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## Original Communications.

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### A DISCUSSION ON THE TREATMENT OF INSOMNIA.

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The term insomnia includes such a variety of disorders of sleep that it is difficult to cover the general question of treatment in a brief paper. Possibly the only fair way to approach the subject is by first considering the physiology of sleep, as without this, all treatment is apt to become empirical, and indeed much of the routine treatment by drugs in the past has been open to this objection, and even to-day we cannot say that we understand the complex physiology of sleep as we hope to understand it later on. At the same time something has been done, and we can fairly claim that in some of the disorders of sleep we have rational treatment, quite in harmony with the most recent physiological discoveries.

The majority of physiological writers seem to agree that during normal sleep there is vascular dilatation of the skin, as a result of which there is a fall of blood pressure in the arteries at the base of the brain, and a lessened blood supply in the cortex. Elaborate theories have been propounded to account for this condition in which the vasomotor centre controlling the vessels of the skin plays such an important part.

Howell, of Johns Hopkins, has been one of the most recent to advance a new theory, and in the *Journal of Experimental Medicine*, Vol. II., No. 3, 1897, says : " This condition of anæmia, in connection with the withdrawal of external stimuli, causes a depression of the psychological processes in the brain cells, below the threshold of consciousness. The fall of blood pressure is due, in the first place, to a relaxation of tone in that portion of the vasomotor centre controlling