how long the illness will last?—Yes, decidedly, in all cases, if he knows himself. It is rarely possible to tell how long a disease will take to run its course, and to hazard an opinion in such cases is disastrous to the reputation of the physician, and of no value to the patient.

Ought a patient to know what will be the probable termination of his illness?—Yes, everyone should be warned of approaching death or encouraged by the assurance of a speedy cure. Again, where an operation is considered necessary, the clear understanding of his condition will enable the patient to accept the chances of operation or to refuse to allow its performance. The probable results of the operation should also be clearly laid before the patient. Against these arguments the ever-constant factor of uncertainty must be laid. We can never be certain of the

results, either of a disease or of an operation, so why tell a patient that he will die from his affection when it is possible he may recover?

As regards writing prescriptions in Latin, personally we thoroughly disapprove of it. One must know one's own language better than Latin. Again, it is not always possible to express one's meaning in Latin, and it is not rare to see such meaningless jargon as "to be coated cum sacch." on the prescriptions of the most eminent physicians. Why do we put the sign "R" above a medical prescription? Now we take it to stand for "Recipe" (take of), and so force ourselves to put the names of the drugs used in the genitive case. This sign R is really an invocation to Jupiter, and was used by the classical physicians, but nowadays it is as much out of place as it is out of date to use it. We thoroughly disapprove of this method of writing prescriptions in a mixture of English, Latin and jargon, and now we always use English alone. The old bugbear, the apothecary's weights, is going to give way to the metrical system of weighing when the new pharmacopœia is ready.

Medical men are not charlatans, and do not write their prescriptions in Latin to prevent criticism. It is simply a piece of foolish conservatism.

In conclusion, we must remember that the physician himself does not always know what is the nature or duration of every morbid condition, and that there are many ailments that have not got a name. Another reason why medical men do not confide in their patients is that the patients make a bad use of the information. For instance: we tell a girl that she has anæmia. A friend comes round and tells her she should take Dr. Quack's pills, which are wonderful. Our treatment is neglected; the patient takes the patent pill, of which neither she, her friend, nor ourselves know the action or the composition. It seems to us, however, that patients take patent medicines and nostrums whatever the diagnosis—and why not? Do not Dr. Quack's pills guarantee to cure everything? Fortunately most patent drugs are harmless as they are useless; but we have seen great harm done by a patient taking an antibilious pill to cure typhoid fever.

It is a matter of experience that it is not wise for the physician to implicitly confide in every patient, but when he is called to a healthy-minded individual, really anxious to be cured, he tells his sufferer everything he knows himself, warns him of approaching danger, and confides in him any uncertainty connected with the diagnosis or termination of the malady.

T. N. D.

HERMIONE asks, "Will you kindly tell me to what Tennyson refers in the following lines from 'Margaret'.

"Exquisite Margaret, who can tell
The last wild thought of Chatelet;
Just ere the falling axe did part
The burning brain from the true heart,
Even in her sight he loved so
well?"

We are very glad to receive questions of this order, which show that our correspondents read poetry in an intelligent spirit. The allusion, we must confess, has a little perplexed us, for there seems no Chatelet known to fame to whom the quotation would be in the least appropriate. Everything points to the name "Chatelet" being interchangeable with Chastelard. Pierre Roscobel de Chastelard was a grandson of the chevalier Bayard, a youth of romantic spirit, and a writer of amatory verse. He fell in love with Mary Queen of Scots during her sojourn in France, and followed her to England on her widowhood. He was compelled, however, to return to Paris, where he passed a year of misery, apart from the object of his adoration. He then joined her court in Scotland, and was at first kindly received; but as his importunities for the Queen's favour became too urgent, he was condemned to lose his head. On the day of execution he walked to the scaffold reading the ode of Ronsard, "*A la Mort*," and finally turning towards the place where the Queen was, he cried aloud, "*Adieu, la plus belle et la plus cruelle princesse du monde!*"

The heroine of Tennyson's early poem is supposed to be secluded from the sorrow and stress of the world in a sort of charmed reverie.

"You love, remaining peacefully,
To hear the murmur of the strife,
But enter not the toil of life."

"What can it matter to you," the poet seems to say, "that brave men suffer, that lovers break their hearts and perish, as did the Queen's minstrel-suitors in days of yore, for love's sake? You know nothing but dream-sorrow—"

"A fairy shield your Genius made,
And gave you on your natal day.
Your sorrow, only sorrow's shade,
Keeps real sorrow far away."

There is a hint of reproach in the words quoted by our correspondent, and yet there is admiration, as for one aloof from the common woes of earth.

ANSWERS TO CORRESPONDENTS.

STUDY AND STUDIO.

PIRATE QUEEN.—We must repeat the censure of a recent answer. The matter of your poem is excellent, and your pictorial description shows that you have talent; but the "form" is defective, and the metre halts. Your lines should be assimilated in length and measure to this one—

"Come with thy cold clear stars, oh, dusk of the northern night!"

T. C.—1. The accidentals are placed in each clef separately, the treble clef not affecting the bass, and vice versa.—2. Your example is written as two half-bars, and we cannot therefore answer your question. If they are intended as two bars, they are inconsistent with ♯ time, as there are only four quavers in each. Have you not copied incorrectly? PONDOR-ME-NOT.—Your design is excellently done. We should think you ought to be able to get work. Apply to one of the weekly "home" magazines.

A. E.—Your stories are very nice considering that you are only fourteen. Study hard, and read good authors: then in days to come you may be able really to write something worth reading.

PRIMROSE.—1. Your quotation—

"Man's love is of man's life a thing apart;
'Tis woman's whole existence."

is from Byron's *Don Juan*, canto i., stanza 194.—2. Your letter is a very kind and pleasant one, and you ask for criticism of your story so modestly, that we feel sorry it cannot be favourable. The composition is faulty, as the sentences are far too long. Then we demur both to the curate's singling out a special member of his congregation for notice while he was officiating at Divine Service, and to his advising a girl to marry a man given to intemperance. He would have known, had he been a person of any experience, that the hope "I can influence him for good," is in such cases, often, if not invariably, a delusion.

A CONSTANT READER OF THE GIRL'S OWN PAPER.—The verses you enclose are decidedly above the average of those sent for criticism. In the "Reverie by the Seaside" there is one halting line, viz.—

"Some of the gladness God gave."

We like the lines—

"For I would go home laden,
Could only my burden be
Some of the fancies whispered
In that music from the sea."

The sacred poem is also good. The last verse of all is the least poetical. We should advise you to persevere.

F. M.—1. We mentioned in this column the other day (see page 224) an elementary Greek class, conducted by Miss Lilian Masters, Mount Avenue, Ealing. You had better write to her for full particulars, as we should suppose it is conducted by means of correspondence.—2. February 10, 1876, was a Thursday.