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William Taylor Marrs**

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**CONFESSIONS**  
**OF A**  
**NEURASTHENIC**  
  
**BY**  
**WILLIAM TAYLOR MARRS, M.D.**

**With Original Illustrations**



**PHILADELPHIA**

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## AUTHOR'S APOLOGY.

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THE author's life-work having been such as to enable him to be especially observant, he can vouch for nearly every incident and statement recorded in this monograph as being based upon an actual experience, and therefore not merely the creation of something out of the whole cloth. In this instance, the neurasthenic is made to carry quite a heavy burden; thus, in a measure, suffering vicariously for the whole class to which he belongs.

The author has used his best efforts to tell his story in a happy vein, without padding and a multiplicity of words. The writing of it has been a task well mixed with pleasure, the latter of which it is hoped the reader may, in some small measure, share. The suggestions that are intended to be conveyed project between the lines, and therefore need no pointing out.

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The one apology which the author desires to offer is for the constant repetition of the personal pronoun. This has been all along a matter of sincere regret to the author, but he saw no way of obviating it. It is a difficult matter to tell a story, when you are your own hero and villain, and keep down to a modest limit the ever-recurring *I*.

WILLIAM TAYLOR MARRS.

Peoria, Illinois.

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## CHAPTER I.

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### THE NEURASTHENIC DURING HIS INFANCY.

THE neurasthenic is born and not made to order, but it is only by assiduous cultivation that he can hope to become a finished product. To elucidate the fact presented by the latter half of the preceding sentence is the purpose of this little book.

In telling a story it is always best to begin at the beginning. I shall start by saying that I was born poor and without any opportunities, therefore I ought to have been able to accomplish almost anything. The reader will readily agree that the best inheritance that the average American boy can have is indigence and lack of opportunity. For getting on in the world and for carving out one's own little niche, nothing beats having poverty-stricken, but sensible and respectable parents. Many a fellow has been heard to deplore the lack of opportunities in his early youth when, in reality, nothing stood in his way, unless it may have been the rather unhandy handicap of being poor. Money may sometimes enable one to get recognition in the hall of fame, and sometimes it is instrumental in getting one's picture in the rogues' gallery.

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So I consider myself fortunate in having been born well, except that I inherited a neurosis instead of an estate. "Neurosis" and "neurotic" are docile terms after you once form their acquaintance. They broke into my vocabulary while I was yet at a tender age, and during all the intervening years I have learned more and more about them, both from literary and experimental standpoints.

A neurosis is a nervous symptom of some sort, and if you have a sufficient number and variety of them you are a neurasthenic. If you ever get so that you can move in neurasthenic circles, you will always be foolish about your health and your physical and mental well-being. It is quite common for us to ascribe all our defects to heredity. Poor old, overworked heredity is the dumping-ground for the most of our laziness, perversity and shortcomings! If we have a bad temper, a penchant for whiskey, or a wryneck, heredity has the brunt to bear. We can always give our imperfections a little veneering by saying that they were an inheritance.

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Granting the significance of heredity as a factor in causing suffering, I wish to emphasize the fact that we can inherit only tendencies, or the raw material, as it were. We do the rest ourselves, and work out our respective salvations either with or without fear and trembling. Quite often improper training and adverse environment at an impressionable age start us on the wrong track. And that brings me to the point.

With this seeming digression in order to prepare the reader's mind for what is to follow, I return to my infancy—*in fancy*. At the age of twenty-four hours, so I am told, I considered it necessary to have a lighted lamp in my room at night. Other habits affecting my special senses followed in rapid succession. The visitors began pouring in to see me on the second day, and I think it was a morbid interest that any one could work up over such a red, speckled mite of humanity as I must have been. They all insisted on digging me out of my nest, taking me up and rolling me about, when it was my natural inclination to want to sleep nearly all the time. From this procedure I soon grew restless and disturbed sleep followed.

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For the first two or three days I had no desire for nourishment, so far as I can remember now, but a number of concoctions were put down my unwilling little throat. As I have since learned, a babe, like a chick, is born with sufficient nourishment in its stomach to tide it

along a few days without parental intervention. You might be able to convince a hen mother of this fact, but a human mother—never! So when I cried, it was for two or three reasons: My feelings were outraged, or the variety of teas had created a gas on my stomach which made me feel very uncomfortable (the old ladies called it “misery”). Then I cried because I thought, or rather felt, that the air-cells of my lungs needed expansion, and the crying act assisted materially in doing this. If I could have talked or sung, I should not have cried. Crying was the easiest and most natural thing for me to do. It was then that I was introduced to the paregoric bottle, and I very soon began to form the habit. My dear, good mother would have been terribly incensed had any one suggested that her darling was becoming a little dope fiend.

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Remedies soon lost their soporific effect on me, or I acquired tolerance to the usual dosage, and the folks had to hunt up new things to give. I took soothing syrups and “baby’s friends” galore. The night and the day were not rightly divided for me; when I slept, it was during the day when others were awake, and *vice versa*. I became a spoiled, pampered child, and gained a great deal of attention and sympathy, in consequence of which I became a veritable little bundle of nerves. While yet in my mother’s arms, I manifested many of the whims and vagaries which were destined to crop out more strenuously as I grew older.

Ah, mothers, why does that big, loving heart of yours never falter or grow weary in the performance of what you think is your bounden duty toward your attention-loving little one? If Willie is not sick—and perhaps even if he is—he needs a great deal of letting alone. Why jeopardize your own health in perpetuating these midnight seances with him, thus engendering in him a habit that will grow into “nerves,” and perhaps later into shattered health or a weakened character? Better let him cry it out once and for all! But you are mothers, and motherhood being a heaven-born institution, there is supposed to be a maternal instinct that ever guides you aright. This I have the hardihood to seriously question.

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## CHAPTER II.

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### THE PERVERSITY OF HIS CHILDHOOD.

WHEN I became old enough to “take notice” of things, I was fairly deluged with toys: Fuzzy dogs and cats; big, red, yellow and green balls; fancy rattle-boxes, and various other things were used to stimulate my perceptive faculties. All of which should be left to Mother Nature, who ever does these things well in her own good time and way. I became so accustomed to toys, having such an innumerable variety of them, that it required something out of the ordinary to arouse my interest. The poetic thought

“Pleased with a rattle, tickled with a toy,”

had little significance to me. I outgrew toys very early and became precocious. Elderly ladies said I was “old for my age,” whatever that may mean, and that I was too smart to live. But I have always had a stubborn way of disappointing those who love me best. This precocity was taken advantage of by relatives and visitors to furnish them with amusement. Many a time when some one dropped in I was called upon to be the star-performer of the evening. I was compelled to appear whether I felt like it or not. I was tickled in the ribs, because the folks liked to hear my hearty laugh; and I was tossed in the air and stood on my head, because it was thought that these things were as amusing to me as to my audience. Whenever conversation lagged I was made the center of attraction and compelled to assist in some new stunt. As I now look back on my infantile career, I have little reason to question why I was nervous and spoiled as I merged from infancy into childhood. I ought to be thankful that I survived it all!

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Nursing the baby.

As I grew older I became peevish and morose. I was full of conceits, moods and whims. This was not due to actual sickness, for all my functions were normal and I was reasonably well nourished. One sort of play or pastime soon palled on me. I think this was mainly due to the fact that I had been humored to death and had enjoyed every sensation and surprise that it was possible for me to experience. When I played with other children, things had to go my way or there was a scene. I did not fight, my bump of combativeness being evidently small. It was not from my inherent goodness that I refrained from pugilistic encounters so much as from the fact that I did not want to disturb my mental equanimity. Then I was lazy and liked a state of physical ease—a condition from which I have not yet recovered. I never wasted any physical energy. In fine, I was steeped in irredeemable laziness to such a degree that it exceeded that of the Indian who said: "What's the use to run when you can walk; or walk when you can sit; or sit when you can lie?" On one occasion, while yet quite young, I was found trying to limit the number of my respirations, stating that it "tired me to breathe so often." I often ate and drank more than I really wanted, hoping thereby not to be troubled with eating and drinking for some little time.

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My muscles became so soft and flabby from disuse that it was almost physically impossible for me to run and exercise as other children do. I was weaker than I really looked to be. I gained the reputation of being a *good boy*, but the truth was I was too lazy to do anything mean as well as anything good. I lacked the spirit and vim that the average boy possesses. While I passed in the "good boy" category, no one stopped to question the why or the wherefore of my being good. People often speak of good boys and good babies in a sense of negation. If children do not indulge in the celestial feat of producing a little thunder occasionally, they will never attract any more attention than that of being good, which is sometimes synonymous with being nobody and doing nothing. It is much easier for the devilish boy to accomplish something if his energy can only be harnessed along the line of utility.

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I was weaker than I really looked to be.

When I arrived at school age I learned pretty well and was still regarded by many as being precocious in this respect; but I acquired knowledge rather by absorption than by hard study. A soft brick placed in water will soak up a quart in a few days. A human brick will likewise absorb a bit of knowledge if he only remains where there is something to be absorbed. As I did not engage in the usual sports and rampages of boys I took to learning rather readily. At the same time I became introspective and self-centered. The brain cells of the most stupid person are constantly in action. Cerebration goes on whether we will it or not. If we do not direct our brain it will run riot and lead us into devious and dangerous paths.

The more I thought of myself, the more important I became; not proud and supercilious, but simply important to my own little ego. I speculated in my childish way, on the function of each organ of my body and the relation it bore to the great scheme which we call existence. One day I got to wondering what would happen if my heart should take a notion to stop and rest for a few seconds. The thought of such a catastrophe made me so nervous that all my organs apparently got out of gear and I had a diminutive fit. From that day I began to have all sorts of nervous symptoms, most of which were, to say the least, vague and indefinite. Frequently I complained that I was afraid "something was going to happen." Since then, whenever I hear that phrase I invariably associate it with a person who has nothing to do and who is too lazy to do anything even if he had ever so many duties. At that time I did not know enough about disease symptoms to enable me to acquire a perfect ailment of any sort, but later, when I had formed a speaking acquaintance with diseases, I began to get them rapidly and in the most typical form. For the present I took life as easy as I could and had no boyish ambition to be a cowboy or a desperado. Such ambitions as I did foster were of the free-and-easy sort.

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My first inspiration worth speaking of was after my visit to the circus. Every male reader has been struck by it some time during his boyhood, and it is a healthy ambition of which we need not be ashamed. Yes, I was going to be an acrobat and wear pretty red tights with glittering spangles! It would be nice, too, I thought incidentally, to be near the little lady who wore the pink tights and did such awe-inspiring stunts on the flying-trapeze. The circus sawdust ring and the flapping folds of canvas may lure boys from books and study, but they give us our first ambition to be and to do something. Mine was of short duration, however. It came and went like the circus itself.

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Soon after this I went on an errand to a shoemaker's repair shop, and the life of a cobbler impressed me favorably. He had such a comfortable seat, made by nailing some leather straps over a circular hole in a bench. The man had nothing to do but to occupy this seat and pound pegs. But the very next week I heard a fine preacher whose roaring eloquence, together with his easy, dignified life, caused me to think that the pulpit was the place for me. A few weeks later I chanced to see a sleight-of-hand performance and I at once decided that the art of legerdemain would be more easily learned than the Gospel work; so I began to practice along this line by extracting potatoes and other sundries from the nasal appendages of members of the household. I was succeeding admirably, I thought, until one day in attempting to eat cotton and blow fire out of my mouth I burnt my tongue painfully and became so disgusted that I abandoned the idea of becoming a showman.

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In turn I had fully made up my mind to become a huckster, an auctioneer, a scissors-grinder, a peanut-vender, an editor, an artist, a book-keeper, etc. My natural selection being always something that I thought would not require great energy.

As I became a little older, my mental horizon widened somewhat, but my erratic notions became accordingly more expansive. I was simply a little dreamer and my thoughts were all visionary. It is true that I was quite young, but the proverbial straws pointing the direction

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## CHAPTER III.

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### AS A SHIFTLESS AND PURPOSELESS YOUTH.

TIME passed on—that's about all time does anyway—and my idle habits still clung to me. In fact they grew stronger and faster than I did. My moods and whims were subject to many changes, however. Something new and absurd entered my mind every day. It was usually concerning the reckless waste of energy. I never indulged in expletives or useless words; never said "golly," "hully gee," or anything that consumed time and strength without giving adequate return. Unconsciously I believed in the conservation of energy. "What's the use?" seemed to be with me a deep-rooted principle.

Being now at an age when I could be of some service in doing odd chores and errands, it was a heavy tax upon my ingenuity always to have a plausible excuse for getting out of work. When there was a little labor scheduled for me, I began to work my wits overtime trying to see a way out of it. Sometimes I became very studious, hoping thus to escape observation, or I put up the plea that I was sick, tired or worn-out. I had practiced woe-begone facial expressions until they came to my relief quite naturally. It seemed to me that on these occasions I was able to make my face assume an actual pallor. I put off beginning any task until the very last moment. If, however, all excuses failed and I was compelled to do some work, I hurried with all my might to get through with it and thus get the matter off my mind. I have since been told that this hurrying through a piece of work is characteristic of many lazy people; or they go to the other extreme and dally along, killing all the time they can.

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Between the ages of ten and twelve I was an omnivorous reader. My literary bill-of-fare was far-reaching; I read everything. The family almanacs came in for a careful review. After reading the harrowing details of diseases, which could only be removed by the timely use of somebody's dope, I always thought: "That's just the way I feel." But when I turned over a few pages and read some lady sufferer's testimonial, I was sure that I felt very much the same myself. All these symptoms, however, assumed a more tangible form as I advanced in years.

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I liked fairy tales and kindred reading; the more audacious and unreal it was, the better satisfaction it gave me. With me everything was a sham; I manifested no interest in real and live things. Nothing but the namby-pamby appealed to me. I now think that if at that time I could have been induced to exercise vigorously so as to get some good, red blood coursing through my veins I might have been different.

In my case my literary taste was decidedly detrimental to me. Before one has arrived at a discriminating age, he cannot sit down to every sort of literary pabulum regardless of consequences. Many parents seem to think the "Crack-went-the-ranger's-rifle-and-down-came-another-Redskin" literature the only kind to be placed on the forbidden shelf. The inspiration to go out and shoot pesky Indians is healthy and commendable as compared with much other reading matter extant. Any literature that warps the imagination and weakens the will should be placed on the tabooed list. In my case, however, the best literature failed to meet with any responses. Nothing was inclined to spur me into action. I did not care to read of great exploits; they gave me mental unrest. Once I read that a person by walking three hours a day would in seven years pass a space equivalent to the circumference of the globe. This thought staggered me and I believed there must be something wrong with a fellow who could conceive such a stupendous undertaking. Surely no one would think for a moment of putting it into execution! I also read with stolid indifference of the Herculean feats of labor performed by men known to history. For example, Demosthenes copied in his own handwriting Thucydides' *History* eight times, merely to make himself familiar with the style of that great man. An incident that appealed to me in a more benign way was this:—

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"Pray, of what did your brother die?" said the Marquis Spinola to Sir Horace Vere. "He died, sir," was the answer, "of having nothing to do!"

That, I thought, must have been an easy death.

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## CHAPTER IV.

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## HIS PURSUIT OF AN EDUCATION.

WHEN I arrived at an age when my character should have been in some measure "moulded," I was, like most persons of a peculiar nervous temperament, very vacillating and changeable. No one knew how to size me up; in fact, I didn't know myself. I was now constantly developing new, short-lived ambitions. Occasionally I became industrious for short periods of time. Indulgent and now prosperous parents provided a way for me to pursue my little ambitions. I had secured the rudimentary part of an education and I determined to build upon it. I was going to reach the topmost rung.

It was my ambition—for a short time—to obtain a classical education and become one of the literati; but I soon became weary of one line of study, and when a thing got to be too irksome I passed it by for something else. I could not be occupied with any study long unless I seemed to be progressing in it with marvelous speed. This rapid-transit progress was, of course, very unusual. I had read that quasi-science, phrenology, and came to the conclusion that I could not stick to any one thing because my *bump of "continuity" was poorly developed*.

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My bump of continuity was poorly developed.

I read that a very learned man used to admire Blackstone; so I dropped everything and began perusing Blackstone's *Commentaries*. Soon after I chanced to hear that Oliver Ellsworth gained the greater part of his information from conversation, and I determined upon this method for a while. I soon grew tired of it, however, and next took up general history and literature. While taking my collegiate course, I pursued a number of different studies, but the pursuit as well as the possession amounted to very little. I had taken up Greek and Latin and had begun to manifest some interest in these studies, when a friend, in whom I had some confidence, advised me against wasting my time on obsolete words. He said: "Learn English first, young man. I'll wager there are plenty of good Anglo-Saxon words that you can't pronounce or define. For example, tell me what 'y-c-l-e-p-t' spells and what it means."

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Thus being picked up on a trifling, useless English word, I decided to give up the study of dead languages and confine myself to my mother-tongue. Rhetoric and lexicography were hobbies with me for a time, but before a great while I thought I needed "mental drill"; so I turned my attention to mathematics. The subject became dry and uninteresting in the usual length of time; besides, I began seriously to question mathematics as being in the utilitarian class of studies. Certainly very little of it was necessary as a business qualification. I recalled the fact that one of the best business men, in a mediocre station of life, whom I had ever known, could not write his own name and his wife had to count his money for him. So I threw away my Euclid and tried something else; but I would voluntarily tire of each study in a little while, or drop it at the counter-suggestion of some friend. Thus I changed from one course to another as a weather-cock is veered by the ever-changing wind to every point of the compass.

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Then I took up the fad of building air-castles. It is hard to laugh down this species of architecture—the erection of atmospheric mansions. Every one has it, in a way, but with me it had broken out in a very virulent form. It makes one feel mean, indeed, to arouse from one of these Elysian escapades only to find his feet on the commonest sort of clay. Day-dreaming never produces the kind of dream that comes true, and mental speculating is about as useless as indulging in Western mining stock. Well-laid plans are all right, but ideals that you can't even hope to live up to have no place in life's calendar. Dabbling with the unattainable is calculated to sour us on the world and turn the milk of human kindness into buttermilk. It may be likened to the predicament in which old Tantalus was placed in the lake, where the water receded when he attempted to drink it, and delicious fruits always just

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eluded his grasp.

Next I got hold of the delusion that I was studying and working too hard. Goodness knows that what little I did was as desultory and haphazard as it could well be, but nevertheless I stood in great fear of a dissolution of my gray matter. Once it seemed to me that my brain was loose in my cranium and I imagined I could hear it rattling around. I went at midnight to consult a physician in regard to this phenomenal condition. After I had described my symptoms, the doctor smiled rather more expansively than was to my liking and said:—

“You may have a little post-nasal catarrh, but I think it is only a neurosis.”

I thought to myself that if it was “only” a neurosis it was one with great possibilities. The fact that collapses are frequent among brain-workers was not easily dismissed from my mind. I feared insanity and began to picture how I would disport myself in a madhouse. It seemed that I could not carry out the medical advice to take vigorous exercise, as it gave me palpitation and made me fear that my heart would go out of business.

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I concluded that the best thing I could do was to take up some fad to relieve my overworked (?) brain and radiate some of my pent-up energy. I had read of the fads of great men, but I could not decide after which one to pattern. Nero was a great fiddler and went up and down Greece, challenging all the crack violinists to a contest; the king of Macedonia spent his time in making lanterns; Herculatius, king of Parthia, was an expert mole-catcher and spent much of his time in that business; Biantes of Lydia was the best hand in the country at filing needles; Theophylact—whom nobody but a bookworm ever heard of—bred fine horses and fed them the richest dates, grapes and figs steeped in wines; an ex-president of modern times was fond of fishing and spent much time in piscatorial pursuits. None of these struck me just right, so I thought I would be obliged to make a selection of my own. First I tried amateur photography, but this soon grew monotonous and I gave it up. Next I got a cornet, but I soon found that it required more wind than I could conveniently spare. I then tried homing pigeons, but before I had scarcely given the little aerial messengers a fair test I had thought of a dozen other things that seemed preferable. Everything proved alike tiresome and tedious. However, I found that in chasing diversions I had forgotten all about my imagined infirmities. So perhaps, after all, the end accomplished justified the means employed to secure it.

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## CHAPTER V.

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### TRIES TO FIND AN OCCUPATION CONDUCTIVE TO HEALTH.

**I**NDECISION marked my life and character and I had no confidence in myself. Yet I realized that I had an active brain, only that it was misdirected and running riot. To correct years of improper thinking and living may seem easy as a theoretical problem, but if one should find it necessary to put the matter to a practical test on himself, he discovers that it is like diverting the course of a small river.

I was sensitive and thought a great deal about myself. Often I entertained the effeminate notion that people were talking about me, when I ought to have known that they could easily find some more interesting topic of conversation. I always went to extremes. I was up on a mountain of enthusiasm or down in the slough of despondency; always elated or depressed; optimistic beyond reason or submerged in pessimism; always the extremes—no happy medium for me. I never met anything on half-way grounds.

Being now of mature years, I realized the necessity of settling down to something, if for no other reason than that I might gain a little more stability of character. Accordingly, I accepted a position as bookkeeper in a flour-mill. I remained at it longer than I ever had at anything. After a few months, however, it seemed that the close confinement indoors did not agree with me. Sitting in a stooped position over books produced a soreness in the muscles of my back and I imagined that I had incipient Bright's disease. I have since learned that the kidneys are not very sensitive organs and seldom give rise to much pain even in the gravest disease. *I read up on kidney affections in the almanacs—oh! what authority!*—and as I had about all the symptoms, I thought it best to put myself on the appropriate regimen. I began drinking buttermilk, taking it regularly and in place of water and coffee. I had read that sour milk was also conducive to longevity, and that if one would drink it faithfully he might live to be a hundred years old. A friend to whom I had confided this information said that between swilling down buttermilk a hundred years and being dead, he preferred the latter.

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I read up in the almanacs.

There was a decided improvement in my case in some respects, but I began to acquire new and different symptoms, mainly from reading medicine advertisements. My name had been seized, as I learned later, by agencies, and was being hawked around to charlatans and medicine-venders. Yes, some one had put me on the "invalid list," and when once your name is there it goes on, like the brook, "forever." The medicine-grafters barter in these names. I have been told that for first-class invalids they pay the munificent sum of fifty cents per thousand! I think that a thousand of my class ought to be worth more—say, six bits! It seemed that I was on several different lists, among them being "catarrh," "neurasthenia," "rheumatism," "incipient tuberculosis," "heart disease," "kidney and liver affections," "chronic invalidism," and numerous others. I was fairly deluged with letters begging me to be cured of these awful diseases before it was forever too late.

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One of the symptoms common to all these grave troubles was "indisposition to work." I knew that I had always suffered from it to the very limit, but I did not know that it was dignified by being classed as such a common disease symptom. I also had a number of other abnormal feelings that were common to most of the ailments described. For example, at times I had "singing in my ears," "distress after eating too much," "self-consciousness," and "forebodings of impending danger." I always experienced great fear lest one of these "forebodings" overtake me unawares.

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These letters were always "personal," although the type-written name at the top did not look exactly like the body of the letter. Possibly they may have been, in advertising parlance, "stock letters." They purported to be from kind-hearted philanthropists who were in the business of curing people simply because they loved humanity. Some of them were from persons who had been cured of something and who now, in a spirit of generosity, were trying to let others similarly afflicted know what the great remedy was.

While I realized that these advertisements were base lies, gotten up to deceive the sick, or those who think they are sick, and to take their money in exchange for dope that was worse than useless, yet the diabolical wording of those sentences affected me in a queer and inexplicable way. The psychologist would, perhaps, call this a subconscious influence. When a person gets the disease *idea* rooted deeply in his mind, as I had it, he is kept busy watching for new symptoms. It is no trouble at all to get some new disease on the very shortest notice.

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As a more active occupation seemed necessary for me, I was trying to study up something new to tackle. Doctors had told me that I needed to be out in the open air where I could get plenty of exercise and practice deep breathing. This agreed with me and I seemed to be gaining in strength, but I came to the conclusion that I might as well turn my exercise into a useful channel; so I went out into the country and hired myself out to a farmer. Here I got, in a very short time, a bit more of the "strenuous life"—a late term—than I had bargained for. We had to get up at four, milk several cows, and curry and harness the horses before breakfast. We then kept "humping" until sunset, except during the hour we took for dinner. On rainy days we were supposed to work in the barn, greasing harness, shelling seed-corn and "sifting" grass-seed. That old farmer seemed to realize the verity of the old couplet:—

"Satan finds some mischief still,  
For idle hands to do."

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Looking for new symptoms.

The reader will readily imagine how hard labor served me. My muscles were as sore as if I had been the recipient of a thorough mauling. I tried to stand the work as long as I could, for I thought it would, like the other remedies prescribed for me, "do me good." I had been there a week (it seemed to me an eternity) when, one morning, I was so sore and stiff that I could not get out of bed. One of the other hired men came to my rescue and gave me a thorough rubbing with liniment, after which I was able to crawl down to breakfast. The old skinflint of a farmer then had the audacity to discharge me, saying that he "didn't want no dood from the city monkeyin' around in the way, nohow."

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## CHAPTER VI.

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### NEW SYMPTOMS AND THE PURSUIT OF HEALTH.

THE pursuit of health is like the pursuit of happiness in that you do not always know when you have either. It may furthermore be likened to chasing a will-o'-the-wisp that ever keeps a few safe paces ahead of you. The thought that I had to keep busy at something calculated to promote my health was a habit that I could not easily relinquish. So now I began to read up and practice physical culture—which I had always spoken of as physical torture. I had read that any puny, warped little body could, by proper and persistent training, be made sturdy and strong. I had no desire to grow big, ugly muscles that look like knots, but I was effeminate enough to think that a touch of physical culture might enhance my beauty as well as make me healthier.

Calisthenics being an esthetic exercise, I began practicing it with the usual enthusiasm that marked the beginning of all my undertakings. Before I had made scarcely any progress I decided that fencing would be of greater value to me, it being an exercise requiring precision of movements, thus making it of much value in the development of brain as well as of muscle. Just about the time my interest in fencing was keyed up to the highest pitch, the friend with whom I was practicing accidentally prodded me a little on the shoulder. This scared me into abandoning the exercise as it seemed fraught with danger.

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Having read that deep and systematic breathing was considered by many as being the royal road to health for all whose stock of vitality is below par, I determined to give it a thorough trial. Deep-breathing was a pleasant exercise and easy to take; I kept it up for some time—perhaps ten days. Perhaps I might have continued it longer had I not about that time accepted the invitation of a friend to accompany him on an automobile tour which required several days. When I returned I was so much improved in health and spirits that I was

looking at life from a new angle. I had forgotten all about the needs of exercise and deep breathing.

About this time there was a vacancy in our city schools, occasioned by the death of a popular teacher, and the School Board reposed sufficient confidence in me to ask me to take the place. I finished out the term and gave such satisfaction to pupils and patrons that the Board asked me to accept the position for the ensuing year at an increased salary. But I declined, on the ground that my health would not permit it. I was slipping back into my old ways! New symptoms were appearing, but the old ones, like old friends, seemed the firmest, and all made their return at varying intervals.

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Among other things from which I now suffered were insomnia, melancholia, heart irregularity, and a train of mental symptoms and feelings which common words could not begin to describe. It would have required an assortment of the very strongest adjectives and adverbs to have told any one how I felt. For the first time, my stomach was now giving me a little trouble and my appetite was off. I went to see a stomach specialist who looked me over and gravely informed me that I had *psychasthenia anorexia*. This was a new one on me. For all I knew about the term, it may have been obsolete swearing. I did not realize then that a little medical learning to a layman is a dangerous thing.

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This doctor prescribed exercise, as had all the others whom I had ever consulted. As it was the consensus of medical opinion that I needed exercise, I thought I would take it scientifically and in the right manner; so I employed a qualified *masseur* to give me massage treatment. I thought passive exercise preferable to the active kind. This fellow, however, did not try to please me—he insisted on rubbing up when I wanted him to rub down, and *vice versa*—so I discharged him. Next I took up swimming and rowing, but one day I had a narrow escape from drowning, so that gave me a distaste for these things.

It seemed that I had about exhausted all the physical culture methods that might be considered genteel and in my class. Perhaps it may be more literally correct to say that I had formed a nodding acquaintance with the most of them.



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Informed me I had psychasthenia anorexia.

One day, as I was wondering what new thing I could annex, the postman handed me a letter. No psychology about this, for the postman comes every day and I get letters nearly every day. But this letter contained an advertisement of an outfit that was guaranteed to increase the stature. Now I was tall enough, but I had a new vanity that I felt like humoring just then. When I occasionally appeared at social functions I wanted to be designated as "the tall, handsome bachelor." I thought that if I went through a course of exercises stretching my ligaments and tendons it would also conduce to health and strength. Growing tall ought to

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be healthy, all right, I thought. So I got the apparatus—a fiendish-looking thing, composed of ropes, straps, buckles, and pulleys—and I set it up in an unused shed. I had taken exercises with it a few days and liked it first-rate. One evening, about dusk, I went out to take my usual “turn” and had just put on a head-gear suspended from a rope. This by a sort of hanging act was to develop and elongate the muscles of the neck. Just as I swung myself loose, two burly policemen hopped over the fence from the alley, cut the rope, and were dragging me off to the lock-up in spite of my pleadings and protests. I tried to assure them that I was not a lunatic and that I was not bent on suicide. “Shure, thot’s what they all say!” was the cold comfort they gave me. As luck would have it, I at last discovered that I had in my pocket some of the directions that went with this new trouble-maker. I prevailed upon these big duffers to read it by their flashlights, and it had its convincing effect upon them. In disgust they released me, one saying to the other:—

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“If I’d knowed thot, I’d let the dom’d fool hang a week!”

The next day I advertised the apparatus for sale, *cheap*.

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## CHAPTER VII.

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### THE NEURASTHENIC FALLS IN LOVE.

**I**N writing this sketch it is the endeavor to carry up the different emotions and characteristics of my life in all their phases, as well as to chronicle the vagaries resulting directly from alleged ailments. To do this without seeming digressions and inconsistencies is not an easy task; therefore this word of explanation seemed apropos.

In the affairs of the heart the neurasthenic is, as some one has said of the heathen Chineese, “peculiar.” As I have lived a life of celibacy so long, I feel free to speak frankly on this matter. After reading this chapter I am sure that no fair reader will picture me as her matinee idol; and I am quite sure that no good woman would undertake the shaky job of making me happy “forever and a day.” She could never learn what I wanted for breakfast. I never know myself, which for the present moment is neither here nor there.

When very adolescent I was engrossed in a few exceedingly tame little love affairs which were of short duration and easy to get over. These little loves are like mumps and whooping-cough and other youthful affections: they seem necessary, but seldom prove serious. Aside from these, I had been proof against the tender passion throughout all that period of my life when, according to the poet, “a young man’s fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love.” While I was getting on in years the love germ was only sleeping, and when it awakened all the lost time was soon made up. I had always admired the female sex collectively and at a distance, but individually no one had ever entered my life until I met Genevieve. The plot thickens! While temporarily—I did everything temporarily—holding a position on one of our daily papers, I suddenly became infatuated with this young lady who occupied a type-writer’s desk near my own. She was a charming girl of twenty and I will dive into the matter by saying that I was madly in love with her. She gave me every reason to believe that there were responsive chords touched in her heart, and that my affection was fully reciprocated. I became wilder every day! I could not be away from this fair creature who had changed the whole current of my being. I was supremely happy and looked at life through spectacles different from any I ever had before. Life had a roseate hue that it had never before possessed. Music was sweeter, flowers were prettier and pictures brighter than ever before. I seemed to be walking around in poetry and at the same time living up near heaven. While all this was true, I was at the same time miserable—a sort of ecstatic misery. It took away my appetite, made sleep impossible and filled my life with wavering hopes and fears. The suspense was killing me! At the first opportunity I threw myself, metaphorically, at her feet, and unburdened myself about in this manner:—

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“Darling, you are my love and my life and I cannot, and will not, live without you. What is your answer? Make up your mind before I do something desperate. Don’t let me over-persuade you, loved one, but if you think I can make you happy, say the word. My life is in your hands. If you spurn me I shall pass out of your life forever. Dear one, what will you do? Pray, speak quickly!”

She was listening attentively and I repeated the question that I thought would soon seal my fate: “*What will you do?*”

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My charmer gave vent to a little chuckle and said: “*Suppose we mildew?*”

That was the proverbial “last straw” with me. Or to multiply similes, my love was blighted like a tomato plant in an unseasonable frost, and I vowed that since I was brought to my senses I would never make love to another woman.

A few months later I had forgotten this incident. I happened one day to be reading a book entitled *Ideals* which gave much information on the subject of life-mating. As the reader may infer I was still a great reader. In fact I was a veritable walking-encyclopedia filled with a mass of information, most of which was of no earthly account. The book in question had a great deal to say concerning soul affinities, why marriages were successes or failures, and gave rules for selecting a sweetheart who would, of course, later bear a closer relationship. The writer thought somewhere there was a soul attuned to our own, and that sooner or later we would get in unison. This sounded nice and impressed me favorably, as most new things did. I recalled that Genevieve was short on the affinity part of the deal. With the aid of the book, I figured out that my ideal was a beautiful blonde with soulful eyes, into whose liquid depths I should some day feastingly gaze. I made up my mind that if ever, in an unguarded moment, I should again try my hand at love-making, I would temper it with science and the eternal fitness of things. I now knew how it should be done.

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Soon after this I was for a short time on the road as a commercial traveler and had some opportunity to watch for my affinity. I at last was rewarded by finding her in the daughter of a customer who lived in an inland town. She, too, was a charming girl, and with me it was a case of love at first sight. I realized at once that the Genevieve affair was spurious and not the real thing. I thought how different was this case with Eleanor—for that was the name my affinity bore. I adored this queenly little maid with the golden hair, and resolved on my next visit to her town to ask her to be mine. I was combining business and heart matters in a way that enabled me to make Eleanor's little city quite frequently. Unfortunately, before I made a return visit I was bruised up a little in a railroad wreck, in consequence of which I went to a hospital for repairs. It was nothing serious, but just enough to incapacitate me for a few days, and I thought I would fare better in the hospital than at a hotel. The nurse who attended me was a pretty brunette and she captivated me. I would lie there and longingly watch for the re-appearance of her natty uniform and sweet smile. Yes, I was desperately in love with Josephine, for besides being fair to look upon, she could do something to add to my comfort. I forgot all about Eleanor and ideals; not because I was a trifler with the hearts of women, but simply because in this matter, as in everything, I did not know my own mind. I was very reluctant to leave the hospital and remained as long as I could. Before going, however, I made love overtures toward Josephine. That lady smiled, not unkindly, and then turned and picked up a magazine called *Nurses' Guide*. She pointed to a bit of colloquy which read as follows:—

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*Man Patient*—"Will you not promise me (groans) that when I recover (more groans) you will fly with me?"

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*Fair Nurse*—"Sure, I will; I have just promised a one-legged man who has a wife and three children to run away with him. I will promise you anything; *it's a part of the business.*"

Once more I realized that I was simply living on the earth.

Whenever I found a young woman who combined good looks, real worth and a practical mind, she was usually engaged to some one else. Perhaps I was too hard to please. I would for a while admire brunettes and then suddenly develop a preference for blondes. I would for another short season think that tall girls were my choice, but in a little while my fancy would switch around to those who were rather small and petite. Sometimes I thought that only a woman who possessed musical and literary accomplishments would ever find favor with me. Then again I would think, should I ever marry, I would choose some little country lass and train her up according to my ideas and ideals. So this has been my life-time attitude toward the feminine half of the world. It is my weakness and not my fault. In consequence of which, am I to be despised and rejected of women?

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But, womankind, you have nowhere a more ardent admirer and defender than you will find in yours truly!

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## CHAPTER VIII.

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### MORBID FEARS AND FANCIES.

**I**T should be remembered that I am now a full-fledged neurasthenic, with all the rights and privileges that go with the job. Yes, Webster defines a job as being an undertaking. Neurasthenia is certainly an "undertaking," therefore it must be a job—a big one at that. It interferes with the holding of any more remunerative job and consumes most of one's time in trying to keep his health in a passable condition. I have had positions of some importance handed to me, which I discharged with eminent satisfaction to all concerned until I got ready to go off at some new tangent. If I did not imagine myself in the actual embrace of some grave physical or mental disease, I feared that something would in the near future attack me; and that brings me to the main topic of this chapter—morbid fears.

These foolish, fanciful and often groundless fears are dignified by the name of "phobias." A man who is afraid of everything should not be dubbed a low-down coward—he is simply afflicted with "pantaphobia." It doesn't cost a bit more to be scientific and it carries with it more *éclat*.

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Another one of these fears is agoraphobia—the fear of an open space. A fellow who has it is afraid to cross an open lot or field, and if he does make the venture, he carries with him a big stick or some weapon of defense. This, like many other phobias, is explained by scientists as being of simian inheritance. Our grandparents who lived in trees a few thousand years ago had a much tougher struggle for existence than any of us have today. Tree-tops were their only places of safety. If one of them happened to fall out of a tree into an open space on the ground where there was nothing to climb into, he was likely to be attacked by a lion or a tiger. This always filled the life of our little ancestor with intense fear and so affected his brain that the impress of it has been handed down and occasionally crops out in some of us. Our dreams of falling, we are told, are a vestige of the mental condition experienced by our monkey-foreparents when they made a misleap and fell to the ground.

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There is also the fear of a confined area, the fear of a crowd, fear of loss of speech at an inopportune moment, fear of falling buildings, fear of being alone, fear of poison, fear of germs, fears *ad nauseam*. I have qualified in all of them and taken post-graduate courses.

Another one of these fears I shall speak of and in no spirit of levity. It is too pathetic for pleasantry or jest. It is the fear that you will in some thoughtless moment, when the occasion is most ill-timed, utter some vulgar or profane word. These ugly, repulsive words or thoughts will cling with the greatest tenacity and defy every effort to eradicate them. They are of a nature entirely foreign to one's disposition and character; for the neurasthenic, with all his eccentricities, is usually refined and exemplary. A minister of the Gospel whose life was of almost immaculate purity stated that the word "damn" often tortured his life and caused him to fear that he would give it an untimely utterance. I have found that many persons are similarly afflicted, but are rather reluctant to let their fears be known.

Hydrophobia demands a few words. A few times in childhood I was scratched by a dog, in consequence of which I stood in mortal fear of hydrophobia. It was a popular belief that the poison of rabies might lie latent in the system and not manifest itself until years after. This belief obtains with many people to-day. The "madstones" in the possession of many credulous people help to perpetuate the fear of this awful disease. As a matter of fact, the madstone is simply a porous rock which may adhere to a warm, moist surface and exert an absorbent action. Any poison introduced under the skin is disseminated through the system in less than two minutes. If the doctor ever gave you a hypodermic, your knowledge on this point is convincing. The folly then of applying something, days or weeks later, to absorb the poison of a mad-dog's bite from a localized spot is at once apparent. Any owner of one of these stones who hires it out should be prosecuted for getting money under false pretense, and then dealt with by the humane societies for engendering morbid and groundless fears.

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Scientific men are yet divided on the question as to whether or not hydrophobia is a *bona fide* disease, or whether it is only a functional disturbance in which the element of fear predominates. No hydrophobia germ has ever been isolated, and when the doctors these days can't find a germ to fit a disease, it looks as if there was something wrong. It has many times been demonstrated that persons of a susceptible nature can be scared to death. But I don't care how much assurance I get from scientific sources, I can't get over the habit of being a little exclusive in regard to uncanny canines.

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There is scarcely a disease or a symptom that I ever heard of that has not at some time preyed upon my mind lest I become a victim of it. These fears are hard to throw off or laugh out of existence when once they have become a part of your very being. In order to avert untoward conditions which I thought might overtake me, I have changed from one occupation to another about as often as the man in the moon modifies his physiognomy. In making these changes I have often found it about like dodging an automobile to get hit by a street car.

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## CHAPTER IX.

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### GERMS AND HOW HE AVOIDED THEM. APPENDICITIS.

**M**ORBID fears have been briefly mentioned. It may now be in order for me to chronicle some of the hygienic measures that I have pursued with a view to averting diseases to which I thought I might succumb. In a former chapter I reported having subjected myself to many rigid conditions in the hope of ridding myself of infirmities which I then had. Now I am looking to the future with the idea that prevention is better than cure.

The germ theory gave me a great deal of worry. I learned a bit about it and some of the

habits of the ubiquitous bacillus. In this matter the little learning was, as usual, a dangerous thing. Germs were constantly on my mind, if not in my brain. It seemed that they were ever lying in wait for me and there was no avenue of escape. Sometimes my scrupulous care in trying to ignore the microbe caused me to be the subject of unfavorable comment. Once, at communion service, I took pains to give the cup a thorough rubbing before putting it to my chaste lips. It had just passed an unkempt and unwashed brother, and for my little act of circumspection I gained his ill-will. However, on the next occasion the cup came direct to me from the lips of a good-looking young woman and I remember that I did not take the usual precautions. This shows how inconsistent I was. I have since learned that some of the most virulent germs are to be found in the mouths of young ladies of the "Gibson-girl" type.

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When I was necessarily obliged to quench my thirst at a public drinking-place I drank up close to the *right* side of the handle of the cup, as I thought that would be the spot least contaminated. In order not to breathe any more germs than I could possibly avoid, I kept away from theatres and places where motley crowds assemble and shunned dust and impure air as I would a leper. I had read that there was on the market a sanitary mask to be worn when going to places where there was the greatest danger of coming into contact with germs, but I did not think that I could work up sufficient nerve to appear in public muzzled in this way. I knew from reading how many million microbes of different kinds there are inhabiting every cubic inch of air, and it was indeed appalling to think what even one of them would do for me if it chanced to hit me in a vulnerable spot. I did the best I could and kept my windows open wide both day and night, that some of these little imps of Satan might ride out on the breeze. *On a cold day I would sit shivering with my overcoat and heavy wraps on, while the wind was blowing a hurricane through any room.* At this some of the neighbors were wont to smile, but when they rather intimated that I was a little off I reminded them that Columbus and all other men who lived in advance of the times were regarded as hopeless lunatics.

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The wind was blowing a hurricane through my room.

One evening when I went to bed with my windows open as usual the weather was quite warm, but the temperature suddenly fell during the night and I chilled, in consequence of which I nearly had pneumonia. After that I thought it best to exclude some of the elements and try to put up with the germs. I went to the other extreme of avoiding fresh air. My main reason for doing so was that I read that one could become immune to his own brand of germs—the kind that constantly live in your own house and eat your own food. I thought this seemed reasonable, on the same principle that parents can get used to their own children easier than they can to other people's pestiferous brats. I don't know that there is science about any of this—no means of escape is all there is to it.

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Of late years I have changed my opinion regarding germs, the same as I have done over and over regarding everything else. We are all apt to think that the only good germs are like good Indians—dead ones. Perhaps most of these microscopic creatures are conservative and play some useful part in life's economy if we only knew what it is. Then we don't know whether microbes are the cause or the product of disease—just as we don't know which came first, the hen or the egg. What we don't know in this matter would make a stupendous



volume. At any rate it is of no use to run from germs, for they are omnipresent.

Appendicitis was a disease that I spent much time in battling. I read up on it and knew all the symptoms. I went to the public library and hunted up a Gray's *Anatomy* and studied the appendix. It seemed to be a little receptacle in which to side-track grape-seeds and other useless rubbish. I would no sooner have knowingly swallowed a grape- or a lemon-seed than I would a stick of dynamite. I would not eat oysters lest I get a piece of shell or even a pearl into my vermiform appendix. I was exceedingly careful never to swallow anything which I thought might contain a gritty substance. I had once heard a lecturer on hygiene and sanitation speak of the limy coat which forms on the inside of our tea-kettles from using "hard" water. He stated that in time we would get that sort of crust inside of us from drinking water which contained mineral matter. I thought how easy it would be for some of it to chip off and slip into the appendix and set up an inflammation. So to be on the safe side, I thought I would try drinking spring water for a while, but it gave me a bad case of malaria. I then came to the conclusion that between being dead with chills and having an inner concrete lining I would choose the latter, which seemed the lesser evil. But with some friend being operated upon for appendicitis nearly every day I could not easily dismiss this disease from my mind. Yet I realized that it was a high-toned disease and also a high-priced one, and that most fellows with my commercial rating are immune from it.

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I happened to be visiting a friend in a small town, for a few days, and was acquiring a voracious appetite. One evening I was seized with a sudden pain, and I knew the dread disease had come at last. The doctor came. He was an old-fashioned fellow without any frills, but he had what books and colleges do not always bestow—a head full of common sense. I said:—

"Doctor, will it have to be done to-night?"

"What done?" asked the doctor.

"Because," I replied, putting my hand on my left side, where the pain was, "I have appendicitis and I supposed—"

"My friend," said this well-seasoned physician, "you are perhaps not aware of the fact that the appendix is on the *right* side."

My knowledge of anatomy had betrayed me.

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The old doctor then gave me this homely advice, which may or may not be correct. At any rate I never forgot it. He said:—

"You've been eating too much and have a little indigestion and stomach-ache. But like thousands of others who have fertile imaginations, you have appendicitis—on the brain. People rarely had this disease thirty years ago. Why should they have it so frequently today? Is the human body so radically different from what it was a few years ago? I have been practicing my profession here for twenty-five years and during all this time I have seen very few cases of severe appendicitis, and those recovered under common-sense medical treatment. There may be an occasional case that requires the surgeon's knife, but such are exceedingly rare."

I have never since had a symptom of the disease, and somehow I can't help associating *appendicitis* with *hospitalitis*.

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## CHAPTER X.

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### DIETING FOR HEALTH'S SAKE.

**N**EXT I must say something about my dietetic ventures. I have at one time and another eaten everything and again eschewed everything in the way of diet, all for the sake of promoting health and longevity. I had read somewhere that a man is simply a reflex of what he puts into his stomach, and also that by judicious eating and drinking he may easily live to be one hundred years old. I started out to reach the century milestone. Why I wanted to attain an unusual age I am unable to explain, for I am sure that my life was not so profitable to myself or to anybody else. But that is another story.

I dieted myself in various ways. It seemed to be on the "cut and try" plan, for when one course of regimen proved disappointing, I very promptly tried something else—usually the very opposite. I was very fond of coffee, but I read that it was the strongest causative factor in the production of heart disease. In medicine advertisements in the newspapers I saw men falling dead on the street as a result of heart failure—always the same man, it is true; but that made little difference to me. I cut out both tea and coffee and drank only milk and water. When I got to reading about tuberculous cows and the action of State Boards of

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Health and public sanitarians in the matter, I became afraid to continue drinking milk. Next I drank only cocoa for a short season.

I took two or three health magazines, but the opinions contained therein were so conflicting that it was a difficult matter for me to follow any of them. For example, in one of them I read that no person who ate pickles, vinegar and condiments could hope to live to a healthy, green old age. Another stated that good vinegar and condiments in moderation caused the gastric fluids to flow and thus materially aided in the process of digestion.

For awhile I was a confirmed vegetarian. The idea of man slaughtering animals to eat was repulsive to me in the extreme. I recalled that the good Creator had in Holy Writ spoken of giving His children all kinds of fruits and herbs for food, but had not said much about edible animals. An argument against flesh-eating was the fact that some of our strongest animals, the horse, the ox and the elephant, never touch meat. I followed the vegetarian system of dietetics for some time, and while it seemed to agree with me, I had some misgivings as to whether or not it was the best thing for me. The thought happened to occur to me that, after all, we had a few powerful animals that subsist almost wholly upon the animal kingdom. Among these were the lion, the tiger and the leopard. The argument that all the strong animals eat only herbs and fruits was here knocked galley-west. I began eating meat again, although as I now look at my actions in this matter I can see no earthly reason why I should have turned either herbivorous or carnivorous. There was certainly no sense in trying to make a horse or a tiger out of myself.

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One day I thought I would look up a few points regarding the relative value of foods from a scientific basis. In my chemistry I ran across a table giving the quantity of water contained in certain foods. I found that about everything I had been eating was the aqueous fluid served up in one way or another. Here is a part of the table:—

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|            | Per cent. water |
|------------|-----------------|
| Watermelon | .98             |
| Cabbage    | .92             |
| Carrots    | .83             |
| Fish       | .81             |
| Cucumbers  | .97             |
| Beets      | .88             |
| Apples     | .80             |
| Meat       | .75             |

That was an eye-opener. I was getting less than 10 per cent. of nourishment in nearly everything that I ate. Thus, I should be obliged to eat nearly a hundred cucumbers and as many heads of cabbage to get one of the real thing. I was afraid that I was imposing upon the good nature of my stomach in asking it to digest so much water and debris in order to get a little nutriment into my system. I thought it would be better to drink the water as such and take my food in a more concentrated form. The body being composed of proportionately so much more fluids than solids, I concluded that plenty of pure water with a minimum quantity of food would be worthy of trial. For a little while I drank water copiously, and each day ate only an egg and a small piece of toast, with an occasional apple or orange thrown in mainly to fill up.

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When a new kind of food—a cereal product, it was supposed to be—appeared on the market and was heralded as a great life-giver, I became one of its faithful consumers. There were some fifteen or twenty of these and I had eaten in succession nearly all of them—I mean my share of them. It read on the boxes: "Get the habit; eat our food," and I was doing pretty well at it until I met with a discouragement. One day I met a traveling man who told me that in a town in Indiana where there was a breakfast-food factory, hundreds of carloads of corn-cobs were shipped in annually and converted into these tempting foods. My relish for this article of diet left me instant.

I partook of one kind of dietary for a while and then changed to something so entirely different that my stomach began to rebel in earnest. My appetite became very capricious. Sometimes I got up at one or two in the morning and went to a night restaurant nearby and would try my hand, or rather my stomach, on a full meal at this most unseasonable hour. Then at times quite unseemly I would get such an insatiable appetite for onions, peanuts, or something, that it was only appeased by hunting up the thing desired. I began taking syrup of pepsin to artificially digest my food and thus take some of the burden off my stomach. A friendly druggist took sufficient interest in me to inform me that there was not enough pepsin in the ordinary digestive syrups and elixirs to digest a mosquito's dinner. When asked why this ferment was omitted from such preparations, the druggist confided to me in a whisper: "Pepsin is a drug that costs money, while diluted molasses is cheap."

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As I had apparently not made much of a success at dieting myself, I thought I would consult a physician who called himself a specialist on "metabolism." I first thought the name had some reference to metals, but I found out differently. This man gave me what he was pleased to term a "test breakfast," for the purpose of diagnosing my case. Now, good

friends, if you never had a "test breakfast" from one of these ultra-scientific men, you are just as well off in blissful ignorance of it. Take my word for it, it is also calculated to put your good nature to the test. This doctor found out everything that I was eating and then told me to eat just the opposite.

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A few weeks later I went to see another specialist of the same kind. I wanted to compare notes. This man, too, inquired carefully into what I was eating. I knew at once that he wanted to prescribe something different. Sure enough, when I told him what my bill-of-fare now was he threw up his hands and said: "Man, those things will kill you!" He told me to go back to my former diet.

So many doctors act on the presumption that we are doing the wrong thing. It reminds me of this little conversation between a mother and her nurse-maid:—

*Mother*—"Martha, what is Johnnie doing?"

*Martha*—"I don't know, mum."

*Mother*—"Well, find out what he is doing *and tell him to stop it this very minute.*"

By the way, I learned a few things in an experimental process about the great subject of alimentation. No matter much what we eat, the system appropriates what elements it wants. The taste bulbs were planted in our mouths for a useful purpose. Our taste is about the surest index to the body's requirements in the matter of nourishment. If our appetite calls for a thing and it tastes all right, it will do us good whether it be carbo-hydrate or hydro-carbon or something else.

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## CHAPTER XI.

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### TELLS OF A FEW NEW OCCUPATIONS AND VENTURES.

ONLY casual mention has been made for a while concerning my occupations. The reader may imagine that in the pursuit of health I found no time to engage in the usual avocations of life. If such be your opinion I would say, be at once undeceived. The neurasthenic has the faculty of being able to turn off more work of a varied and useless character than any person living. I had a fund of information, mainly of a superficial nature, but it enabled me to turn my hand to a great many different things. I had once studied shorthand and I put this acquirement to what I thought was a useful purpose. I carried a number of note-books and took down everything that I saw or heard. Whenever a man of reputed wisdom was heard speaking, either from the rostrum or in private conversation, I was busy in the mechanical act of writing it down, and in so doing failed to get from the talk that inspiration which is so often more important than the mere words of the story. I had such a mess of notes in these little hooks and crooks that I never found time to hunt anything up and read it over. In fact, I doubt whether in all this rubbish I could have found anything I wanted had I searched ever so long. Still I obtained considerable information, mainly as I did when a boy, by absorption.

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I was full of tables and statistics. By keeping some of these in my brain in an easy place to get at them when wanted, I was able to formulate rules and plans for almost any condition that might arise. By unloading abstruse and unusual facts at the proper time and place I gained the reputation of being a very shrewd fellow, but I was always careful to introduce subjects in which my assertions were likely to go unchallenged. I had established the habit of reasoning by deduction and analogy, and would often startle people by what they thought was my profound wisdom. I had a system of cues by which I tried to cultivate a memory so tenacious that nothing could escape me, but this proved a great deal like my voluminous note-taking. It often crowded out some things of the most vital importance; besides, I often forgot my cues—just as one ties a string in his button-hole to keep from forgetting something and then forgets to look at the string.

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By my suave manners and versatile speech I was enabled to work myself into the good graces of people and thus obtain desirable positions. But always on some pretext I shifted from one thing to another. Once I held for a short time a very remunerative place in a banking establishment, but I got to thinking that in case of robbery or defalcation I might be unjustly accused; so I promptly handed in my resignation. Through the recommendations of influential friends I was next able to secure a Government clerkship which I held for a few months. My reason for remaining with it so long was perhaps due to the fact that I became interested in social problems and I was in touch with a class of people from whom I could obtain valuable ideas. As soon as I thought I had mastered the intricacies of socialism, I started out on a lecture tour. I wanted to enlighten benighted humanity on economic matters and unfold to it a scheme that would lift the burden of poverty from its shoulders. If I could get this feasible plan of mine in operation, with the proper distribution of wealth and

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everybody compelled to work just a little, we could all have a tolerable easy time. The poor, over-worked and under-fed people would then have a chance to read and cultivate their minds. It did not occur to me at the time that among the wealthy who had oceans of time there was a paucity of mind cultivation.

The lecture was a failure; my ideas were too far in advance of the times, and I realized as never before that great movements, like great bodies, must move slowly. However, two or three wealthy and enthusiastic co-workers came to my financial rescue right nobly. I could usually find some one fool enough to "back up" any scheme I might see fit to project.

The next thing I conceived was to work to the front in a manufacturing industry of some kind. I had read that, for mastering all the details of a business, there was nothing like beginning at the ground and working up. Nearly all men of affairs had begun in that way; why should I not? Accordingly I started in as a laborer in a foundry with the full determination of forging to the front. But the first day I burned my hand and I at once gave up the idea of ever becoming a captain of industry.

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Having dabbled in literary work a little at odd times I had obtained a slight recognition as a writer. My vivid imagination had impressed two or three magazine editors favorably. One of these in particular called for more of my short stories, and in his letter occurred these sentences:—

"You have what is known to psychologists as 'creative imagination,' but you paint your pictures in a plausible manner. You are great on synonyms: seldom use a word of any length more than once in the same manuscript; and last, but not least, your diction is so clear and concise that it seems to the reader that you are talking to him."

This swelled me up with conceit and I thought if these words be true, why should I bury my talents in a little magazine in exchange for a paltry twenty-five dollars per thousand words? I would write a play and do something worth while. Just as I had the skeleton of the play well formed and a good start made on it, I came into the possession of a few thousand dollars by the death of an uncle in California. I at once invested the money in a farm—the most sensible thing I ever did. Now I thought that I would move to the country and live the life of a retired country gentleman. The seclusion of rural life would better enable me to put vim and inspiration into my literary efforts. But I found that the farm was too lonesome, with only hired help about me, so I secured a tenant and hied back to my city quarters.

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These are only a few of my undertakings. Everything was "for a short time." This phrase occurs monotonously often, a fact of which I am not unaware, but I don't know how to obviate it.

While most of my ventures have been failures, as the world reckons failure, yet they have all been a source of satisfaction to me. Some day I feel that I shall find a life-work that will be to my liking and have a salutary effect upon me mentally and physically.

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## CHAPTER XII.

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### TRIES A NEW BUSINESS; ALSO TRAVELS SOME FOR HIS HEALTH.

AS the reader may have already surmised, the play mentioned in the preceding chapter was never finished. No; after I was once more domiciled in my city home, I began to think that if I really was a literary genius I ought to commercialize my ideas right, instead of using them in fiction or drama simply to tickle the fancy of people who would forget it all in a moment's time. The idea of teaching things by mail occurred to me as being a field of great possibilities.

While it is a difficult matter to give tangible lessons by correspondence methods on some subjects—swimming, for example—yet on nearly everything there may be presented a working knowledge which the student can enlarge upon for himself. I employed some auburn-haired typewriters and began advertising to teach several different subjects by mail courses. Among these were journalism, poultry-raising, bee-culture, market-gardening, surveying, engineering, architecture, and several different things. We gave our graduates a nice diploma with some blue ribbon and cheap tinsel on it. These diplomas cost about twenty cents apiece to get them up, which seemed like a reckless waste of money, but it helped to advertise the business. Business came and we hadn't much to do except to deposit the money and, incidentally, send out the "stock letters," which the girls always jokingly called the "lessons."

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One day one of the typewriters called my attention to the fact that for originality I had been outdone by a fellow at Peoria, Illinois, who advertised in the leading magazines to teach ventriloquism by mail. This was certainly an innovation in the way of mail instruction. I

thought a little while about something entirely new that I could introduce. I soon had it! I got up a correspondence course in courting for the purpose of straightening out the crooked course of true love. I argued that nearly everything else had been simplified save courting, which went on in the old laborious manner with lovers' quarrels, heartaches, and oftentimes life-time estrangements. The course was a success and many wrote for "individual" instruction.

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Things were going well and I had a lucrative business. I had been so busy for several months that all my symptoms had sunk into desuetude. I had almost forgotten that I was an invalid and that I should take care of my precious health, what little I had left, when the thought occurred to me, as it had several years before, that I was working too hard. Then, too, I became a little conscience-stricken. My conscience had never before troubled me, probably from the fact that I had never worked it overtime. I began to think that in these correspondence courses I might not be giving my patrons value received for their money. A pretty record for me to leave behind me, I thought. So as I had a competency anyway, I paid off my helpers and went out of business.

As I now thought I was again on the very edge of a nervous breakdown, I concluded to travel for my health. Where to go was the next question! A medical friend suggested a sea-voyage, but advised me to first take a sail for a day or so on Lake Michigan. I did so and became so seasick that death would have been joyously welcomed. I did not take the proposed voyage, as I had had enough.

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But the germ that prompted me to travel for my health had a firm grip on me. Colorado was my first objective point, and on the first day of my arrival there I went to the top of one of their snow-capped mountains. I had not taken into account the effects of altitude upon a person not accustomed to it, and in consequence of my sudden ascent I had a slight expectoration of blood. This seemed to be cause for genuine alarm, and I now realized that I was to be a victim of "the great white plague," vulgarly known as consumption. Consumptives were as thick as English sparrows in Colorado and I saw ample evidences of the disease in all its horrible details. It seemed that there was a sort of caste among the "lungers," depending mainly upon their amount of ready cash. Some had plain "consumption," while others had only "tuberculosis." Many had "lung trouble," "catarrh," "bronchitis," and—"neurasthenia."

The patients in the sanitariums were graded. The most advanced cases were called the "B. L. B's."—"The Busted Lung Brigade." It seems that there is no condition too grim for joke and jest. On all sides there were coughing and expectorating and suffering and dying, sufficient to dismay the stoutest heart—and I a victim myself, I thought.

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I heard that the torrid southwest was the ideal climate for tuberculosis and thither I went. I visited a few places in this hot southwestern country where it is alleged that consumptives in all stages soon recover and grow fat. I soon learned that these alluring reports should be taken with the usual quantity of saline matter. This boosting of climate for invalids, I found, was mainly the work of land sharks, railroads, hotel and sanitarium people, and a few medical men who were crafty or misguided. This climate may be ideal in being germ-free, but where it is so hot and dry that even germs can't eke out an existence, it is also a trifle trying on the tender-foot consumptive. I found that the bad water and sand-storms in many localities, coupled with his homesickness, more than off-set all the good results the climate could otherwise bring to the sufferer.

In nearly every room I occupied while in this Mecca for consumptives, the place had been rendered vacant by my predecessor having moved out—in a box. I did not stay in one locality very long, but visited a number of places that were exploited as being the land of promise for all afflicted with this agonizing disease. Everywhere I went I saw hundreds of victims being shorn of their money and deriving meager, if any, benefits. The native consumptives went elsewhere in search of health, it being another case of "green hills *far away*." Many went so far as the State of Maine.

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Every State in the Union has at some time been lauded as the favored spot for the cure of consumption, but, after all, it seems as mythical as the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. Some climates may be better than others for those ill with this disease, but if you are a poor, homesick sufferer—a stranger in a strange land—I doubt whether the best climate on earth can vie with the comforts of home, surrounded by those nearest and dearest to you, and whose kindly administrations are not to be regarded as a case of "love's labor lost."

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I returned home "much improved in health." Don't think I've had a tuberculous symptom since.

## TRIES A RETIRED LIFE; IS ALSO AN INVESTIGATOR OF NEW THOUGHT, CHRISTIAN SCIENCE, HYPNOTIC SUGGESTION, ETC.

HAVING now decided upon a retired life in earnest, I had nothing to do but to look after my health and enjoy myself as best I could. I would settle down and have a good time after a genteel fashion and, as the poet says: "Gather ye rosebuds while ye may." I would cultivate the little niceties and amenities that go to embellish and round out one's life and character. I would add a few touches to enhance my personal charms. I would manicure my nails; iron out my "crow feet"; bleach out my freckles; keep my hair softened up with hirsute remedies, and my mustache waxed out at the proper angle. Whenever I appeared in society I did not mean to take a back seat or be a wall-flower, realizing that bachelors of my age and standing were very popular in a social way. However, I did not intend to get entangled in the meshes of love again, remembering the Genevieve-Eleanor-Josephine affairs. No wedding bells for me!

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Yes, I would take life easy and I was always thinking, "next week I shall go to work enjoying myself." But time slipped along and somehow I could not get started in on the road to happiness. As I had nothing else to do I could not understand why I should not be supremely happy. But I found it hard work doing nothing; I could not enjoy myself at it.

Again I began to grow introspective and melancholy, and soon had a return of all my symptoms of old. They all came trooping in to pay me a visit for the sake of auld lang syne. How should I treat them? To get rid of unwelcome visitors often requires study and tact. I had tried about all the "health and hygiene" rules that had ever been invented. But while this was true, I take a certain degree of pride in saying that among all the absurd measures to which I have resorted, I never made a practice of taking dopes and cure-alls. There are depths to which a self-respecting neurasthenic will not stoop. One of these is taking patent medicines and nostrums. Whenever an individual has descended so low that he imbibes these things, he has gotten out of our class and has become a common, every-day fiend. No, the neurasthenic is no commonplace fellow. He may undergo a useless operation for appendicitis, but he will not swill down dirty dopes. His office is high-toned and esthetic. Perhaps that is the main reason why he is so often reluctant to give it up and be cured. He may display morbid fears and fancies that border on lunacy, and he may do some freakish and atrocious things, but for all that he is usually a man of good points and perhaps superior attainments. Our cult is respectable and made up of gentlemen who seldom defile their mouths or stomachs with tobacco, cigarettes, impure words or patent medicine.

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But I could not refrain from doing something for my health's sake. After taking a little mental survey of the past, I saw at once that all of nature's methods had, at one time and another, been called into my service. It seemed to be an unconscious rule of action on my part never to do the same thing twice if it could be avoided. Now I resolved to invade the realm of the speculative and unseen by dipping into New Thought. The subject seemed to be fascinating, although one in which there was still something to be learned. The psychic research people claimed to have telepathy and thought transference about on a paying basis. I thought that if I could get some strong "health waves" permeating my system it would do me good. The thing to do was to get my psychic machinery attuned to that of some good healthy, clean-minded individuals who were skilled in this line of business. I attended the meetings of a Theosophy Mutual Admiration Society and tried to get some of their wholesome thoughts worked into my system. It seemed to act nicely and the results were gratifying, but I was of the opinion that perhaps Christian Science was better adapted to my needs. It would be a stunner to be able to address a little speech about like this to myself:—

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"The joke is on you, old chap; you don't feel any of those symptoms you have complained of all these years. Why? Well, because you haven't anybody and haven't anything to feel with. Mind is all there is to you and—and—and I'm afraid there is not enough of it to give you much trouble."

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I liked Christian Science pretty well, although the name seemed to me somewhat of a misnomer. The main part of it consisted in trying to make me believe that nothing is or ever was. Just a great big, overgrown imagination. However, I cannot refrain from perpetrating that old gag about their taking real money for what they did for me.

I soon dropped science and was treated by hypnotic suggestion. I would seat myself in an easy-chair midst seductive surroundings and the great metaphysician would then say: "Put your objective senses in abeyance with complete mental oblivion, and enter a state of profound passivity." This interpreted into plain United States would mean: "Forget your troubles and go to sleep." When I was in a suggestible mood the doctor would address a little speech to what he called my subconscious mind, after which he sent me on my way rejoicing. About this time a friend advised me to consult a vibrationist, which I did.

This man told me that the trouble in my case was in my polarization; not enough positive for the negative elements. However, he assured me that I could be cured by sleeping with my head to the northwest and wearing his insulated soles inside my shoes. I postponed taking this treatment until after I had heard from an astrologist to whom I had written. The latter agreed to tell me all I cared to know about myself and my ailments, which he would deduce from the date of my birth. His graphic description of the diseases to which I was liable gave me a favorable impression of his astute wisdom. So I wrote to about a dozen other

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astrologists for horoscopes of my life in order to see whether all their findings were the same. Some of them tallied almost verbatim with the first one received, while others were diametrically opposite. From this I inferred that these star-gazers gained their information in at least two ways: from their imaginations and from a book.

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## CHAPTER XIV.

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### THE CULTIVATION OF A FEW VICES AND THE CONSEQUENCES.

WHEN I found that I couldn't possibly do nothing—I do not mean this in the ungrammatical sense in which it is so often used—I thought I would be obliged to take up some new calling or diversion. Time hung heavily on my hands and I thought too much about myself, as usual. A mental healer had told me that I was too imaginative and thought of too many different things. He said: "A part of the time try to think of absolutely nothing; think of yourself." I did not know whether he meant this literally or as a bit of sarcasm. Anyway, I realized that it was best for me to keep the ego in subjection so far as possible. But to what new things could I now turn in order to divert my mind from myself and my ailments?

I had always led a life very exemplary and free from even the petty vices usually indulged in by the best of men. I had never engaged in the little pleasantries and frivolities that might be of questioned propriety. I would often remark that I had never had a cigar between my teeth, never had uttered a cuss word, never kissed a girl, and so on. For this my friends would sometimes twit me and say: "Old boy, you don't know what you've missed!" Another quotation rung in my ears was: "Be good and you'll be happy, but you'll miss a lot of fun!" So I thought I would pursue a different course for a while. It was an awful thing to do, but I was set upon putting it to the test: I would cultivate a few delicate vices.

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One day, when a very good friend was visiting me, I thought I would begin on my course of depravity. The first lesson would be in swearing. When an opportunity presented itself, I uttered a word that I thought was strong enough for an amateur to begin on. It stuck in my throat and nearly choked me. My friend laughed and looked both amused and ashamed. Reader, if you have lived to maturity and never indulged in profanity, you can't imagine how awkward it will be for you to turn out your first piece of swearing. You can't do it justice. With no disposition to want to sermonize on the matter I would say, don't begin. I have seen several women—or rather females—who could beat me swearing all hollow.

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Next, I thought I'd try smoking. In theory only I knew some of the seductive effects of My Lady Nicotine. I would experience the reality. I purchased a box of cigars, and in making my selection I depended mainly upon the label on the box, as women do when they buy birthday cigars for their husbands. When I got in seclusion I took out one and smoked about an inch of it. Pretty soon things began going round and an eruption occurred inside of me. Words are inadequate to describe how sick I became, so I shall not make the attempt. It is needless to state that I at once abandoned the idea of ever being able to extract any satisfaction from tobacco fumes.

No more self-contamination for me, I thought. But soon after these events another friend prevailed upon me to sample with him a most excellent brand of champagne. The blood mounts to my cheeks in "maidenly" shame as I now chronicle the occurrence. This friend said: "You don't know what a feeling of exhilaration and well-being a little good champagne will give you. Try it once; don't associate it with common alcoholic stimulants." Those last words, well-meant but, to me, misleading, caused me to make a spectacle of myself for a short period of time. While I partook of this fizzing beverage lightly, the reader will understand how readily the stuff affected my susceptible system and how quickly it went to my head. And then it seemed to have staying qualities. The next morning I was crazier than ever, but toward evening I crawled out on the lawn in a secluded corner. The fresh air did me good, but for several hours I had to hold on to the grass *to keep from dropping off the earth*.

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Here I halted on my road to ruin. I resolved that between remaining a neurasthenic who enjoyed the respect and esteem of a large circle of friends, and becoming a depraved wretch, I would choose the former. I had no ambition to become a sport or a rounder, but would continue the even tenor of my former way and stick to those things in which I could indulge without moral or mental reservations.

Now, whenever I see a bibulous man, it brings to my mind visions of that one experience and how I was compelled to hold on for dear life to keep from falling into space.

### CONSIDERS POLITICS AND RELIGION. CONSULTS OSTEOPATHIC AND HOMEOPATHIC DOCTORS.

**B**Y this time I was beginning to get tolerably well acquainted with myself. The reader may perhaps think—if he cares enough to think—that I did not enjoy life; but I did in my evanescent, changeful way. I was always wavering between optimism and pessimism. Some days one of these qualities would predominate and some days the other would be in evidence. I never knew one day what the next would bring forth. I came to understand myself so well that I never started anything with the determination to carry it to a finish.

I thought about entering politics, but did not know with what party to cast my affiliations. The Democrats and the Republicans both claimed to favor a judicious revision of the tariff as well as a yearning to bridle the trusts and money power. So did the Populists. Each of them had plenty of plans for solving the vexed and ever-present problem of capital and labor. Each party espoused the cause of the masses who toil, and each likewise favored laws which would enable one to get the highest price if he had labor or products to sell; or if one happened to be in the market as a buyer he would, of course, get these things cheap. Their rules seemed to effect a compromise by working both ways. Out of all these conflicting and chaotic ideas I knew that I would be unable to decide upon any set of issues and stay with them a fortnight. So, as I view the matter now, I think I displayed unusual strength of character in staying out of politics.

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The same puzzling situation confronted me in regard to matters of the church. There were those who were very firm in the conviction that immersion was the only true way of being introduced into the church; others thought pouring was good enough; while still others considered sprinkling all that was essential to pass the portals. Some believed in infantile baptism, while a few good, religious people that I chanced to know did not deem any kind of water-rite at any time in life absolutely necessary. A certain few clung to fore-ordination which, if true, would preclude the need of most people making any efforts along that line. Some of the churches denounced dancing and card-playing in no unmeaning terms, while others gave holy sanction to card-parties and charity balls. Some churches were bound down by certain rigid rules which they called creeds; others were very much opposed to these. For every belief there was an "anti."

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Under such conditions as these it was a big undertaking to try to sift the wheat from a mountain of chaff and become enthusiastic in one's devotion to State and Church. Why should there be such a state of chaos on matters of the most vital importance? Is human nature not sincere? Or is it simply erratic?

For the present I tried to content myself with the study of subjects that would in a small way muddle the world in return for the muddling the world had given me. I pursued the investigation of such things as neoplatonism, psychic phenomena, platonic friendship, and so forth. After coaching myself up a little on such topics as these, I could appear in the most erudite company and pose as an authority on the same. Ah! authority, how many errors are committed in thy name!

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For several months I busied myself in one way and another, and my infirmities seemed to have given me a respite. Every symptom had for a while been in abeyance, but now they began to assert themselves with renewed activity. The reader will perhaps wonder what new restorative agencies I could now summon to my aid. I was always quite resourceful and could usually think of something untried.

I remembered that I had never consulted a homeopathic physician. This must have been on my part an oversight, for I have the greatest esteem for this class of medical men, mainly on account of their benign remedies. The one I consulted told me that homeopaths did not treat a disease *name*, but directed the remedy toward the symptoms at hand. This impressed me that he would treat my case on its merits and without any guess-work. My relief would depend upon correct statements in answer to all the doctor's questions. He was very painstaking in this matter, and the questions asked were many and diversified. One was: "Do you ever imagine that you see a big spider crawling up the wall?" Another was: "Do you at times imagine that you are falling from a high precipice?"

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At the time I had a slight tonsillitis, and the doctor was careful to note that it was the right tonsil involved. He told me that if it had been the left one, the treatment would be entirely different. Up to this time I had, in my ignorance of the human frame, supposed that the two halves were the same in function and symmetrical in anatomy.

The doctor gave me a vial of little red pills about the size of beet seeds, with explicit directions as to how to take them. If I exceeded the dosage prescribed I endangered my life, for these pellets were of a high potency. They were little two-edged swords which might cut both ways.

I took this medicine for perhaps a week; that was longer than I usually confined myself to



one remedy. One day, when in an extremely despondent mood, I was seized with an impulse to kill myself. Neurasthenics, like hysterical women, sometimes talk of suicide, but these threats are usually made to attract attention and gain sympathy. Neither very often make any well-directed efforts to get their threats into execution. But for me to plan was to act; so I attempted the "rash act," as the newspapers invariably call it, by swallowing the contents of that little vial. I then performed a few ante-mortem details, such as writing good-byes to friends. About the time I had all my arrangements made and was wondering if it was not time for the medicine to exert its deadly effect, I changed my mind about dying. The stuff had been so slow in its action that it had enabled me to look at life from a different viewpoint. Life now seemed sweet to me and it was so soon to pass from me! Oh! why had I not used some deliberation before thus consummating the desperate deed?

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To the telephone I rushed. I soon had the doctor, and this was our conversation:—

*Myself*—"Doctor, come at once; by mistake I swallowed all the medicine you gave me. Do hurry, doctor."

*Doctor*—"Did you take the entire contents of the bottle?"

*Myself*—"Every one—over a hundred—do hurry, doctor."

*Doctor*—"No alarm, then. You have swallowed so many that they will neutralize one another and act as an antidote. Calm yourself and you will be all right!"

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I thought more than ever that this was surely a mysterious remedy.

A few weeks later I chanced to remember that in my ceaseless rounds of trying to regain my health and retain such as I had, no osteopathic doctor had ever been favored by a call from me. I went to consult with one post-haste. The osteopath wanted to pull my limbs both literally and metaphorically. He discovered that I had a rib depressed and digging into my lungs; also a dislocation of my atlas, which is a bone at the top of my spinal column. He was not sure but that one of my cranial bones was pressing upon one of the large nerve centers in my brain. My symptoms were all reflex from these troubles.

I did not decide upon an immediate course of osteopathic treatment, as I had been struck by something new. I will tell about it another chapter; it makes me so tired to write so much at one time. That accounts for these short chapters all along.

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## CHAPTER XVI.

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### TAKES A COURSE IN A MEDICAL COLLEGE.

**Y**ES, I had thought of something entirely new. I would take a medical course and would then know for myself whether I suffered from a complication of diseases or whether it was true, as many had tried to convince me, that there was nothing the matter with me. A medical education, too, would be an embellishment that every one could not boast of. I had the necessary time and means to take a course in medicine, having no one dependent upon me. If there had been family cares on my hands, the case would have been different. So I matriculated in a St. Louis medical college during the middle of a term and began the study of the healing art.

Now, reader, please do not be shocked too badly if, in this connection, I mention a few slightly uncanny things. I have always noticed, however, that most people do not raise much of a fuss over a diminutive shocking semi-occasionally, provided the act comes about as a natural course of events. There were many things about the college and clinic rooms that were, to me, gruesome and repulsive. The dissecting-room, with its stench and debris from dead bodies, was the crucial test for me. I wonder now that I stayed with it as long as I did.

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For my dissecting partner I had an uncouth cow-puncher from southern Texas. There were in the college a number of these broad-hatted and rather illiterate fellows from the southwest trying to get themselves metamorphosed into doctors. (I would often feel for their prospective patients.) This man who assisted me on the "stiff," as they call the dissecting material, did the cutting and I looked up the points of anatomy. I preferred to do the literary rather than the sanguinary part of the work. One evening—we did this work at night—we were to dissect and expose all the muscles of the head, so as to make them look as nearly as possible like the colored plates in the anatomy. We were expected to learn the names of all these structures. The memorizing of these terms was no small task, for I remember that one little muscle even bore this outlandish name: *levator labii superioris alaquae nasi*. Anglicized, this would mean that the function of the muscle was to raise the upper lip and dilate the nostril. My companion said that he "didn't see no sense in being so durned scientific." Accordingly he went to work and cut all the flesh off the head and stacked it up on the slab. When the demonstrator of anatomy came by to test our knowledge and to see

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our work, he asked: "What have you here?" My friend very promptly answered: "A pile of lean meat." This student went by the not very euphonious name of "Lean Meat" from that date.

A trick of the students was to place fingers and toes in pockets of unsuspecting visitors to the dissecting-room. There was no end to these ghoulish acts. A student while in a hilarious mood one night did a decapitating operation on one of the bodies. His loot was the head of an old man with patriarchal beard and he carried it around from one place of debauchery to another, exhibiting it to gaping crowds of a rather unenviable class of citizenship.

I mention these things merely that the reader may imagine the morbid effect they might have upon one of my temperament. Being a freshman, I was to get in the way of lectures only anatomy, physiology, microscopy and osteology. This interpreted meant body, bugs, and bones. But I wanted to acquire medical lore rapidly, so I listened to every lecture that I could, whether it came in my schedule or not. *Soon I began to manifest symptoms of every disease I heard discussed.* I would one day have all the signs of pancreatic disease; perhaps the next I would display unmistakable evidences of ascending myelitis; next, my liver would be the storm center, and so on. My shifting of symptoms was gauged by the lecturers to whom I listened.

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At my room one evening I was walking the floor wrapped in deepest gloom. No deep-dyed pessimist ever felt as I did at that moment, for I had just discovered that I had an incurable heart disease. I had often feared as much, but now I had it from a scientific source that my heart was going wrong. I could tell by the way I felt. My room-mate noticed me. He was another Western bovine-chaser, a good fellow in his way, but according to my standard, devoid of all the finer qualities that go to make a gentleman.

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"What in thunder's the matter with you, feller?" he blurted out. I told him of the latest affliction that had beset me. What this fellow said would not look well in print. My exasperation at his conduct, together with thoughts of my new disease, caused me to lash the pillow sleeplessly that night. I decided to go early in the morning and see Dr. Cardack, professor of chest diseases, and at least have him concur in my self-diagnosis.

The doctor had not yet arrived at his office. I must have been very early, for it seemed to me that he would never come. When he did arrive I was given a very affable greeting but only a superficial examination. I felt a little hurt to think that he did not seem to regard my case with the significance which I thought it deserved. The afflicted are always close observers in whatever concerns themselves. Professor Cardack had a peculiar smile on his big, kind face when he asked:—

"Have you been listening to my lectures on diseases of the heart?"

"Yes, sir;" was my response.

"Did you hear my lecture on mitral murmurs yesterday?" he asked.

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"I did," I had to admit.

"And did you read up on the subject?" was further interrogated.

"Y-yes," and my tones implied a little guilt, although I could not tell why.

"I thought so," continued the doctor; "some of the boys from our college were in last night to have their hearts examined, and I am expecting quite a number in again this evening. Every year when I begin my course of lectures on the heart the boys call singly and in droves to see me and have my assurance that they have no cardiac lesions. I have never yet found one of them to have a crippled heart. Like you, they all have a slight neurosis, coupled with a self-consciousness, that makes them think the world revolves around them and their little imaginary ailments."

I felt somewhat ashamed, but with it came a sense of relief. "Misery loves company," and I was glad in my mortification to think that I had not been the only one to make a fool of myself.

The old doctor gave me the usual advice about exercise. He said: "Go home when this term has closed and go to work at something during your vacation. Work hard and for a purpose, if possible, but don't forget to work. If you can't do any better, dig ditches and fill them up again. Forget yourself! Forget that you have a heart, a stomach, a liver, or a sympathetic nervous system. Live right, and those organs will take care of themselves all right. That's why the Creator tried to bury them away beyond our control."

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This little talk, coming as it did from an acknowledged authority, made a strong impression upon me. I resolved to act upon the suggestions given me. By the way, it is scarcely necessary for me to state that I never went back to the medical college again.

## TURNS COW-BOY. HAS RUN GAMUT OF FADS.

NEXT I decided to turn cow-boy, so I at once went toward the setting sun. I would go out West and go galloping over the mesa and acquire the color of a brick-house, with the appetite and vigor that are its concomitants. I had frequently read of Yale and Harvard graduates going out and getting a touch of life on the plains; so, as such a life did not seem to be beneath the dignity of cultured people, I would give it a trial.

I had never had any experience in "roughing it," but from what I had read I knew that it was just the thing to make me healthy and vigorous and also cause me to look at life from a few different angles. In addition to my unceasing concern about my health, I also had a yearning to experience every phase and condition of life known to anybody else.

Broncho-busting and Western life in general satisfied me about as quickly as any of my numerous ventures. In a very few days I was heartsick and homesick—a strong combination. I will draw a curtain over some of my experiences, as I don't care to talk about them; one of these being my feelings after my first day in the saddle. When I worked for that mean old farmer, years before, I thought I was physically broken up if not entirely bankrupt, but that experience pales into significance as compared with the present case. Then we got out on an alkali desert, forty miles from water, and I nearly choked, to death. However, I survived it all and in due time got back to civilization.

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On my arrival home my den looked more cozy and inviting than it ever had before. My old friends gave me a hearty greeting and their smiles and handshakes seemed good to me on dropping back to earth after a brief sojourn in the Land of Nowhere. I was truly glad for once that I was alive, for I believe there is no keener pleasure than, after an absence, to have the privilege of mingling with old, time-tried friends that you know are sincere and true. My friends seemed just as glad to see me as I did them. We laughed as heartily at each other's jokes as if they had been really funny. Old friends are the best, because they learn where our tenderest corns are and try to walk as lightly as possible over them. I thought the hardships I had endured for a while were fully compensated for by once more being surrounded by familiar faces and scenes.

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But in a few weeks life again became monotonous. Everybody bored me. It seemed to me that both men and women talked, as they thought, in a circle of very small circumference. I found only an occasional person who could interest me for even a short time; I felt that I must have some mental excitement of a legitimate kind or I would go crazy. What should it be?

Not having anything better at hand, I turned my attention to society and the club. I had never given these matters quite the earnest consideration even for the accustomed length of time which I devoted to so many other things. I conceived the idea of inaugurating a campaign of education, socially speaking, for the purpose of getting men and women on a higher plane of thinking. I tried to get everybody interested in Browning and Shakespeare, from whom they could get mental pabulum worth while; I would have everybody look after his diction and not give vent to such expressions as: "I seen him when he done it." I would get as many people as I could to think and talk of something above commonplaces. But in a little while I saw that most people did not want to be bored by such things as mind cultivation, but were rather bent on what they chose to think was a good time. So I went to the opposite extreme and tried to perfect myself in the small talk and frivolities that interest the majority of society people. I was soon able to ape the vapid dictates of those who called themselves the *élite* and the *bon ton*. If the reader will pardon me for using these words, I promise as a gentleman not to inflict them on him again.

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Of course, I did not pursue my last strain for very long. I worried somewhat about my health, but not so much as of old. I had had about all the disease symptoms worth having and now could complain only on general principles. My character was as vacillating and unsettled as ever. I would pick up one thing today only to discard it to-morrow. I had tried so many different callings, fads, and diversions that now only something in the way of an innovation appealed to me even momentarily. Truth to tell, I had about got to the bottom of my resources, and felt somewhat like old Alexander the Great when he conquered his last world and wept because he was out of a job.

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I had become very discriminating in regard to trying remedial measures and agencies. Any new thing in order to gain my favor had to bear the brand: "Made in Germany."

## GIVES UP THE TASK OF WRITING CONFESSIONS.

READER, you have perhaps wondered all along how I could ever hold myself down to write a little sketch of my life. I wonder myself that I have thus been able to jot down twenty thousand words without once going in for repairs. I did not realize until this very moment what a lot of work I was piling up—an effort that is appalling for me to contemplate. Indeed, I have suddenly grown so tired of it that I have decided, here and now, to give it up, as I have all my other undertakings. And I had this little volume only about half compiled! Perhaps, some day, in a spasm of industry I may be able to write the other half.

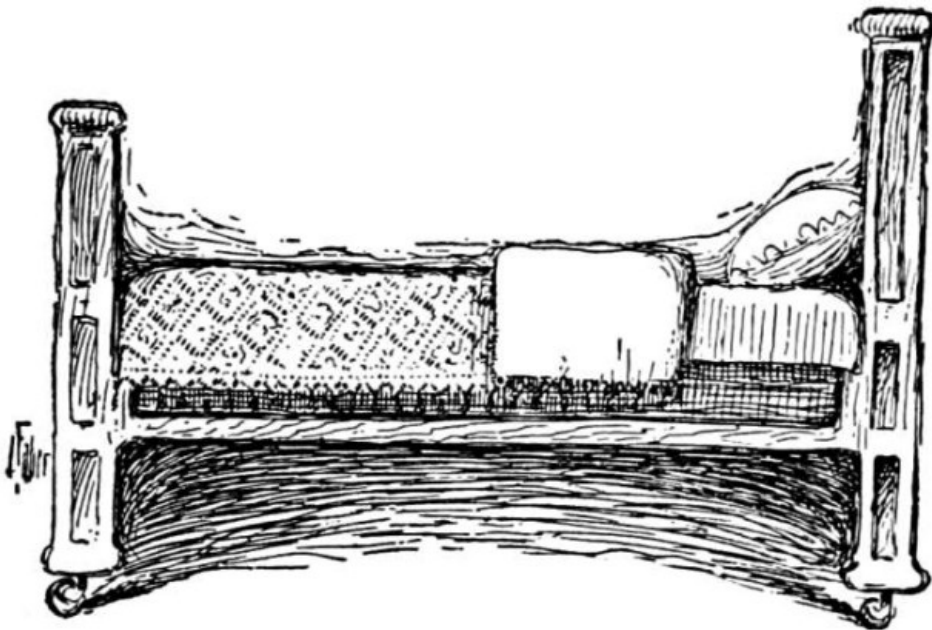
At any rate, I have written enough to convince even the most skeptical that the neurasthenic is no ordinary individual. We want the world to know that our little brotherhood is ever entitled to respect—more so than many other cults that become fashionable for a day and then depart from the “earth, earthy.” It is true, we think much about our health and those measures calculated to retain or regain it, as well as misdirecting energy in our pursuits and pastimes; but, after all, *that’s our business!* The world should not look on us as being cold and selfish; if it does, the case is another one wherein “things are not what they seem.” We have big, warm hearts that beat for others’ woes and are ever responsive to the “touch of nature that makes the whole world kin.”

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We neurasthenics have slumbering within our bosoms ambitions and possibilities that, if set in motion, would move mountains and revert the course of rivers. But we can’t work up enough energy to consummate our aims and carry things to a finish. Perhaps we may be able to do so some day. Oh, Some Day, you are a mirage on the desert of life that ever lures us on to things that can only be attained in the land where dreams come true!

I am now wound up for quite a bit of pretty writing like this, but as I have promised to say good-night and good-bye, I will put my flights of fancy back in the box and go to bed.

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### Transcriber’s Notes:

Images have been moved from the middle of a paragraph to the closest paragraph break.

Other than the corrections noted by hover information in the text, printer’s inconsistencies have been retained.

\*\*\* END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK CONFESSIONS OF A NEURASTHENIC \*\*\*

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