

## THE FACULTY OF IDLENESS.

Mr. Ernest Hart, the editor of the *Brit. Med. Jour.*, thus writes to his journal from Malta, where he has stopped on a sea-voyage :

A letter from ship-board can but be a vain thing, reflecting the idleness to which it is the first function of "a holiday at sea" to minister. Of such a state, there are many who can think only with pity, some only with disdain. To be shut up on ship-board is captivity ; but, perhaps, one which holiday-hopes and a catholic appetite render the most delightful of prisons, the least suggestive of walls and bars. Boswell said to Dr. Johnson, "We grow weary when idle;" and the laborious lexicographer replied to the effect that "that is because, others being busy, we want company ; but, were they also idle, there would be no weariness ; we should all entertain one another."

That is a vivid picture of life on board-ship on a cruise on summer seas. The faculty of idleness is, in my conviction, one which busy men do well to cherish and cultivate. "To possess the soul in peace" is a means of physical and intellectual health, and an aid to the development of wholesome individuality. To be happily idle is a duty much disregarded, a capacity probably insufficiently esteemed, and a factor which physicians may wisely introduce systematically into their own lives, and prescribe for their patients. Undeviating devotion to what a man calls his business is commonly rated as a part of wisdom and virtue ; but, if this be true, it is also only half true ; and I am inclined to agree with Robert Louis Stevenson, who, in one of his charming essays, asks whether this undeviating devotion is not inevitably apt to be sustained only by undeviating neglect of many other things ; and, again, whether it is at all certain that a man's "business" is the most important thing he has to do.

At any rate, in every man's life, there arrive seasons when it is well that he should step aside from the hustling crowd and struggling combat, to breathe a quiet air, dwell in other regions of thought, and understand, by inner experience, that in life there is a duty "to be," not at all less than a duty "to do." When physical infirmities accentuate this call, it need not be altogether regarded as a misfortune ; and the imper-

ative message to go South, or to dive into the far East, which wintry winds and chilly fogs bring to some of us, might well, perhaps, be more widely received and extensively obeyed. —*Med. Surg. Reporter.*

AN ERROR OF DIAGNOSIS.—Some years ago, we had the pleasure of hearing the following instructive anecdote of professional experience, from the lips of Marion Sims :

A Parisian lady of social prominence consulted Nelaton and Maisonneuve in regard to a tumour of the breast. The two distinguished surgeons agreed that the new growth was cancerous, and both advocated immediate removal. Nelaton advised the knife, while Maisonneuve expressed a preference for his caustic arrows. They called in Dr. Sims. He, after confirming the diagnosis, agreed with Nelaton as to the method of removal. The patient, however, was disgusted at the disagreement of the physicians, and decided to have nothing done. Years after, when Nelaton and Maisonneuve were both dead, Dr. Sims met the husband of the former patient on the streets of Paris. After a little conversation Dr. Sims was asked to call, the invitation being accompanied by the remark : "My wife would be delighted to see you." Dr. Sims called and found, instead of a second wife, whose existence he had taken for granted, his old patient, who was nearly as blooming and charming as ever. The "cancer" had disappeared.

When the leaders in the most exact branch of medicine make such mistakes and acknowledge them, who of us can pretend to be absolutely sure of a diagnosis ? If General Grant's physicians have made a wrong diagnosis, as the omniscient newspaper editors assure their readers, we shall esteem those physicians none the less ; they are men whose reputations are too firmly established to be destroyed by a single mistake. In the meantime everything points to the correctness of their diagnosis.

The brave General on his sick-bed has paid as little attention to the advice of the gentlemen of the daily press as he used to do on the battle-field. The physicians have shown equal good sense in not replying to the abusive criticisms that are heaped on them. The newspapers are the natural allies of quacks and charlatans, who furnish them with a good proportion of their advertising, and it is an acceptable task for them to attempt to destroy the reputation of a respectable practitioner of medicine.—*N. W. Lancet.*