

## CHAPTER IX.

LAWS OF HEALTH—RECKLESSNESS IN LIVING—SUNSTROKE—  
NECESSARY MEDICINES—FORMS OF DIFFERENT ILLS—  
PRICKLY HEAT—PRECAUTIONS WHEN CAMPING OUT—  
JUNGLE FEVER—ENLARGED SPLEEN—COLD WEATHER  
FEYER—WATER SUPPLY IN FACTORIES—THE COOLIE  
HOSPITAL—SNAKE BITES.

WE must not pass on without a few remarks on the laws of health necessary to be observed for the well-being of both European and native. To keep in a condition of good health, under the terrible strain of climatic influences, is a most essential consideration for the successful carrying through of work to be done ; at the same time, while in Assam, difficult of accomplishment. Men in their lonely lives out there are dependent on themselves and their good health for continuing in their billets : a planter that is weak and sickly is incapable of doing his employers justice, and is best out of the country. There are such innumerable little inconveniences, a lack of comforts, deficiencies in quality of food, sudden variations of temperature, etc., that the temper and health have both a severe strain put upon them. Any little illness is greatly aggravated by the sufferer being

confined to the bungalow, where exercise is out of the question ; for in this country activity means health, and directly a small ache or pain steps in, all exposure to the sun must be avoided. Among the smaller ills, men in this vile country suffer terribly from tooth-ache. Teeth decay at an alarming pace, whether from the complete change of diet to which Europeans have always been accustomed, or what not, it is hard to tell.

Liability to any of the before-mentioned discomforts and the hard work together induce a spirit of recklessness in living which results in eating things that are totally unsuited to the climate, or in indulging in too many "pegs," and false methods of stimulating the appetite. A jaded appetite longs for something palatable, so under the disguise of various condiments, chutnees, etc., many otherwise tasteless morsels are taken into the system. Exposure to the sun—an everyday and all-day evil that cannot be avoided in a planter's business—is the foundation on which nearly all diseases are based. With the ordinary protection afforded by a good thick solar topee, the bad effects of a midday's sun can be warded off, to a limited extent ; but it is after a long period of fasting, or immediately after a heavy meal, at which something more powerful than water has been taken, that a proneness to sunstroke develops. This is indeed a terrible visitant, irresistible in its force, and impossible to dispose of by any known remedy. Black men and white are alike susceptible to it. In a bad attack it

strikes a man down so quickly that there is barely sufficient time to take him up and carry him to his bungalow before he is dead ; but there are several degrees in the power of the stroke, and every one is not necessarily fatal. Loss of memory, either temporarily or lastingly, periodical attacks of mental aberration, divers forms of eccentricity, etc., are a few of the results arising out of a touch of the sun. After one attack a man's life is uncertain ; he is extremely susceptible to another stroke, and it is best for him to return to England at once.

Headache and prostration follow more than usually violent exertion, or a long period of outdoor exposure. To dispel this, as many men do, with stimulants is an easy remedy ; but a more satisfactory and less harmful way of dealing with the nuisance is thorough rest for two or three hours, if it can be had.

Quinine, the recognised medicine for all the ills to which flesh is heir, in Assam, is especially serviceable in cases of fever. Exposure to the sun after a dose must be avoided, for then the system is particularly liable to be weakly and incapable of resistance. The exhaustive nature of the climate and work demand of a European, at the outset of his planting career, a very healthy constitution, one that is not likely to get out of order easily ; for once general seediness sets in, the difficulties of shaking it off are insuperable.

With quinine, chlorodyne, and a bottle of brandy, a man can do a great deal towards holding in check the various illnesses that are constantly besetting

him. An active and happily contented mind will do much to assist the medicine when they are required.

Our English ideas of the proper way of cooking are entirely upset. Everything is done up with a buttery compound, known in the country as ghe, a very rich distasteful mode that is responsible for a good deal of biliousness and liver attacks.

Such petty everyday inconveniences as mosquito stings are a nuisance, especially if they entail confinement to the bungalow. A person with an irritable skin will at first suffer tremendously from these small torments; the burning sensation after the sting is maddening, but scratching only makes matters worse: the tender skin is rubbed off, and leaves a poisoned sore that is slow to heal.

Anything that upsets the system takes a most bitter form of revenge on the wretched sufferer by depriving him of well-deserved rest at night. Hard as it is under ordinary circumstances to court the rosy god, an impending bilious attack will make it an absurd impossibility to think or hope of getting to sleep. Rolling from side to side in a feverish condition, with perspiration starting out all over the body, and every sound, either inside or outside, intensified to an alarming degree by nervous prostration, how one longs for a gasp of cold air! What priceless treasure would he not give in exchange for half an hour with the thermometer at fifty degrees?

The liver appears to be the most easily disarranged

portion of the internal organisation when in the East, and every slight thing that disagrees with the system threatens to develop into a liver attack. Spirituous liquors, beer, unwholesome food, hot curries, rich sweets, etc., are especially bad when there is any weakness in this direction. Feelings of intense depression and lassitude, with a general indifference to everything, are the commencement and outcome of the complaint. Careful dieting is the only remedy.

A capital form of protection against attacks of cold on the liver—a frequently fatal complaint—is to adopt the native fashion of tying round the waist two or three coils of a fine silk scarf, to be worn both day and night. I have mentioned this protection in a previous chapter, but I think that its usefulness justifies my again alluding to it in this chapter. These wrappers, called *kummerbunds*, can be bought in all colours, of varied thicknesses and sizes, at the nearest bazaar for a small amount; they wear well, and are decidedly picturesque. Just before dawn of day, the air grows much colder, and it is at this period that the *kummerbund* is of most service in warding off a sudden chill to the liver.

Scarcely a single European gets through his first year without prickly heat, a violent tingling sensation, as of innumerable fine needle points being thrust into the skin, the irritation of which is at times most exasperating. A visitation from this abomination can be looked for at any sudden change of temperature, or just before breaking into perspiration.

The skin all over the body resembles, in point of colour, a boiled lobster's brilliant hues; the appearance of each tiny pustule, that cover the sufferer in countless thousands, suggests a tremendous attack of measles, and is rather terrifying to those unlearned in its ways.

Most difficult to contend against is the bad but natural habit of sleeping after tiffin. Weary with a hard morning's work, the chief meal of the day just finished, the sun outside using its best efforts to burst the thermometer, and nearly succeeding, the air quite still, the coolies not at work, and our usually noisy friend the crow just managing to gasp in the stifling air as he sits in the shade of a tamal tree with beak agape,—is there not some excuse for going to sleep? But it is a lazy, pernicious habit; nor does it encourage the development of that very necessary condition, a good digestion. Sleeping during the day discounts the probability of the usual nightly allowance, and instead of waking up refreshed there will be more often headache, a sluggish feeling, and bad temper.

A good principle to lay down is—never to be without chlorodyne and quinine, two invaluable medicines: the former for any kind of dysentery or cholera, the latter for fevers. I have seen some remarkable cures effected by the use of Browne's chlorodyne, and cannot speak too highly of it. Our coolies took very kindly to it, but that was probably on account of its being mixed with a little rum the only thing that

induced them, when really ill, to take it ; mixed with water, they would have nothing to do with it. A suspicion arose, owing to the immense number of men that had the particular form of attack requiring the administration of a dose of chlorodyne, that a good many only came for the sake of the rum, so we had at last to exercise a wise discernment in giving only to the deserving. Assamese, all of whom are good Brahmins, would rather die than take our medicines ; but if they should be over-persuaded, they break caste, a position that is only regained after much penance, and the performance of many religious observances. Another medicine with great virtue is the podophyllin pill, useful to administer to those who are subject to derangement of the liver. This can be added to the medicine chest with satisfactory results.

It is while camping out that men grow careless about themselves, take no precautions, and consequently succeed in laying up a store of all kinds of diseases. The worst of these, and most dreaded on account of its pertinacity in sticking to its victim and refusing to be exorcised, is jungle fever. The ordinary malarious fever of the country is bad enough, in its course sparing neither native nor European, but jungle fever is especially severe on the white man. It is this dreadful malady that afflicts so many of the old Indians that are to be met at home ; and "only an attack of the old fever," that you hear them plead as an excuse for failing to keep some engagement, means several hours spent in paroxysms of ague, cold

and hot alternately, accompanied by sickness, and leaving behind a heritage of intense prostration. Care must be taken when camping out not to sleep on the ground or under trees, some of which give off a poisonous vapour. Select as dry a spot as the nature of the place will permit, then have a chung knocked up of bamboos, on which to place the rezai, or mattress. Never forget to travel, in every part of India, with a rubber sheet, a pillow, a rezai (a kind of eider-down quilt), and medicine. The chung should be erected as high as possible, but under no circumstances less than eighteen inches from the earth. Any man who sleeps on the ground and does not contract some form of fever, may consider himself the luckiest of mortals. Slight malaria can be shaken off by change of air; the return sea journey from India is a favourite remedy for thoroughly disposing of any pretensions that the fever may have as an occupant in perpetuity of your body, but with jungle fever the matter is different. Although it may not appear for months at a stretch, yet it is only biding its time, until some change of condition renders its unhappy victim less able to resist its insidious approach; then it enters again into possession and requires a great deal of turning out. The neighbourhood of stagnant water, or the smell arising from the drying-up of decayed vegetation on the banks of a river whose waters have fallen low, are calculated to produce a visit from this much-dreaded scourge. Bathing after sun-down, though particularly pleasant, must be avoided,



as a most risky proceeding that is sure to encourage colds and fever.

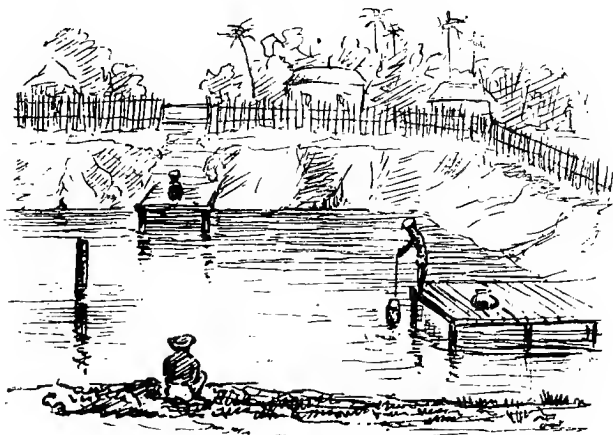
Enlargement of the spleen attacks a large proportion of natives, but rarely settles down on a white man, unless he has been unfortunate enough to have had a succession of bad attacks of fever, after which he has not taken proper care of himself. The appearance of an enlarged spleen is particularly ludicrous, and can be observed on nine natives out of ten. They do not seem to be inconvenienced by the formidable swelling, but walk, work, are as contented, and live as long as their brethren who are not affected by this unsightly disease.

Day and night are, without much variation during the rains, one long round of terrific heat. The few degrees that the thermometer falls at night are scarcely perceptible, and give but small relief. Great difficulty is experienced in getting to sleep on account of the uncomfortable feeling of being in a perpetual state of perspiration. All the hot season is spent in longing for the cold weather, which brings with it a comfortable change, but at the same time another form of fever. Cold weather fever is an awkward illness to deal with, and, like his jungle namesake, is very pertinacious when once in the system; nor will he leave, in many cases, until the hot weather routs him out.

The lesser ills that take rank after fevers and sun-stroke are numerous disagreeable, but can generally be defied by careful and abstemious living

combined with plenty of hard mental and bodily work.

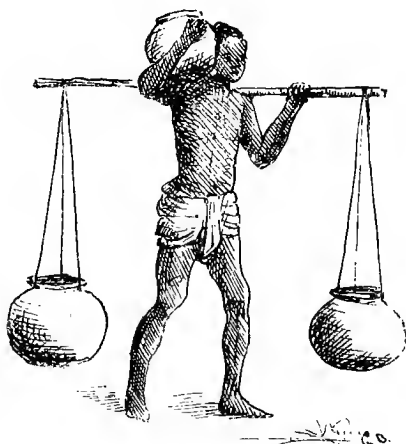
The water supply of factories requires very careful attention, for on the good condition of the drinking water the health of the whole garden, to a large extent, depends. Tanks and wells ought to be thoroughly looked after, and kept clear of any foreign matter that will, in the ordinary course of nature,



A TANK.

present itself. A special coolie is set apart for this important work, and his office is rendered difficult by the natives' unconquerable love of dirt. Tanks (the only source of water supply in the cold weather, throughout which period the rainfall is very slight) are built at an immense expense of money, time, and labour; and where there is only one to supply the

whole garden, this must be of a size sufficiently large to contain enough water to hold out through the dry season, without fear of its being exhausted. If there is anything wrong with the water (and, unless every precaution is taken to secure its purity, nothing is more likely, nor does there exist a better medium for the dissemination of disease), cholera may be ex-

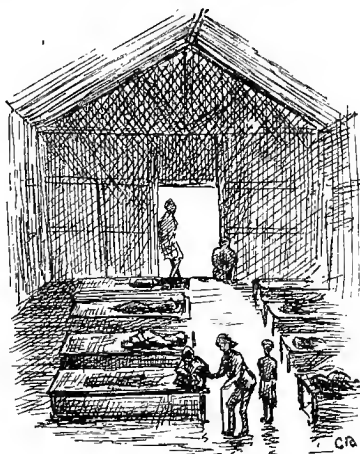


COOLIE WATER CARRIER.

pected to appear amongst the coolies. Then, besides those that actually die from infection, there are numbers of others who are frightened to death, or who, at the first signs of the impending outbreak, turn tail and bolt. But natives are so lazy that, although they know the probable penalty, they will often take the handiest water to drink, instead of going to the trouble of fetching it from the tank; and it is hard to

prevent these unthinking suicides, but it must be somehow accomplished.

No garden can be counted complete that has not set aside a suitable site for a coolie hospital, where, when any infectious disease breaks out, men can be promptly separated from their fellows, and, during ordinary times, as many as are ailing can be treated under one roof. A native compounder is installed at



COOLIE HOSPITAL.

the head of this establishment to deal with the more simple cases of fever, ague, etc., but serious illnesses require the skilled knowledge of the doctor sahib, who makes his rounds once or twice a week. Private gardens enter into an arrangement with the nearest white doctor to pay them periodical visits in the interests of the general health, but the large companies retain

the services of one or two professional men solely to look after their own numerous *employés*.

A more doleful sight than a coolie in hospital can scarcely be found in the East, the abode of horrible sights and smells. Swathed up in a dark coloured blanket, with only the tip of his nose and his eyes peeping out, he looks but a poor representative specimen of that noble creature man. The fever shakes him as he lies on his mattress, but he is un-



SICK COOLIE.

complaining. When addressed he patiently remarks, "I shall die;" but the speedy approach of his dissolution does not seem to bother him much. Poor fellow! he certainly has not much to live for, unless an existence in which hubble-bubble smoking and a hearty dislike for anything in the shape of manual labour, are to be considered the most blissful consummation to that great mystery, life. On an unhealthy garden it is a rare occurrence to find

the hospital empty. Natives have a perverse and unreasonable way of dying: notwithstanding that their illness may be easy enough to treat, yet if the sufferer takes it into his head to die, and says so, die he will, and no power on earth can prevent him. Sometimes, to bring about the desired end, these obstinate fellows will refuse food and medicine. Then force has to be employed to compel them to swallow the things that are good for them; a waste of labour, however, though it is unnatural to allow a fellow-creature to leave this world without making every effort to save him.

Other coolies there are who look upon the hospital as an institution providentially erected, in which it is possible, by a little manœuvring, to spend many days of the year at their leisure, happily freed from the labours of the hoe. These are shams, who present themselves of a morning with downcast look and trembling frame, a personification of all that is miserable, to appeal to the sympathies of the sahib in order to be released from work for that day. Even the most tender-hearted planters are up to this dodge. If the coolie is really suffering from fever, by simply feeling his pulse his real state can be ascertained without a doubt. The wrath of the sahib when he places his hand on the cool unfevered wrist of an impostor is justifiable, and the judicious application of the cane quickly convinces the coolie that he has made a mistake in imagining that there could be anything the matter with him.

The labours of Hercules pale into insignificance before the efforts of a planter to manage coolies, the mental worry and strain put upon a constitution debilitated by fever or other illness, often culminates in an attack of general seediness and depression, from which it is difficult to rally. A man ought, if possible, to return to England every five or six years for a short visit, in order to recruit his stock of health, to last over another five or six years; and now that the facilities for getting backwards and forwards are daily on the increase, there ought to be more attention paid to the question.

I had almost forgotten to mention the native method of dealing with snake bites. Charming is the only recognised way of effecting a cure. Our own pharmacopœia is particularly silent on all cases of this kind, so an English doctor is not of much assistance under the circumstances. When a native is bitten he does not turn on the reptile and kill it, but allows it to escape; then he returns to his home and sticks a curious compound on the small spot where the needle-like fang has entered the skin, says his prayers, goes through a ceremony with his priest, and awaits the result. Some few take a home-brewed mixture of herbs, but the great virtue lies in this odd sort of sticking plaster. He superstitiously believes that if the small India-rubber-looking patch should tumble off, he would die, but if it holds fast he will live. It is impossible to blame them for this simple act of faith, which seems in most cases to have the

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desired result, especially when it is remembered that our own English doctors, with all their research, are incapable of dealing with snake bites. An Englishman, whose range of knowledge for treating such cases does not extend over so many instances, and is, to my mind, in consequence less capable of understanding the nature of them than any ordinary native, would set to work with plaister, blisters, &c., and *cui bono?* to bring about exactly the same result as our superstitious natives.