JAMES JOSEPH WALSH

HEALTH THROUGH WILL POWER

James Walsh

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Содержание

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PREFACE

A French surgeon to whom the remark was made in the third year of the War that France was losing an immense number of men replied: "Yes, we are losing enormously, but for every man that we lose we are making two men." What he meant, of course, was that the War was bringing out the latent powers of men to such an extent that every one of those who were left now counted for two. The expression is much more than a mere figure of speech. It is quite literally true that a man who has had the profound experience of a war like this becomes capable of doing ever so much more than he could before. He has discovered his own power. He has tapped layers of energy that he did not know he possessed. Above all, he has learned that his will is capable of enabling him to do things that he would have hesitated about and probably thought quite impossible before this revelation of himself to himself had been made.

In a word, the War has proved a revival of appreciation of the place of the human will in life. Marshal Foch, the greatest character of the War, did not hesitate even to declare that "A battle is the struggle of two wills. It is never lost until defeat is accepted. They only are vanquished who confess themselves to be."

Our generation has been intent on the development of the intellect. We have been neglecting the will. "Shell shock" experiences have shown us that the intellect is largely the source of unfavorable suggestion. The will is the controlling factor in the disease. Many another demonstration of the power of will has been furnished by the War. This volume is meant to help in the restoration of the will to its place as the supreme faculty in life, above all the one on whose exercise, more than any other single factor, depends health and recovery from disease. The time seems opportune for its appearance and it is commended to the attention of those who have recognized how much the modern cult of intellect left man unprepared for the ruder trails of life yet could not see clearly what the remedy might be.

CHAPTER I
THE WILL IN LIFE

"What he will he does and does so much
That proof is called impossibility."

Troilus and Cressida.

The place of the will in its influence upon health and vitality has long been recognized, not only by psychologists and those who pay special attention to problems of mental healing, but also, as a rule, by physicians and even by the general public. It is, for instance, a well-established practice, when two older folk, near relatives, are ill at the same time, or even when two younger persons are injured together and one of them dies, or perhaps has a serious turn for the worse, carefully to keep all knowledge of it from the other one. The reason is a very definite conviction that in the revulsion of feeling caused by learning of the fatality, or as a result of the solicitude consequent upon hearing that there has been a turn for the worse, the other patient's chances for recovery would probably be seriously impaired. The will to get better, even to live on, is weakened, with grave consequences. This is no mere popular impression due to an exaggeration of sympathetic feeling for the patient. It has been noted over and over again, so often that it evidently represents some rule of life, that whenever by inadvertence the serious condition or death of the other was made known, there was an immediate unfavorable development in the case which sometimes ended fatally, though all had been going well up to that time. This was due not merely to the shock, but largely to the "giving up", as it is called, which left the surviving patient without that stimulus from the will to get well which means so much.

It is surprising to what an extent the will may affect the body, even under circumstances where it would seem impossible that physical factors could any longer have any serious influence. We often hear it said that certain people are "living on their wills", and when they are of the kind who take comparatively little food and yet succeed in accomplishing a great deal of work, the truth of the expression comes home to us rather strikingly. The expression is usually considered, however, to be scarcely more than a formula of words elaborated in order to explain certain of these exceptional cases that seem to need some special explanation. The possibility of the human will of itself actually prolonging existence beyond the time when, according to all reason founded on physical grounds, life should end, would seem to most people to be quite out of the question. And yet there are a number of striking cases on record in which the only explanation of the continuance of life would seem to be that the will to live has been so strongly aroused that life was prolonged beyond even expert expectation. That the will was the survival factor in the case is clear from the fact that as soon as this active willing process ceased, because the reason that had aroused it no longer existed, the individuals in question proceeded to reach the end of life rapidly from the physical factors already at work and which seemed to portend inevitably an earlier dissolution than that which happened. Probably a great many physicians know of striking examples of patients who have lived beyond the time when ordinarily death would be expected, because they were awaiting the arrival of a friend from a distance who was known to be coming and whom the patient wanted very much to see. Dying mothers have lived on to get a last embrace of a son or daughter, and wives have survived to see their husbands for a last parting—though it seemed impossible that they should do so, so far as their physical condition was concerned—and then expired within a short time. Of course there are any number of examples in which this has not been true, but then that is only a proof of the fact that the great majority of mankind do not use their wills, or perhaps, having appealed to them for help during life never or but slightly, are not prepared to make a definite serious call on them toward the end. I

am quite sure, however, that a great many country physicians particularly can tell stories of incidents that to them were proofs that the will can resist even the approach of death for some time, though just as soon as the patients give up, death comes to them.

Professor Stokes, the great Irish clinician of the nineteenth century, to whom we owe so much of our knowledge of the diseases of the heart and lungs, and whose name is enshrined in terms commonly used in medicine in connection with these diseases, has told a striking story of his experiences in a Dublin hospital that illustrates this very well. An old Irishman, who had been a soldier in his younger years and had been wounded many times, was in the hospital ill and manifestly dying. Professor Stokes, after a careful investigation of his condition, declared that he could not live a week, though at the end of that time the old soldier was still hanging on to life, ever visibly sinking. Stokes assured the students who were making the rounds of his wards with him that the old man had at most a day or two more to live, and yet at the end of some days he was still there to greet them on their morning visits. After the way of medical students the world over, though without any of that hard-heartedness that would be supposed ordinarily to go with such a procedure, for they were interested in the case as a medical problem, the students began to bet how long the old man would live.

Finally, one day the old man said to Stokes in his broadest brogue: "Docther, you must keep me alive until the first of the month, because me pension for the quarther is then due, and unless the folks have it, shure they won't have anything to bury me with."

The first of the month was some ten days away. Stokes said to his students, though of course not in the hearing of the patient, that there was not a chance in the world, considering the old soldier's physical condition, that he would live until the first of the month. Every morning, in spite of this, when they came in, the old man was still alive and there was even no sign of the curtains being drawn around his bed as if the end were approaching. Finally on the morning of the first of the month, when Stokes came in, the old pensioner said to him feebly, "Docther, the papers are there. Sign them! Then they'll get the pension. I am glad you kept me alive, for now they'll surely have the money to bury me." And then the old man, having seen the signature affixed, composed himself for death and was dead in the course of a few hours. He had kept himself alive on his will because he had a purpose in it, and once that purpose was fulfilled, death was welcome and it came without any further delay.

There is a story which comes to us from one of the French prisons about the middle of the nineteenth century which illustrates forcibly the same power of the will to maintain life after it seemed sure, beyond peradventure, that death must come. It was the custom to bury in quicklime in the prison yard the bodies of all the prisoners who died while in custody. The custom still survives, or did but twenty years ago, even in English prisons, for those who were executed, as readers of Oscar Wilde's "Ballad of Reading Gaol" will recall. Irish prisons still keep up the barbarism, and one of the reasons for the bitterness of the Irish after the insurrection of 1916 in Dublin was the burial of the executed in quicklime in the prison yard. The Celtic mind particularly revolts at the idea, and it happened that one of the prisoners in a certain French prison, a Breton, a Celt of the Celts, was deeply affected by the thought that something like this might happen to him. He was suffering from tuberculosis at a time when very little attention was paid to such ailments in prisoners, for the sooner the end came, the less bother there was with them; but he was horrified at the thought that if he died in prison his body would disappear in the merciless fire of the quicklime.

So far as the prison physician could foresee, the course of his disease would inevitably reach its fatal termination long before the end of his sentence. In spite of its advance. however, the prisoner himself declared that he would never permit himself to die in prison and have his body face such a fate. His declaration was dismissed by the physician with a shrug and the feeling that after all it would not make very much difference to the man, since he would not be there to see or feel it. When, however, he continued to live, manifestly in the last throes of consumption, for weeks and even months after death seemed inevitable, some attention was paid to his declaration in the matter and the doctors began to give special attention to his case. He lived for many months after the time when, according

to all ordinary medical knowledge, it would seem he must surely have died. He actually outlived the end of his sentence, had arrangements made to move him to a house just beyond the prison gate as soon as his sentence had expired, and according to the story, was dead within twenty-four hours after the time he got out of prison and thus assured his Breton soul of the fact that his body would be given, like that of any Christian, to the bosom of mother earth.

But there are other and even more important phases of the prolongation of life by the will that still better illustrates its power. It has often been noted that men who have had extremely busy lives, working long hours every day, often sleeping only a few hours at night, turning from one thing to another and accomplishing so much that it seemed almost impossible that one man could do all they did, have lived very long lives. Men like Alexander Humboldt, for instance, distinguished in science in his younger life, a traveler for many years in that hell-hole of the tropics, the region around Panama and Central America, a great writer whose books deeply influenced his generation in middle age. Prime Minister of Prussia as an older man, lived to be past ninety, though he once confessed that in his forties he often slept but two or three hours a night and sometimes took even that little rest on a sofa instead of a bed. Leo XIII at the end of the nineteenth century was just such another man. Frail of body, elected Pope at sixty-four, it was thought that there would soon be occasion for another election; he did an immense amount of work, assumed successfully the heaviest responsibilities, and outlived the years of Peter in the Papal chair, breaking all the prophecies in that regard and not dying till he was ninety-three.

Many other examples might be cited. Gladstone, always at work, probably the greatest statesman of the nineteenth century in the better sense of that word, was a scholar almost without a peer in the breadth of his scholarly attainments, a most interesting writer on multitudinous topics, keen of interest for everything human and always active, and yet he lived well on into the eighties. Bismarck and Von Moltke, who assumed heavier responsibilities than almost any other men of the nineteenth century, saw their fourscore years pass over them a good while before the end came. Bismarck remarked on his eighty-first birthday that he used to think all the good things of life were confined to the first eighty years of life, but now he knew that there were a great many good things reserved for the second eighty years. I shall never forget sitting beside Thomas Dunn English, the American poet, at a banquet of the Alumni of the University of Pennsylvania, when he repeated this expression for us; at the time he himself was well past eighty. He too had been a busy man and yet rejoiced to be with the younger alumni at the dinner.

My dear old teacher, Virchow, of whom they said when he died that four men died, for he was distinguished not only as a pathologist, which was the great life-work for which he was known, but as an anthropologist, a historian of medicine and a sanitarian, was at seventy-five actively accomplishing the work of two or three men. He died at eighty-one, as the result of a trolley injury, or I could easily imagine him alive even yet. Von Ranke, the great historian of the popes, began a universal history at the age of ninety which was planned to be complete in twelve volumes, one volume a year to be issued. I believe that he lived to finish half a dozen of them. I have some dear friends among the medical profession in America who are in their eighties and nineties, and all of them were extremely busy men in their middle years and always lived intensely active lives. Stephen Smith and Thomas Addis Emmet, John W. Gouley, William Hanna Thompson, not long dead, and S. Weir Mitchell, who lived to be past eighty-five, are typical examples of extremely busy men, yet of extremely long lives.

All of these men had the will power to keep themselves busily at work, and their exercise of that will power, far from wearing them out, actually seemed to enable them to tap reservoirs of energy that might have remained latent in them. The very intensiveness of their will to do seemed to exert an extensive influence over their lives, and so they not only accomplished more but actually lived longer. Hard work, far from exhausting, has just the opposite effect. We often hear of hard work killing people, but as a physician I have carefully looked into a number of these cases and have never found one which satisfied me as representing exhaustion due to hard work. Insidious kidney disease,

rheumatic heart disease, the infections of which pneumonia is a typical example, all these have been the causes of death and not hard work, and they may come to any of us. They are just as much accidents as any other of the mischances of life, for it is as dangerous to be run into by a microbe as by a trolley car. Using the will in life to do all the work possible only gives life and gives it more abundantly, and people may rust out, that is be hurt by rest, much sooner than they will wear out.

Here, then, is a wellspring of vitality that checks for a time at least even lethal changes in the body and undoubtedly is one of the most important factors for the prolongation of life. It represents the greatest force for health and power of accomplishment that we have. Unfortunately, in recent years, it has been neglected to a great extent for a number of reasons. One of these has been the discussions as to the freedom of the will and the very common teaching of determinism which seemed to eliminate the will as an independent faculty in life. While this affected only the educated classes who had received the higher education, their example undoubtedly was pervasive and influenced a great many other people. Besides, newspaper and magazine writers emphasized for popular dissemination the ideas as to absence of the freedom of the will which created at least an unfortunate attitude of mind as regards the use of the will at its best and tended to produce the feeling that we are the creatures of circumstances rather than the makers of our destiny in any way, or above all, the rulers of ourselves, including even to a great extent our bodily energies.

Even more significant than this intellectual factor, in sapping will power has been the comfortable living of the modern time with its tendency to eliminate from life everything that required any exercise of the will. The progress which our generation is so prone to boast of concerns mainly this making of people more comfortable than they were before. The luxuries of life of a few centuries ago have now become practically the necessities of life of to-day. We are not asked to stand cold to any extent, we do not have to tire ourselves walking, and bodily labor is reserved for a certain number of people whom we apparently think of as scarcely counting in the scheme of humanity. Making ourselves comfortable has included particularly the removal of nearly all necessity for special exertion, and therefore of any serious exercise of the will. We have saved ourselves the necessity for expending energy, apparently with the idea that thus it would accumulate and be available for higher and better purposes.

The curious thing with regard to animal energy, however, is that it does not accumulate in the body beyond a certain limited extent, and all energy that is manufactured beyond that seems to have a definite tendency to dissipate itself throughout the body, producing discomfort of various kinds instead of doing useful work. The process is very like what is called short-circuiting in electrical machinery, and this enables us to understand how much harm may be done. Making ourselves comfortable, therefore, may in the end have just exactly the opposite effect, and often does. This is not noted at first, and may escape notice entirely unless there is an analysis of the mode of life which is directed particularly to finding out the amount of exertion of will and energy that there is in the daily round of existence.

The will, like so many other faculties of the human organism, grows in power not by resting but by use and exercise. There have been very few calls for serious exercise of the will left in modern life and so it is no wonder that it has dwindled in power. As a consequence, a good deal of the significance of the will in life has been lost sight of. This is unfortunate, for the will can enable us to tap sources of energy that might otherwise remain concealed from us. Professor William James particularly called attention to the fact, in his well-known essay on "The Energies of Men", that very few people live up to their ***maximum*** of accomplishment or their ***optimum*** of conduct, and that indeed "***as a rule men habitually use only a small part of the powers which they actually possess and which they might use under appropriate conditions.***"

It is with the idea of pointing out how much the will can accomplish in changing things for the better that this volume is written. Professor James quoted with approval Prince Pueckler-Muskau's expression, "I find something very satisfactory in the thought that man has the power of framing such

props and weapons out of the most trivial materials, indeed out of nothing, merely by the force of his will, which thereby truly deserves the name of omnipotent."[1]

It is this power, thus daringly called omnipotent, that men have not been using to the best advantage to maintain health and even to help in the cure of disease, which needs to be recalled emphatically to attention. The war has shown us in the persons of our young soldiers that the human will has not lost a single bit of its pristine power to enable men to accomplish what might almost have seemed impossible. One of the heritages from the war should be the continuance of that fine use of the will which military discipline and war's demands so well brought into play. Men can do and stand ever so much more than they realize, and in the very doing and standing find a satisfaction that surpasses all the softer pleasant feelings that come from mere comfort and lack of necessity for physical and psychical exertion. Their exercise of tolerance and their strenuous exertion, instead of exhausting, only makes them more capable and adds to instead of detracting from their powers.

How much this discipline and training of the will meant for our young American soldiers, some of whom were raised in the lap of luxury and almost without the necessity of ever having had to do or stand hard things previously in their lives, is very well illustrated by a letter quoted by Miss Agnes Repplier in the ***Century*** for December. It is by no means unique or even exceptional. There were literally thousands of such letters written by young officers similarly circumstanced, and it is only because it is typical and characteristic of the spirit of all of these young men that I quote it here. Miss Repplier says that it came from "a young American lieutenant for whom the world had been from infancy a perilously pleasant place." He wrote home in the early spring of 1918:

"It has rained and rained and rained. I am as much at home in a mud puddle as any frog in France, and I have clean forgotten what a dry bed is like. But I am as fit as a fiddle and as hard as nails. I can eat scrap iron and sleep standing. Aren't there things called umbrellas, which you pampered civilians carry about in showers?" If we can secure the continuance of this will exertion, life will be ever so much heartier and healthier and happier than it was before, so that the war shall have its compensations.

[1] "Tour in England, Ireland and France."

CHAPTER II
DREADS

"O, know he is the bridle of your will.
There's none but asses will be bridled so."

A Comedy of Errors.

It must be a surprise to most people, after the demonstration of the power of the will in the preceding chapter, that so many fail to make use of it. Indeed, the majority of mankind are quite unable to realize the store of energy for their health and strength and well-being which is thus readily available, though so often unused or called upon but feebly. The reason why the will is not used more is comparatively easy to understand, however, once its activity in ordinary conditions of humanity is analyzed a little more carefully. The will is unfortunately seldom permitted to act freely. Brakes are put on its energies by mental states of doubt and hesitation, by contrary suggestion, and above all by the dreads which humanity has allowed to fasten themselves on us until now a great many activities are hampered. There is the feeling that many things cannot be done, or may be accomplished only at the cost of so much effort and even hardship that it would be hopeless for any but those who are gifted with extremely strong wills to attempt them. People grow afraid to commit themselves to any purpose lest they should not be able to carry it out. Many feel that they would never be able to stand what others have stood without flinching and are persuaded that if ever they were placed in the position where they had to withstand some of the trials that they have heard of they would inevitably break down under the strain.

Just as soon as a human being loses confidence that he or she may be able to accomplish a certain thing, that of itself is enough to make the will ever so much less active than it would otherwise be. It is like breaking a piece of strong string: those who know how wrap it around their fingers, then jerk confidently and the string is broken. Those who fear that they may not be able to break it hesitate lest they should hurt themselves and give a half-hearted twitch which does not break the string; the only thing they succeed in doing is in hurting themselves ever so much more than does the person who really breaks it. After that abortive effort, they feel that they must be different from the others whose fingers were strong enough to break the string, and they hesitate about it and will probably refuse to make the attempt again.

It is a very old story,—this of dreads hampering the activities of mankind with lack of confidence, and the fear of failure keeping people from doing things. One of his disciples, according to a very old tradition, once asked St. Anthony the Hermit what had been the hardest obstacle that he found on the road to sanctity. The story has all the more meaning for us here if we recall that health and holiness are in etymology the same. St. Anthony, whose temptations have made him famous, was over a hundred at the time and had spent some seventy years in the desert, almost always alone, and probably knew as much about the inner workings of human nature from the opportunities for introspection which he had thus enjoyed as any human being who ever lived. His young disciple, like all young disciples, wanted a short cut on the pathway that they were both traveling. The old man said to him, "Well, I am an old man and I have had many troubles, but most of them never happened."

Many a nightmare of doubt and hesitation disappears at once if the dread of it is overcome. The troubles that never happen, if dwelt upon, paralyze the will until health and holiness become extremely difficult of attainment.

There is the secret of the failure of a great many people in life in a great many ways. They fear the worst, dread failure, dampen their own confidence, and therefore fritter away their own energy.

Anything that will enable them to get rid of the dreads of life will add greatly to their power to accomplish things inside as well as outside their bodies. Well begun is half done, and tackling a thing confidently means almost surely that it will be accomplished. If the dread of failure, the dread of possible pain in its performance, the dread of what may happen as a result of activity,—if all these or any of them are allowed to obtrude themselves, then energy is greatly lessened, the power to do things hampered and success becomes almost impossible. This is as true in matters of health and strength as it is with regard to various external accomplishments. It takes a great deal of experience for mankind to learn the lesson that their dreads are often without reality, and some men never learn it.

Usually when the word dreads is used, it is meant to signify a series of psychic or psychoneurotic conditions from which sensitive, nervous people suffer a great deal. There is, for instance, the dread of dirt called learnedly misophobia, that exaggerated fear that dirt may cling to the hands and prove in some way deleterious which sends its victims to wash their hands from twenty to forty times a day. Not infrequently they wash the skin pretty well off or at least produce annoying skin irritation as the result of their feeling. There are many other dreads of this kind. Some of them seem ever so much more absurd even than this dread of dirt. Most of us have a dread of heights, that is, we cannot stand on the edge of a height and look down without trembling and having such uncomfortable feelings that it is impossible for us to stay there any length of time. Some people also are unable to sit in the front row of the balcony of a theater or even to kneel in the front row of a gallery at church without having the same dread of heights that comes to others at the edge of a high precipice. I have among my patients some clergymen who find it extremely difficult to stand up on a high altar, though, almost needless to say, the whole height is at most five or six ordinary steps.

Then there are people who have an exaggerated dread of the dark, so that it is quite impossible for them to sleep without a light or to sleep alone. Sometimes such a dread is the result of some terrifying incident, as the case in my notes in which the treasurer of a university developed an intense dread of the dark which made sleep impossible without a light, after he had been shot at by a burglar who came into his room and who answered his demand, "Who is that?" by a bullet which passed through the head of the bed. Most of the skotophobists, the technical name for dark-dreaders, have no such excuse as this one. Victims of nervous dreads have as a rule developed their dread by permitting some natural feeling of minor importance to grow to such an extent that it makes them very miserable.

Some cannot abide a shut-in place. Philip Gilbert Hamerton, the English writer and painter, often found a railroad compartment in the English cars an impossible situation and had to break his journey in order to get over the growing feeling of claustrophobia, the dread of shut-in places, which would steal over him.

There are any number of these dreads and, almost needless to say, all of them may interfere with health and the pursuit of happiness. I have seen men and women thrown into a severe nervous state with chilly feelings and cold sweat as the result of trying to overcome one of these dreads. They make it impossible for their victims to do a great many things that other people do readily, and sadly hamper their wills. There is only one way to overcome these dreads, and that is by a series of acts in the contrary direction until a habit of self-control with regard to these haunting ideas is secured. All mankind, almost without exception, has a dread of heights, and yet many thousands of men have in recent years learned to work on high buildings without very much inconvenience from the dread. The wages are good, they ***want*** to work this way, and the result is they take themselves in hand and gradually acquire self-control. I have had many of them tell me that at first they were sure they would never be able to do it, but the gradual ascent of the building as the work proceeded accustomed them to height, and after a while it became almost as natural to work high up in the air as on the first or second story of a building or even on the level ground.

The overcoming of these dreads is not easy unless some good reason releases the will and sets it to exerting its full power. When this is the case, however, the dread is overcome and the brake lifted after some persistence, with absolute assurance. Men who became brave soldiers have been known

to have had a great dread of blood in early life. Some of our best surgeons have had to leave the first operation that they ever saw or they would have fainted, and yet after repeated effort they have succeeded in overcoming this sensitiveness. As a matter of fact, most people suffer so much from dreads because they yielded to a minor dread and allowed a bad habit to be formed. It is a question of breaking a bad habit by contrary acts rather than of overcoming a natural disposition. Many of those who are victims have the feeling that they cannot be expected to conquer nature this way. As a result, they are so discouraged at the very idea that success is dubious and practically impossible from their very attitude of mind; but it is only the second nature of a habit that they have to overcome, and this is quite another matter, for exactly contrary acts to these which formed a habit will break it.

Some of these dreads seem to be purely physical in origin or character yet prove to be merely or to a great degree only psychic states. Insomnia itself is more a dread than anything else. In writing for the International Clinics some years ago (Volume IV, Series XXVI) I dwelt on the fact that insomnia as a dread was probably responsible for more discomfort and complaints from mankind than almost anything else. Insomniaphobia is just such a dread as agoraphobia, the dread of open spaces; or akrophobia, the dread of heights; or skotophobia, the dread of the dark, and other phobias which afflict mankind. It is perfectly possible in most cases to cure such phobias by direct training against them, and this can be done also with regard to insomnia.

Some people, particularly those who have not been out much during the day and who have suffered from wakefulness a few times, get it on their mind that if this state keeps up they will surely lose their reason or their bodily health, and they begin to worry about it. They commence wondering about five in the afternoon whether they are going to be awake that night or not. It becomes a haunt, and no matter what they do during the evening every now and then the thought recurs that they will not sleep. By the time they actually lie down they have become so thoroughly occupied with that thought that it serves to keep them awake. Some of them avoid the solicitude before they actually get to bed, but begin to worry after that, and if after ten minutes they are not asleep, above all if they hear a clock strike somewhere, they are sure they are going to be awake, they worry about it, get themselves thoroughly aroused, and then they will not go to sleep for hours. It is quite useless to give such people drugs, just as useless as to attempt to give a man a drug to overcome the dread of heights or the dread of the dark or of a narrow street through which he has to pass. They must use their wills to help them out of a condition in which their dreads have placed them.

Apart from these neurotic dreads, quite unreasoning as most of them are, there are a series of what may be called intellectual dreads. These are due to false notions that have come to be accepted and that serve to keep people from doing things that they ought to do for the sake of their health, or set them performing acts that are injurious instead of beneficial. The dread of loss of sleep has often caused people to take somnifacients which eventually proved ever so much more harmful than would the loss of sleep they were meant to overcome. Many a person dreading a cold has taken enough quinine and whisky to make him more miserable the next day than the cold would have, had it actually made its appearance, as it often does not. The quinine and whisky did not prevent it, but the expectation was founded on false premises. There are a great many other floating ideas that prove the source of disturbing dreads for many people. A discussion of a few typical examples will show how much health may be broken by the dreads associated with various ills, for they often interfere with normal, healthy living.

"A little knowledge is a dangerous thing" applies particularly in this matter. There are many morbid fears that disturb mankind and keep us from accomplishing what might otherwise be comparatively easy. A great many people become convinced that they have some diseased condition, or morbid elements at least, in them which make it impossible for them to do as much as other people. Sometimes this morbid persuasion takes the form of hypochrondia and the individuals feel that they have a constitution that unfits them for prolonged and strenuous effort of any kind, so they avoid it. The number of valetudinarians, that is of those who live their lives mainly engaged in caring for their

health, though their physicians have never been able to find anything organically wrong with them, is much larger than might be imagined. This state of mind has been with us for many centuries, for the word which describes it, hypochondria, came to us originally from Greece and is an attempt to localize the affection in connection with its principal symptom, which is usually one of discomfort in the stomach region or to one side or the other of it, that is, in the hypochondria or beneath the ribs.

Such a state of mind, in which the patient is constantly complaining of one symptom or another, quite paralyzes the will. The individual may be able to do some routine work but he will not be able to have any initiative or energy for special developments of his occupation, and of course, when any real affection occurs, he will feel that he is quite unable to bear this additional burden of disease. Hypochondriacs, however, sometimes fairly enjoy their ill health and therefore have been known not infrequently to live on to a good, round old age, ever complaining more and more. It is their dread of disease that keeps them from getting better and prevents their wills from throwing off whatever symptoms there are and becoming perfectly well. Until something comes along and rouses their wills, there is no hope of affecting them favorably, and it is surprising how long the state may continue without any one ever having found any organic affection to justify all the discomforts of which they complain. Quite literally, they are suffering from complaints and not from disease in the ordinary sense of the word.

Sometimes these dreads of disease are dependent on some word which has taken on an exaggerated significance in people's minds. A word that in recent years has been the source of a great deal of unfavorable suggestion is "catarrh", and a mistaken notion of its meaning has been productive of a serious hampering of their will to be well in a number of persons. In itself, both according to its derivation and its accepted scientific significance, the word means only that first stage of inflammatory irritation of mucous membranes which causes secretion to flow more freely than normally. ***Catarrhein*** in Greek means only to flow down.[2]

By abuse, however, the word ***catarrh*** has come to mean in the minds of a great many people in our time a very serious inflammation of the mucous membranes, almost inevitably progressive and very often resulting in fetid diseased conditions of internal or external mucous membranes, very unpleasant for the patient and his friends and the source of serious complications and ***sequelae***. This idea has been fostered sedulously by the advertisers of proprietary remedies and the ingenious exploiters of various modes of treatment. As a result, a great many people who for one reason or another—usually because of some slight increase of secretion in the nose and throat—become convinced they have catarrh begin to feel that they cannot be expected to have as much resistive vitality as others, since they are the subjects of this serious progressive disease. As a matter of fact, very few people in America, especially those living in the northern or eastern States, are without some tendency to mild chronic catarrh. The violent changes of temperature and the damp, dark days predispose to it; but it produces very few symptoms except in certain particularly sensitive individuals whose minds become centered on slight discomforts in the throat and nose and who feel that they must represent some serious and probably progressive condition.

As a matter of fact, catarrh has almost nothing of the significance attributed to it so often in magazine and newspaper advertisements. Simple catarrh decreases without producing any serious result, and indeed it is an index of a purely catarrhal condition that there is a complete return to normal. Sometimes microbes are associated with its causation, but when this is so, they are bacteria of mild pathological virulence that do not produce deep changes. As for catarrh developing fetid,

[2] The word has, by the way, the same meaning as rheumatism, which is also from the Greek verb, to flow, though its application is usually limited to the serous membranes of the joints or the serous surfaces of the intermuscular planes. By derivation, catarrh is the same word also as gout, which comes from ***gutta*** in Latin, meaning a drop and implying secretory disturbances. These three words—catarrh, rheumatism, gout—have been applied to all sorts of affections and are so general in meaning as to be quite hard to define exactly. They have for this very reason, their vagueness, become a prolific source of unfortunate suggestion and of all kinds of dreads that disturb health.

foul-smelling discharges or odors, that is out of the question. There are certain affections, notably diphtheria, that may produce such serious changes in the mucous membranes that there will always even long after complete recovery be an unpleasant odorous condition, but it is probable that even in these cases there exists a special form of microbe quite rare in occurrence which produces the state known as ***ozena***.

As to catarrh spreading from the nose and throat to the other mucous membranes, that is also quite out of the question if it is supposed to occur in the way that the advertising specialist likes to announce. Catarrhal conditions may occur in the stomach, but like those of the nose and throat they are not serious, heal completely, and produce no definite changes. A pinch of snuff may cause a catarrhal condition of the nose, that is an increase of secretion due to hyperaemia of the mucous membrane; the eating of condiments, of Worcestershire sauce, peppers, and horse-radish may cause it in the stomach. It may be due to microbic action or to irritant or decomposing food, but it is not a part of a serious, wide-spreading pathological condition that will finally make the patient miserable. It is surprising, however, how many people say with an air of finality that they have catarrh, as if it should be perfectly clear that as a result they cannot be expected at any time to be in sufficiently good health to be called on for any special work, and of course if any affection should attack them, their natural immunity to disease has been so lowered by this chronic affection, of which they are the victims, that no strong resistance could be expected from them.

All this is merely a dread induced by paying too much attention to medical advertisements. It is better not to know as much as some people know, or think they know about themselves, than to know so many things that are not so. Their dreads seriously impair their power to work and leave them ill disposed to resist affections of any kind that may attack them. It is a sad confession to make, but not a little of the enforced study of physiology in our schools has become the source of a series of dreads and solicitudes rather than of helpful knowledge. We have as a result a generation who know a little about their internal economy, but only enough to make them worry about it and not quite enough to make them understand how thoroughly capable our organisms are of caring for themselves successfully and with resultant good health, if we will only refrain from putting brakes on their energies and disturbing their functions by our worries and anxieties.

Another such word as catarrh in its unfavorable suggestiveness in recent years has been auto-intoxication. It is a mouth-filling word, and therefore very probably it has occupied the minds of the better educated classes. Usually the form of auto-intoxication that is most spoken of is intestinal auto-intoxication, and this combination has for many people a very satisfying polysyllabic length that makes it of special significance. Its meaning is taken to be that whenever the contents of the intestines are delayed more than twenty hours or perhaps a little longer, or whenever certain irritant materials find their way into the intestinal tract, there is an absorption of toxic matter which produces a series of constitutional symptoms. These include such vague symptomatic conditions as sleepiness, torpor after meals, an uncomfortable sense of fullness—though when we were young we rather liked to have that feeling of fullness—and sometimes a feeling of heat in the skin with other sensations of discomfort in various parts of the body. At times there is headache, but this is rather rare; lassitude and a feeling of inability to do things is looked upon as almost characteristic of the condition. Usually there are nervous symptoms of one kind or another associated with the other complaints and there may be distinctly hysterical or psycho-neurotic manifestations.

Auto-intoxication as just described has become a sort of fetish for a great many people who bow down and worship at its shrine and give some of the best of their energies and not a little of their time to meditation before it. As a matter of fact, in the last few years it has come to be recognized that auto-intoxication is a much abused word employed very often when there are serious organic conditions in existence elsewhere in the body and still more frequently when the symptoms are due merely to functional nervous troubles. These are usually consequent upon a sedentary life, lack of fresh air and exercise, insufficient attention to the diet in the direction of taking simple and coarse food, and

generally passing disturbances that can be rather readily catalogued under much simpler affections than a supposed absorption of toxic materials from the intestines. Reflexes from the intestinal tract, emphasized by worries about the condition, are much more responsible for the feelings complained of—which are often not in any sense symptoms—than any physical factors present.

As Doctor Walter C. Alvarez said in a paper on the "Origin of the So-called Auto-intoxicational Symptoms" published from the George Williams Hooper Foundation for Medical Research of the University of California Medical School,[3] as the conclusion of his investigation of the subject:

> "Auto-intoxication is commonly diagnosed when a physical examination would show other more definite causes for the symptoms. Those who believe that intestinal stasis can account for a long list of disease conditions have little proof to offer for their views. Many of the assumptions on which they rest their case have proved to be wrong.
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> "The usual symptoms of the constipated disappear so promptly after a bowel movement that they cannot be due to absorbed toxins. They must be produced mechanically by distension and irritation of the colon. They occur in nervous, sensitive people. It has been shown that various activities of the digestive tract can profoundly affect the sensorium and the vasomotor nerves. The old ideas of insidious poisoning led to the formation of hypochrondriacs; the new explanation helps to cure many of them."

There are many other terms in common use that have unfortunate suggestions and make people feel, if they once get the habit of applying them to themselves, that they are the subject of rather serious illness. I suppose that one of the most used and most abused of these is uric acid and the uric acid diathesis. Scientific physicians have nearly given up these terms, but a great many people are still intent on making themselves miserable. All sorts of symptoms usually due to insufficient exercise and air, inadequate diversion of mind and lack of interests are attributed to these conditions. Some time or other a physician or perhaps some one who is supposed to be a friend suggested them and they continue to hamper the will to be well by baseless worries founded on false notions for years afterwards. What is needed is a definite effort of the will to throw off these nightmares of disease that are so disturbing and live without them.

It is surprising how much vital energy may be wasted in connection with such dreads. Unfortunately, too, medicines of various kinds are taken to relieve the symptoms connected with them and the medicine does ever so much more harm than good. Oliver Wendell Holmes declared a generation ago that if all the medicines that had ever been taken by mankind were thrown into the sea it would be much better for mankind and much worse for the fishes. The expression still has a great truth in it, especially as regards that habit of self-drugging so common among the American people. In the course of lecture engagements, I stay with very intelligent friends on a good many occasions each year, and it is surprising how many of them have medicine bottles around, indicating that they are subject to dreads of various kinds with regard to themselves for which they feel medicine should be taken. These dreads unfortunately often serve to lessen resistive vitality to real affections when they occur and therefore become a source of real danger.

All these various dreads, then, have the definite effect of lessening the power of the will to enable people to do their work and remain well. They represent serious brakes upon the flow of nerve impulses from the spiritual side of man's nature to the physical. This is much more serious in its results than would usually be thought; and one of the things that a physician has to find out from a great many patients is what sources of dread they are laboring under so as to neutralize them or at least correct them as far as possible. It is surprising how much good can be accomplished by a deliberate

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[3] ***Journal of the American Medical Association*** , January 4, 1919.

quest after dreads and the direct discussion of them, for they are always much less significant when brought out of the purlieus of the mind directly into the open. Many a neurotic patient, particularly, will not be improved until his dreads are relieved. This form of psycho-analysis rather than the search for sex insults, as they are called, or sexual incidents of early life, is the hopeful phase of modern psychological contribution to therapeutics.

CHAPTER III
HABITS

"Why, will shall break it; will and nothing else."

Love's Labor's Lost

Dreads are brakes on the will, inhibitions which prevent its exercise and make accomplishment very difficult and sometimes impossible. They represent mainly a state of mind, yet often they contain physical elements, and the disposition counts for much. Their counterpart in the opposite direction is represented by habits which are acquired facilities of action for good or for ill. Habits not only make activities easy but they even produce such a definite tendency to the performance of certain actions as to make it difficult not to do them. They may become so strong as to be tyrants for ill, though it must not be forgotten that properly directed they may master what is worst in us and help us up the hill of life. Acts that are entirely voluntary and very difficult at first may become by habit so natural that it is extremely difficult to do otherwise than follow the ingrained tendency. Nature's activities are imperative. Habitual actions may become equally so. When some one once remarked to the Duke of Wellington that habit was second nature, he replied:

"Oh, ever so much more than that! Habit may be ten times as strong as nature."

The function of the will in health is mainly to prevent the formation of bad habits or break those that have been formed, but above all, to bring about the formation of habits that will prevent as far as is possible the development of tendencies to disease in the body, Man probably faces no more difficult problem in life than the breaking of a bad habit. Usually it requires the exercise of all his will power applied to its fullest extent. If there is a more difficult problem than the breaking of a bad habit it is the formation of a good one late in life because of the persistency of advertence and effort that is required. It is comparatively easy to prevent the formation of bad habits and also easy to form good habits in the earlier years. The organism is then plastic and yields itself readily and thus becomes grooved to the habit or hardened against it by the performance of even a few acts.

All the psychologists insist that after the period of the exercise of instinct as the basis of life passes, habit becomes the great force for good or for ill. We become quite literally a bundle of habits, and the success of life largely depends on whether these habits are favorable or unfavorable to the accomplishment of what is best in us. More than anything else health depends on habit. We begin by doing things more or less casually, and after a time a tendency to do them is created; then almost before we know it, we find that we have a difficult task before us, if we try not to do them.

To begin with, the activity which becomes the subject of a habit may be distinctly unpleasant and require considerable effort to accomplish. Practically every one who has learned to smoke recalls more or less vividly the physical disturbance caused by the first attempt and how even succeeding smokes for some time, far from being pleasant, required distinct effort and no little self-control. After a time, the desire to smoke becomes so ingrained that a man is literally made quite miserable by the lack of it and finds himself almost incapable of doing anything else until he has had his smoke.

Even more of an effort is required to establish the habit of chewing tobacco, and it is even more difficult to break when once it has been formed. Any one who has seen the discomfort and even torments endured by a man who, after he had chewed tobacco for many years, tried to stop will appreciate fully what a firm hold the habit has obtained. I have known a serious business man who almost had to give up business, who lost his sleep and his appetite and went through a nervous crisis merely by trying to break the habit of chewing tobacco.

In the Orient they chew betel nut. It is an extremely hot material which burns the tongue and which a man can stand for only a very short time when he first tries it. After a while, however, he finds a pleasant stimulation of sensation in the constant presence of the biting betel nut in his mouth; he craves it and cannot do his work so well without it. He will ever advert to its use and will be restless without it. He continues to use it in spite of the fact that the intense irritation set up by the biting qualities of the substance causes cancer of the tongue to occur ten times as frequently among those who chew betel nut as among the rest of the population. Not all those who chew it get cancer, for some die from other causes before there is time for the cancer to develop, and some seem to possess immunity against the irritation. The betel nut chewer ignores all this, proceeds to form the habit, urged thereto by the force of example, and then lets himself drift along, hoping that it will have no bad effects.

The alcohol and drug habits are quite as significant in shortening life as betel nut and yet men take them up quite confident in the beginning that ***they*** will not fall victims, and then find themselves enmeshed. It is probable that the direct physical effects of none of these substances shorten life to a marked degree unless they are indulged in to very great excess, but the moral hazards which they produce, accidents, injuries of various kinds, exposure to disease, all these shorten life. Men know this very well, and yet persist in the formation of these habits.

Any habit, no matter how strong, can be broken if the individual really wishes to break it, provided the subject of it is not actually insane or on the way to the insane asylum. He need only get a motive strong enough to rouse his will, secure a consciousness of his own power, and then the habit can be broken. After all, it must never be forgotten that the only thing necessary in order to break a habit effectively is to refuse to perform a single act of it, the next time one is tempted. That breaks the habit and makes refusal easier and one need only continue the refusal until the temptation ceases.

Men who have not drawn a sober breath for years have sometimes come to the realization of the fools that they were making of themselves, the injury they were doing their relatives, or perhaps have been touched by a child's words or some religious motive, and after that they have never touched liquor again. Father Theobald Mathew's wonderful work in this regard among the Irish in the first half of the nineteenth century has been repeated by many temperance or total abstinence advocates in more recent generations. I have known a confirmed drunkard reason himself into a state of mind from which he was able to overcome his habit very successfully, though his reasoning consisted of nothing more than the recognition of the fact that suggestion was the root of his craving for alcohol. His father had been a drunkard and he had received so many warnings from all his older relatives and had himself so come to dwell on the possible danger of his own formation of the habit that he had suggested himself into the frame of mind in which he took to drink. I have known a physician on whom some half a dozen different morphine cures had been tried—always followed by a relapse—cure himself by an act of his own will and stay cured ever since because of an incident that stirred him deeply enough to arouse his will properly to activity. One day his little boy of about four was in his office when father prepared to give himself one of his usual injections of morphine. The little boy gave very close attention to all his father's manipulations, and as the doctor was hurrying to keep an appointment, he did not notice the intent eye witness of the proceedings. Just as the needle was pushed home and the piston shot down in the barrel, the little boy rushed over to his father and said, "Oh, Daddy, do that to me." Apparently this close childish observer had noted something of the look of satisfaction that came over his father's face as he felt the fluid sink into his tissues. It is almost needless to say that the shock the father received was enough to break his morphine habit for good and all. It simply released his will and then he found that if he really wanted to, he could accomplish what the various cures for the morphine habit only lead up to—and in his case unsuccessfully—the exercise of his own will power.

The word "habit" suggests nearly always, unfortunately, the thought of bad habits, just as the word "passion" implies, with many people, evil tendencies. But it must not be forgotten that there are

good passions and good habits that are as helpful for the accomplishment of what is best in life as bad passions and bad habits are harmful. A repetition of acts is needed for the formation of good habits just as for the establishment of customs of evil. Usually, however, and this must not be forgotten, the beginning of a good habit is easier than the beginning of a bad habit. Once formed, the good habits are even more beneficial than the bad habits are harmful. It is almost as hard to break a good habit as a bad one, provided that it has been continued for a sufficient length of time to make that groove in the nervous system which underlies all habit. We cannot avoid forming habits and the question is, shall we form good or bad habits? Good habits preserve health, make life easier and happier; bad habits have the opposite effect, though there is some countervailing personal element that tempts to their formation and persistence.

Every failure to do what we should has its unfortunate effect upon us. We get into a state in which it is extremely difficult for us to do the right things. We have to overcome not only the original inertia of nature, but also a contrary habit. If we do not follow our good impulses, the worse ones get the upper hand. As Professor James said, for we must always recur to him when we want to have the clear expression of many of these ideas:

> "Just as, if we let our emotions evaporate, they get into a way of evaporating; so there is reason to suppose that if we often flinch from making an effort, before we know it the effort-making capacity will be gone; and that, if we suffer the wandering of our attention, presently it will wander all the time. Attention and effort are but two names for the same psychic fact. To what brain-processes they correspond we do not know. The strongest reason for believing that they do depend on brain processes at all and are not pure acts of the spirit, is just this fact, that they seem in some degree subject to the law of habit, which is a material law."

It must not be forgotten that we mold not alone what we call character, but that we manifestly produce effects upon our tissues that are lasting. Indeed it is these that count the most, for health at least. It is the physical basis of will and intellect that is grooved by what we call habit. As Doctor Carpenter says:

> "Our nervous systems have grown to the way in which they have been exercised, just as a sheet of paper or a coat, once creased or folded, tends to fall forever afterwards into the same identical fold."

Permitting exceptions to occur when we are forming a habit is almost necessarily disturbing. The classical figure is that it is like letting fall a ball of string which we have been winding. It undoes in a moment all that we have accomplished in a long while. As Professor Bain has said it so much better than I could, I prefer to quote him:

> "The peculiarity of the moral habits, contradistinguishing them from the intellectual acquisitions, is the presence of two hostile powers, one to be gradually raised into the ascendant over the other. It is necessary, above all things, in such a situation never to lose a battle. Every gain on the wrong side undoes the effect of many conquests on the right. The essential precaution, therefore, is so to regulate the two opposing powers that the one may have a series of uninterrupted successes, until repetition has fortified it to such a degree as to enable it to cope with the opposition under any circumstances."

This means training the will by a series of difficult acts, accomplished in spite of the effort they require, but which gradually become easier from repeated performance until habit replaces nature and dominates the situation.

Serious thinkers who faced humanity's problems squarely and devoted themselves to finding solutions for them had worked out this formula of the need of will training long ago, and it was indeed

a principal characteristic of medieval education. The old monastic schools were founded on the idea that training of the will and the formation of good habits was ever so much more important than the accumulation of information. They frankly called the human will the highest faculty of mankind and felt that to neglect it would be a serious defect in education. The will can only be trained by the accomplishment of difficult things day after day until its energies are aroused and the man becomes conscious of his own powers and the ability to use them whenever he really wishes. There was a time not so long since, and there are still voices raised to that purport, when it was the custom to scoff at the will training of the older time and above all the old-fashioned suggestion that mortifications of various kinds—that is, the doing of unpleasant things just for the sake of doing them—should be practiced because of the added will power thus acquired. The failure of our modern education which neglected this special attention to the will is now so patent as to make everyone feel that there must be a recurrence to old time ideas once more.

The formation of proper habits should, then, be the main occupation of the early years. This will assure health as well as happiness, barring the accidents that may come to any human being. Good habits make proper living easy and after a time even pleasant, though there may have been considerable difficulty in the performance of the acts associated with them at the beginning. Indeed, the organism becomes so accustomed to their performance after a time that it becomes actually something of a trial to omit them, and they are missed.

Education consists much more in such training of the will than in storing the intellect with knowledge, though the latter idea has been unfortunately the almost exclusive policy in our education in recent generations. We are waking up to the fact that diminution of power has been brought about by striving for information instead of for the increase of will energy.

Professor Conklin of Princeton, in his volume on "Heredity and Environment", emphasized the fact that "Will is indeed the supreme human faculty, the whole mind in action, the internal stimulus which may call forth all the capacities and powers." He had said just before this: "It is one of the most serious indictments against modern systems of education that they devote so much attention to the training of the memory and intellect and so little attention to the training of the will, upon the proper development of which so much depends."

Nor must it be thought that the idea behind this training of the will is in any sense medievally ascetic and old-fashioned and that it does not apply to our modern conditions and modes of thinking. Professor Huxley would surely be the one man above all whom any one in our times would be least likely to think of as mystical in his ways or medieval in his tendencies. In his address on "A Liberal Education and Where to Find It", delivered before the South London Workingmen's College some forty years ago, in emphasizing what he thought was the real purpose of education, he dwelt particularly on the training of the will. He defined a liberal education not as so many people might think of it in terms of the intellect, but rather in terms of the will. He said that a liberal education was one "which has not only prepared a man to escape the great evils of disobedience to natural laws, but has trained him to appreciate and to seize upon the rewards which nature scatters with as free a hand as her penalties." And then he added:

> "That man, I think, has had a liberal education who has been so trained in youth that his body is the ready servant of his will, and does with ease and pleasure all the work that, as a mechanism, it is capable of; whose intellect is a clear, cold, logic engine, with all its parts of equal strength, and in smooth working order, ready, like a steam engine, to be turned to any kind of work, and spin the gossamers as well as forge the anchors of the mind; whose mind is stored with a knowledge of the great and fundamental truths of nature and of the laws of her operations; one who is no stunted ascetic but who is full of life and fire, but whose passions are trained to come to heel by a vigorous will, the servant of a tender conscience; who

> has learned to love all beauty, whether of nature or of art, to hate all vileness, and to respect others as himself.
>
> "Such an one and no other, I conceive, has had a liberal education; for he is, completely as a man can be, in harmony with nature."

This is the liberal education in habits of order and power that every one must strive for, so that all possible energies may be available for the rewards of good health. Details of the habits that mean much for health must be reserved for subsequent chapters, but it must be appreciated in any consideration of the relation of the will to health that good habits formed as early as possible in life and maintained conservatively as the years advance are the mainstay of health and the power to do work.

CHAPTER IV
SYMPATHY

"Never could maintain his part but in the force of his will."

Much Ado about Nothing

A great French physician once combined in the same sentence two expressions that to most people of the modern time would seem utter paradoxes. "Rest," he said, "is the most dangerous of remedies, never to be employed for the treatment of disease, except in careful doses, under the direction of a physician and rarely for any but sufferers from organic disease"; while "sympathy", he added, "is the most insidiously harmful of anodynes, seldom doing any good except for the passing moment, and often working a deal of harm to the patient."

With the first of these expressions, we have nothing to do here, but the second is extremely important in any consideration of the place of the will in human life. Nothing is so prone to weaken the will, to keep it from exerting its full influence in maintaining vital resistance, and as a result, to relax not only the moral but the physical fiber of men and women as misplaced sympathy. It has almost exactly the same place in the moral life that narcotics have in the physical, and it must be employed with quite as much nicety of judgment and discrimination.

Sympathy of itself is a beautiful thing in so far as it implies that ***suffering with*** another which its Greek etymology signifies. In so far as it is pity, however, it tends to lessen our power to stand up firmly under the trials that are sure to come, and is just to that extent harmful rather than helpful. There is a definite reaction against it in all normal individuals. No one wants to be pitied. We feel naturally a little degraded by it. In so far as it creates a feeling of self-pity, it is particularly to be deprecated, and indeed this is so important a subject in all that concerns the will to be well and to get well that it has been reserved for a special chapter. What we would emphasize here is the harm that is almost invariably done by the well-meant but so often ill-directed sympathy of friends and relatives which proves relaxing of moral purpose and hampers the will in its activities, physical as well as ethical.

Human nature has long recognized this and has organized certain customs of life with due reference to it. We all know that when children fall and even hurt themselves, the thing to do is not to express our sympathy and sorrow for them, even though we feel it deeply, but unless their injury is severe, to let them pick themselves up and divert their minds from their hurts by suggesting that they have broken the floor, or hurt it. For the less sympathy expressed, the shorter will be the crying, and the sooner the child will learn to take the hard knocks of life without feeling that it is especially abused or suffering any more than comes to most people. Unfortunately, it is not always the custom to do the same thing with the children of a larger growth. This is particularly true when there is but a single child in the family, or perhaps two, when a good deal of sympathy is likely to be wasted on their ills which are often greatly increased by their self-consciousness and their dwelling on them. Diversion of mind, not pity, is needed. The advice to do the next thing and not cry over spilt milk is ever so much better than sentimental recalling of the past.

Many a young man who went to war learned the precious lesson that sympathy, though he might crave it, instead of doing him good would do harm. Many a manly character was rounded out into firm self-control and independence by military discipline and the lack of anything like sentimentality in camp and military life. A good many mothers whose boys had been the objects of their special solicitude felt very sorry to think that they would have to submit to the hardships and trials involved

in military discipline. Most of them who were solicitous in this way were rather inclined to feel that their boy might not be able to stand up under the rigidities of military life and hoped at most that he would not be seriously harmed. They could not think that early rising, hard work, severe physical tasks, tiring almost to exhaustion, with plain, hearty, yet rather coarse food, eaten in slapdash fashion, would be quite the thing for their boy of whom they had taken so much care. Not a few of them were surprised to find how the life under these difficult circumstances proved practically always beneficial.

I remember distinctly that when the soldiers were sent to the Mexican border the mother of a soldier from a neighboring State remarked rather anxiously to me that she did not know what would happen to Jack under the severe discipline incident to military life. He had always gone away for five or six weeks in the summer either to the mountains or to the seashore, and the Mexican border, probably the most trying summer climate in the United States, represented the very opposite of this. Besides, there was the question of the army rations; Jack was an only son with five sisters. Most of them were older than he, and so Jack had been coddled as though by half a dozen mothers. He was underweight, he had a rather finicky appetite, he was capricious in his eating both as to quantity and quality, and was supposed to be a sufferer from some form of nervous indigestion. Personally, I felt that what Jack needed was weight, but I had found it very hard to increase his weight. He was particularly prone to eat a very small breakfast, and his mother once told me that whenever he was at home, she always prepared his breakfast for him with her own hands. This did not improve matters much, however, for Jack was likely to take a small portion of the meat cooked for him, refuse to touch the potatoes, and eat marmalade and toast with his coffee and nothing more. No wonder that he was twenty pounds underweight or that his mother should be solicitous as to what might happen to her Jack in army life at the Border.

I agreed with her in that but there were some things that I knew would not happen to Jack. His breakfast, for instance, would not be particularly cooked for him, and he might take or leave exactly what was prepared for every one else. Neither would the Government cook come out and sit beside Jack while he was at breakfast and tempt him to eat, as his mother had always done. I knew, too, that at other meals, while the food would be abundant, it would usually be rather coarse, always plain, and there would be nothing very tempting about it unless you had your appetite with you. If ever there is a place where appetite is the best sauce, it is surely where one is served with army food.

I need scarcely tell what actually happened to Jack, for it was exactly what happened to a good many Jacks whose mothers were equally afraid of the effects of camp life on them. Amid the temptations of home food, Jack had remained persistently underweight. Eating an army ration with the sauce of appetite due to prolonged physical efforts in the outdoor air every day, Jack gained more than twenty pounds in weight, in spite of the supposedly insalubrious climate of the Border and the difficult conditions under which he had to live. It was literally the best summer vacation that Jack had ever spent, though if the suggestion had ever been made that this was the sort of summer vacation that would do him good, the idea would have been scoffed at as impractical, if not absolutely impossible.

Homer suggested that a mollycoddle character whom he introduces into the "Iliad" owed something of his lack of manly stamina to the fact that he had six sisters at home, and an Irish friend once translated the passage by saying that the young man in question was "one of seven sisters." This had been something of Jack's trouble. He had been asked always whether he changed his underwear at the different seasons, whether he wore the wristlets that sisterly care provided for him, whether he put on his rubbers when he went out in damp weather and carried his umbrella when it was threatening rain, and all the rest. He got away from all this sympathetic solicitude in army life and was ever so much better for it.

It is extremely difficult to draw the line where the sympathy that is helpful because it is encouraging ends, and sentimental pity which discourages begins. There is always danger of overdoing and it is extremely important that growing young folks particularly should be allowed to bear their ills without help and learn to find resources within themselves that will support them. The will can

thus be buttressed to withstand the difficulties of life, make them much easier to bear, and actually lessen their effect. Ten growing young folks have been seriously hurt by ill-judged sympathy for every one that has been discouraged by the absence of sympathy or by being made to feel that he must take the things of life as they come and stand them without grouchy complaint or without looking for sympathy.

This is particularly true as regards those with any nervous or hysterical tendencies, for they readily learn to look for sympathy. The most precious lesson of the war for physicians has been that which is emphasized in the chapter on "The Will and the War Psychoneuroses." There was an immense amount of so-called "shell-shock" which really represented functional neurotic conditions such as in women used to be called hysteria. At the beginning of the war there was a good deal of hearty sympathy with it, and patients were encouraged by the physicians and then by the nurses and other patients in the hospital to tell over and over again how their condition developed. It was found after a time that the sympathy thus manifested always did harm. The frequent repetition of their stories added more and more suggestive elements to the patients' condition, and they grew worse instead of better. It was found that the proper curative treatment was to make just as little as possible of their condition, to treat them firmly but with assurance—once it had been definitely determined that no organic nervous trouble was present—and to bring about a cure of whatever symptoms they had at a single sitting by changing their attitude of mind towards themselves.

Some of the patients proved refractory and for these isolation and rather severe discipline were occasionally necessary. The isolation was so complete as to deprive them not only of companionship but also of reading and writing materials and the solace of their tobacco. Severe cases were sometimes treated by strong faradic currents of electricity which were extremely painful. Patients who insisted that they could not move their muscles were simply made to jump by an electric shock, thus proving to them that they could use the muscles, and then they were required to continue their use.

Those suffering from shell-shock deafness and muteness were told that an electrode would be applied to their larynx or the neighborhood of their ear and when they felt pain from it, that was a sign that they were able to talk and to hear if they wished, and that they must do so. Relapses had to be guarded against by suggestion, and where relapses became refractory and stronger currents of electricity to ear and larynx were deemed inadvisable, the strict isolation treatment usually proved effective.

In a word, discipline and not sympathy was the valuable mode of treating them. Sympathy did them harm as it invariably does. The world has recognized this truism always, but we need to learn the lesson afresh, or the will power is undermined. Character is built up by standing the difficult things of life without looking for the narcotic of sympathy or any other anaesthetizing material. These are "hard sayings," to use a Scriptural expression, but they represent the accumulation of wisdom of human experience. Sympathy can be almost as destructive of individual morale as the dreads, and it is extremely important that it should not be allowed to sap will energy. In our time above all, when the training of the will has been neglected, though it is by far the most important factor in education, this lesson with regard to the harmful effect of sympathy needs to be emphasized.

For nervous people, that is, for those who have, either from inheritance or so much oftener from environment, yielded to circumstances rather than properly opposed them, sympathy is quite as dangerous as opium. George Eliot once replied to a friend who asked her what was duty, that duty consisted in facing the hard things in life without taking opium.

Healthy living to a great extent depends on standing what has to be borne from the bodies that we carry around with us without looking for sympathy. It has often been emphasized that human beings are eminently lonely. The great experiences of life and above all, death and suffering, we have to face by ourselves and no one can help us. We may not be, as Emerson suggested, "infinitely repellent particles", but at all the profoundest moments of life we feel our alone-ness. The more that

we learn to depend bravely on ourselves and the less we seek outside support for our characters, the better for us and our power to stand whatever comes to us in life.

Physical ills are always lessened by courageously facing them and are always increased by cringing before them. The one who dreads suffers both before and during the time of the pain and thus doubles his discomfort. We must stand alone in the matter and sympathy is prone to unman us. Looking for sympathy is a tendency to that self-pity which is treated in a subsequent chapter and which does more to increase discomfort in illness, exaggerate symptoms, and lower resistive vitality than anything else, in the psychic order at least.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.