

higher parts of the brain. Often the remedy is ridiculously easy as it resolves itself into diverting the blood into the skin or abdomen. Thus, a warm bath just before retiring followed by warm clothing on the bed, a glass of hot milk to give the stomach a little to do, will have the desired effect, and it is astonishing how many cases of sleeplessness will yield to one or both of these simple remedies. Again, the persistence on the brain of study-engendered impressions may be avoided by reading a simple book, or by talking ordinary nonsense just before retiring. There is a great deal to be said for the combination of a talk, a cigar, and a whisky and soda before going to bed in the case of a busy man. They are as helpful to him as they are disastrous to the idler. On similar lines it is often better for the hard-worked professional man to play Bridge in the evenings than to read law or medicine.

The sleeplessness of some Nurses may not inappropriately be mentioned here. We have sometimes the new Probationer who cannot sleep because her work—or rather overwork—to the shame of some Hospitals be it said—persists in following her from the ward to her bed. I think this is often due to an exaggerated idea of the importance of her own actions or omissions. She is apt to lie awake wondering whether some really trivial thing that she has done or left undone has done some harm to a patient. Far be it from me to tilt at the spirit underlying this; it is the basis of that absolutely inestimable capacity for sympathy which makes a good nurse so invaluable. It can be overdone, however. One of the best cures that I know is reading a suitable—and sufficiently frivolous—book in bed, and I think this should not always be tabooed. Tired and aching feet are another cause, and the remedy for this may often be found in a change of shoes while on duty. Again, hot milk and a warm bath are often invaluable. The one essential is that “sleeping draughts” should never be given—much less taken—for fatigue either bodily or mental in origin.

This brings us to the question of the action of drugs in promoting sleep. It is possible to send anyone to sleep by drugging them, and it is quite an easy thing to do, but in the average case it is much more foolish than easy, and in some instances it may be almost criminal.

Most of these drugs act by directly paralysing the cells of the higher centres, but inasmuch as sleep is wanted in order to recuperate these very cells, the treatment is rather akin to the process of satisfying the clamouring for bread of a hungry man by knocking him down—the clamouring is stopped, but he remains hungry.

It is much better to treat the cause of the sleeplessness than the sleeplessness itself.

An exception must be made when the trouble is due to actual pain, or to respiratory or cardiac distress, such as one sees in some diseases of the heart or lungs, but that is rather a different matter, the prime factor being the pain or distress, and not the sleeplessness to which they give rise. Here one gives sedatives such as opium or some of its derivatives. It should be a cardinal rule never to give opium or morphia for sleeplessness pure and simple. The result is generally more sleeplessness the next night, and subsequently the morphia habit.

Another point is that the patient should never know what he is being given for sleeplessness. Unless care be taken, he is apt to find out, and then we generally find him buying a supply of the drug in tablet form from the nearest drug store, and raising up for himself a devil of his own creation which the doctor is often powerless to exorcise. In some cases of sleeplessness due to worry it may be advisable to administer a nervous sedative in order to diminish the undue susceptibility of the brain to the impressions which are at the bottom of the worry, but the best plan is then to give the drug—bromide of potassium answers very well—in the form of a mixture to be taken three times a day, and not in one big dose at night. It is often advisable to describe the mixture as a tonic. One can often put a neurotic patient to sleep with a draught of salt and water—provided that it comes out of a medicine bottle.

#### MISS HALDANE ON EDUCATION IN AMERICA.

Miss Haldane during her recent short visit to the United States and Canada, with Lord Haldane, inspected educational establishments, and upon her return has expressed surprise at the large amount of money women give towards education there, in addition to what is done by the State. It was difficult she thought to say whether American women were better educated than English, but it was evident that Americans were searching constantly for better ideals.

One class of American women certainly have better chances: When we nurses think of the splendid nursing facilities, provided entirely through the generosity of women at Teacher's College, Columbia University, we wonder when some of our rich countrywomen will emulate their far sighted policy. Let us hope when Lord Haldane formulates his great scheme for national education, that he will not leave nursing out in the cold.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)