

ON INDIGESTION AND CONSUMPTION.

CHAPTER I.

One of the most troublesome, prostrating and painful diseases, which confinement and muscular inactivity give rise to, is indigestion, or *dyspepsia*. This disease seems to be a severe penalty affixed to disobedience to the law of motion. The muscles of our body are made for action. Those that are not under the direction of the will are almost constantly at work. The heart, for instance, is nothing more than a muscle; its alternations from action to rest, and from rest to action, are quick and successive. If it should suspend its operations for a few moments, life would become extinct. The muscles which move the chest and carry on the process of respiration are equally as active. The muscles which produce all the voluntary movements of the body require exercise, or they become small, flabby and weak.

Inactivity, alone, enfeebles the body, and renders it inadequate to support itself under great fatigue, or overcome any violent disease. But add to this, intemperance in eating, bodily infirmities, and painful diseases, and a premature death follow as surely as the apple falls prematurely from its mother tree, when a canker has eaten into its very core.

Almost every man, whether he has little or much exercise, eats too much—more, we mean, than is necessary for the wants of his body. All the lower animals eat only in obedience to the cravings of hunger; but man, who may be made a little lower than the angels, often eats for fashion's sake—for amusement, on account of the delicious taste of some highly flavoured dish, or to oblige the kind solicitations of a friend. Let us describe as nearly as we can the course of many who enter stores early in life, and the ruinous consequences which we have positively known more than once to follow. A boy enters a store, for example, in Boston. He has just come from the country, where he has had free exercise, has breathed a pure air, and lived upon simple, but nutritious food. He is now confined to the store from sunrise till sundown, and, perhaps, all the evening, with the exception of walking a short distance for his meals. His food is entirely different from that to which he has been accustomed: he eats more fresh meat and pastry. He soon loses his rosy cheeks; his muscles do not retain their former strength and roundness; he grows tall, but he looks more like a slender stalk springing up from a shallow soil, than a deep-rooted plant which gives promise of abundant flowers. His ambition is excited—he wishes soon to become a man, and he solicits his master to let him take charge of the books, the very worst employment he can have at that time of life. He now remains, bent over the desk, day after day, and month after month; takes little or no exercise, grows weak and languid, but still he enjoys a tolerable degree of health and a good flow of spirits. He boards with a few pleasant associates, who must all have a lunch before going to bed, and he eats freely with them. His sleep, in consequence, is restless—frightful dreams annoy him—he awakes unrefreshed in the morning, his mouth tastes bad, he is a little feverish, and has a slight headache; he goes on in the same course, although he is making frightful inroads upon his constitution. He now forms a few acquaintances out of the family; he spends some of his evenings with them; perhaps he is flattered for his wit and his liberal feelings, and he eventually takes the lead of a little gang of convivial jokers—pretenders to social enjoyment, causers of liberality, and servile imitators of the vices of some older than themselves, whom they consider praiseworthy examples.

What are the effects resulting from such a course of life? A weakened constitution, and mental imbecility—moral and physical pain, and a premature death. We appeal to those who are older, and who have had more experience than ourselves. We ask them if this picture is not a true one? If so, in what does the remedy consist? It surely is not found in apothecaries' shops. It is not found in following the directions of ignorant pretenders. It is not found in pursuing

the same injudicious habits. No—it is found in daily exercise in the open air; in diminishing the quantity of food; in abandoning forever the practice of eating just before going to bed; in spending the evenings in cultivating the mind and morals. This is the course that must be pursued by those who would become useful to their masters—who desire to be rich, and have those feelings that are necessary to enjoy an abundance.

Masters should permit their clerks, who are confined to the desk, to take so much of exercise as is necessary for the preservation of their health. It is for their interests to attend to their clerks' health. Let the body become diseased, and the mind is weakened. It will be less able to withstand temptation, and it will be more likely to be led captive by unhallowed passions. Many clerks, we have no doubt, have sacrificed their masters' interest, and robbed their purses, for the purpose of gratifying desires that were riding triumphant over their bodily infirmities—desires that never would have gained an ascendancy, if their own physical powers had not been immolated upon the altar erected by their avaricious masters.

Unquestionably, there are many ladies, in cities, who are now suffering under the tortures of nervous irritability, consequent on indigestion, and want of muscular activity, and who, if they had the stimulus of prospective want, powerfully applied, would enjoy much better health, and live a greater number of years, than they now will.

We have had young men apply to us for relief from a languid feeling, a weakness in all their joints, and an indisposition to move, or apply themselves to their calling; but when they were asked whether they took much exercise, they almost invariably would answer no, for they did not feel strong enough. 'Is your appetite good?' 'Yes, excellent.' 'What do you eat?' 'Why, meat twice a day; a piece of pudding or pie at dinner, and drink a cup of coffee in the morning, and tea at night.' When urged to leave off drinking coffee and tea, and eating meat—to take exercise, and live upon bread and milk—they could not do it, for they were very weak, and wanted something to strengthen them. By requesting them to follow these simple directions for a few days, and promising that, if they were not better, medicines should be given, they have usually listened to the advice reluctantly—and are soon astonished at the change. They begin to have more strength, and their morbid appetite leaves them. What would have been the result, had they continued to eat as usual, and taken a little stimulus or tonic medicine? Why, they would have felt relieved for a few days; but when the stomach had been taxed to its utmost, it would have risen in rebellion, and have nullified the whole body.

What are the effects of *dyspepsia* on the intellectual faculties? The mind is weakened; it becomes irritable and peevish, the judgment is distracted, for it sees things through a false medium. The passions are less under controul; fearful anticipations of the future induce melancholy, which, if indulged, settles down into deep despair or woful insanity. In this state of mind, what are the honours or the possessions of the world, when the poor sufferer can no longer enjoy them, although they may be showered in profusion upon him.

We would say, then, to all young men, look to your health—to the cultivation of your mind, and your morals. We would also say to all young ladies, look well to your personal health; consider that you have many and important duties to perform; and, if your physical powers are prostrated, you are ill prepared for them. Your happiness, your comfort, and your duty admonish you, to take care of those powers, which the Great Author of our existence has entrusted to your care.

It is impossible, says the learned Bishop Taylor, to make people understand their own ignorance—for it requires knowledge to perceive it; and, therefore, he that can perceive it hath it not.