



SPRING FLOWERS

ANSWERS TO CORRESPONDENTS.

MEDICAL.

SLEEPLESSNESS (an answer to "Amy" and others).—

Sleeplessness is one of the most important symptoms which a physician is called upon to treat. Not only is it the most distressing of all forms of suffering to which we are liable, but its causation is of a most varied character, and its results are often of the gravest possible kind. We therefore deem it advisable to discuss at full length this important subject, for we have received many letters from correspondents about this condition, and it is useless to give a brief account of mysterious and complex a complaint. Before we enter upon the subject of insomnia itself, we must first have a clear knowledge as to what is natural sleep and what is its cause. Sleep is the temporary cessation of the vital activity of the higher centres of the mind together with a partial dulling of the excitability of the whole nervous system. For sleep to occur two factors are necessary—the higher centres of the mind must be tired and all sources of reflex irritation of the centres must be removed. The mind is excited by impressions received through the special senses, and also by irritation of any part of the nervous system. When we go to bed we darken the room, we do our best to prevent our being disturbed by noise, and we lay perfectly still to prevent any impressions from reaching the brain. We have done a day's work, therefore our minds are tired; and we have removed all sources of irritation therefore we sleep. Now you ask us the very pertinent question, "Why do we ever wake up?" We said that the higher centres must be tired in order to sleep, and it is the recovery of these centres which causes our awakening. There are few of us who can go to sleep at a minute's notice, during the daytime, however carefully we prevent impression from reaching the brain through the senses. This is because our minds are not tired and do not need sleep. We do not go to sleep or wake up suddenly, but we pass from full consciousness to diminished mental power, then to a state in which the imagination is still retained, but the control of the will is gone, then deeper to a dreamy state, and then deeper and deeper still to total unconsciousness and mental inaction. This is normal sleep. We awaken in the reverse order, but each stage is more prolonged than in the converse state. This is the reason that dreams are most frequent in the early morning hours. As we said, all the nervous system partakes, to a certain extent, in the inaction of sleep. If the whole nervous system slept death would result, for the heart and respiration would stop. But both these two bodily functions are depressed, and we are all familiar with the peculiar deep, infrequent breathing of a sleeping person. Impressions are received more slowly and less distinctly than when awake. A slight stimulus, such as a faint light, or gently touching the skin, produces no reaction; but a more severe stimulus, as a shout, or a pin prick, produces a reaction slowly, and if sufficiently intense will awaken the sleeper. Here you will give us a very hard nut to crack. "If, as you say, it is necessary for the mind to be tired before sleep can occur, how comes it that after working excessively hard one goes to bed worn out, and yet sleep does not come, but the unfortunate person lies tossing about in a most unpleasant condition between sleep and waking?" The answer to this is that here the mental centres are exhausted. Now, the first sign of nervous exhaustion is irritability, consequently these centres become irritable

and react violently to impressions which would have no effect on the normally waking mind. Having described the process of normal sleep, let us now consider the various ways in which sleep may be modified; but as this answer is already of inordinate length, we will only be able to consider the causes of diminished or abolished power of sleeping. Sleep may be interfered with in three ways—either the person does not go to sleep at all, but remains fully awake; or she lies in an intermediate condition in which the imagination runs unchecked by the mind, and she is haunted by ideas of falling down precipices, or out of window, or being pursued by villains or other such thoughts; or, thirdly, and this is the most common, she may dream. These three are phases of the same condition—insomnia. From what we have said before it will be easy to understand that the causes of insomnia may be divided into two classes those due to interference with the higher centres of the brain; and those due to excessive irritation received through the senses, preventing the brain from sleeping. Now, the former class of cases is the less numerous and consist of three causes—the centre may not be tired; the centre may be exhausted; the powers of the centre may be perverted, as in insanity. Of these, the first needs no comment, sleep is not needed and does not occur. The third cause, insanity, depression, etc., need not trouble us here, though it is of vast importance. The second of these three causes is a very important cause of insomnia, and one that we must fully discuss. If you work too hard, or too late in the evening you will not sleep. Your centres have been overworked, they have become partly exhausted, and, moreover, your brain has become full of blood and is altogether in too excitable a state to sleep. The second class of causes of insomnia contains all causes of irritation—practically every disease and pain in any form; also such exciting causes as noise, bright lights, etc., and fleas (not by any means an uncommon cause of sleeplessness during the first few days of a summer holiday at the sea-side). In this list the most important items are indigestion, pain, and bright lights. As our space is rapidly coming to an end, we must leave this part of the subject and pass on to the treatment of insomnia. First, find out the cause, and if possible, remove it. Thus, if you suffer from indigestion, constipation, neuralgia or any other disease, this must be cured if possible. Not an uncommon cause of insomnia is eating a large supper. If you have been doing this, discontinue the habit and take nothing but a glass of warm milk at bedtime. Another cause is *not* taking a supper. Many people who suffer from sleeplessness find taking a light supper very efficacious for producing sleep. If you work too hard in the evening, bathing your feet in hot or very cold water immediately before getting into bed is often very useful. Let your room be absolutely quiet and dark. Avoid tea and coffee at bedtime as these of themselves produce insomnia. *Never* take hypnotics unless you are daily attended by a physician. Insomnia is bad, but the habit of taking hypnotics is far worse. The subject of dreams and night terrors we will attack at another time. If we have not made ourselves clear to anyone we will be pleased to answer any questions on this subject, for of course you must understand that we have not by any means exhausted the subject.

ACHUSHA-MA-CHREE.—We discussed at great length the nature, cause, and treatment of blackheads or skinworms some weeks ago.



STUDY AND STUDIO.

LENA.—1. Your difficulty as to where to find recitations that are amusing and appropriate is a very common one. You will find several that are humorous in *What to Read at Winter Entertainments* (55, Paternoster Row), compiled by the Rev. F. Langbridge. *The American Reader*, by Alfred H. Miles, price 6d., is also useful.—2. We do not know the piece entitled "How three Bachelors kept House." Perhaps some of our readers will help you.

AMILLA.—We are struck by the poem you send us. There is force and passion in it, and music of expression in sufficient degree to make us think that some day you may be able to do good work. The third verse is decidedly the best. You speak of "his" having been away "nine long years," and still describe him as quite young. Is this consistent with what you suggest of the story? The chief defect, from a literary point of view, is the interchange of "thou" and "you" in addressing the same person. We should caution you to be on your guard against a morbid tendency, and should strongly dissuade you from attempting, as yet, to publish a volume. Store your mind with good poetry, and study as much as you can, to lay up treasure that you may possibly use in after years.

A. H. L. B.—1. If your friends like to read our verses and you enjoy writing them, there seem no reason why you should not exercise your pen in this way. The two poems you enclose contain nothing original. "Owen" and "Home" are incorrect rhymes. We think the first specimen, "Love," is the better of the two.—2. Your writing is fairly good, but it appears to us that you use too fine or "scratchy" a pen. Many thanks for your kind note.

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE.

LYS DE FRANCE.—aged fifteen, wishes for an English girl correspondent, if one will send us her name and address for publication.

MADAMELEK MARIE ANNE CERNESSON. Sens (Yonne), France, 11 ans, désire correspondre avec une jeune fille anglaise; elle écrit en anglais, et sa correspondante en français. Adresse—chez M. Cernesson, professeur au lycée de Sens (Yonne), France, 1, rue de Montpézat.

MISS FLORA BOWMAN. 6, Granville Road, Yesmond, Newcastle-on-Tyne, aged 15, with a fair knowledge of French, would like to correspond with a French girl.

QUEENIE (Jersey), aged 18, would like to correspond with a French or German girl, or both, of about her own age.

MISS A. S. MILLAR. Lynville, Dunblane, Scotland, having observed our reply to "Friend Studio" (Budapesth), offers to correspond with her in English.

MISS MARIE ENTWISLE. of 1, William Street, Darwen, Lancashire, aged 19, would like to correspond with a well-educated, refined French young lady of about the same age.

PANSY in a HUMBLY EDINBURGH PLOT would be glad to correspond with a French girl of about her own age (18).