

The
American
Magazine

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March



Clarence
Budington
Kelland

talks about

Neighbors

Channing
Pollock

talks about

Sheldon

PS
XCHW

WADDY
KY

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NEXT MONTH

THE late Sam Bernard was a highly emotional man, which doubtless contributed to his success as an actor. They tell a story of his being with a friend when he encountered another friend who some time previously at a dinner had paid warm tribute to Bernard.

"I was deeply moved by your speech," Sam told him. "Honest, you touched me so I could have cried."

"Don't pay any attention to him," laughed the first friend. "He cries at card tricks!"

Well, there was a laugh in that line, but it was built on a wealth of feeling which all of us possess in greater or less degree. The ability to get steamed up over things is a priceless quality. Sometimes it is expended too energetically on themes which do not warrant it. Often it leads to differences of opinion and occasionally, alas, to bitterness. But that's only when it gets out of hand. Within normal bounds it is a wholesome and a healthy ingredient in our natures. We Americans, thank heaven, possess it in large degree.

The way in which we react to different things is an interesting guidepost to our natures. And next month in THE AMERICAN MAGAZINE Heywood Brown, nationally known novelist, lecturer, columnist, and (infrequently) actor, tells what he's learned about all of us in his many intimate contacts with The Man in the Street.

—THE EDITOR

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Are You Committing Suicide on the Installment Plan?

By WILLIAM S. SADLER, M. D.

I CAN'T understand people who would do a thing like that," he said. "Really, I can't."

I looked at him, sitting across the room from me, a middle-aged man, short, heavy-set, with a round, florid face and pudgy hands. It was obvious that he overate regularly, and his eyes and the brown stains on his fingers indicated that he also drank and smoked more than he should.

We had been discussing the death of a prominent banker the day before, a death by self-administered poison.

"It's implausible," he continued, "just implausible."

"Then why," I asked, "are you doing it?"

"Doing what?"

"Committing suicide," I answered. He stared at me.

"I? How?"

"On the installment plan," I told him. "You can't understand a man who would drink a glass of poison. Yet, unless I'm a poor diagnostician, you are, by overeating and overindulging in liquor and cigarettes, doing the very same thing. The only difference is that while this man swallowed his poison at a gulp, you are sipping yours. But in the end it will be just as fatal."

He did not believe me, of course. Even laughed at me. Why, he said, he felt "fit as a fiddle." There wasn't any danger in a bit of rich food now and then, or a glass of wine, or a cigarette. Suicide on the installment plan! It was ridiculous! But two years later he was dead of diabetes.

This man's case may sound unusual, but it is not. The majority of us are committing suicide on the installment plan in some way or otherwise. Day after day we unthinkingly take small amounts of poison into our systems, poison that in the end brings us down with a fatal illness. In fact, most deaths can be traced to some form of poisoning.



PHOTOGRAPH BY
ELIUS TRAYNER

"One man's meat is another man's poison." Some people can't eat buckwheat cakes; others can't eat strawberries

If we do not overeat, we eat the wrong kinds of food. If we do not use cheap, injurious cosmetics, we ride in hermetically closed automobiles. In one way or another we violate the laws of health and life, and invariably we pay the penalty.

The cells of the human body are virtually immortal. They would be able to live on, to reproduce themselves, indefinitely, if it were not for unfavorable conditions of heat, light, and air, and if they were not injured by poisons. We cannot escape taking some of these poisons into our bodies every day, but we can reduce them. And the more we do, the greater are our chances of longevity. By keeping our liver in proper working order, by abstaining from excesses and from injurious foods, by balancing our diets, we can safeguard against the majority of these poisons, at least.

THE most common form of self-poisoning occurs at mealtime. Some of us like rich, highly spiced foods. So we live on stews, puddings, and fancy pastries. Others have what they call a sweet tooth. They must have pie or cake at every

meal, four spoonfuls of sugar in their coffee, and a box or two of candy a week.

Then there are the people who live on a one-sided diet of protein—meat, eggs, and cheese at the same meal, or meat, cheese, and baked beans. They overload their systems with building material and don't give it the energy to build. The eliminative organs are overworked, because they haven't the strength to do their job right. Besides, proteins leave behind clinkers and cinders. They make the job even harder.

Some of us, afraid to eat too much meat—too much protein—swing the other way and eat too much starch. The grocery stores are filled with cereals. They are good foods when used properly. But a diet containing too much starch, like too much sugar, is injurious. It is fattening, and it lacks the proper minerals and vitamins for good health.

AN UNBALANCED diet may not always be the direct cause of a disease, but it creates a constitutional debility which makes us susceptible to illness.

Overacidity and underacidity are both highly injurious conditions that can be corrected with a proper diet. When food is burned in our bodies, it usually leaves behind either an acid or an alkaline ash. If we have a tendency to eat too much of a certain kind of food, we develop an acid condition. If we go too far the other way, our blood becomes too alkaline.

High acidity results in mental dullness, difficulty in concentration, and even poor memory. Unfortunately, the visible symptoms do not appear until it reaches an acute stage, and even then they vary. Some people are warned by headaches, others by extreme lassitude, fatigue, or insomnia. But the trouble is that even these conditions are not an infallible sign. They may mean, instead, that you are (Continued on page 176)

Are You Committing Suicide on the Installment Plan?

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suffering from a mild form of neurasthenia or brain fog, or that your nerves need attention. So, if a proper diet does not bring prompt relief, see your doctor.

Many people believe that itching after a hot bath is caused by too much acid in the blood. But it is not. This is due, rather, to low humidity or a nervous condition.

The symptoms of alkalinity are even more elusive. People who drink too much soda suffer from it, and so, occasionally, do people who live on freak diets. Within the past year several medical centers have begun experiments with the theory that asthma and hay fever and some skin ailments are influenced by alkalinity.

FOR those who are suffering from over-acidity, the remedy is to eat largely of foods that produce an alkaline ash. These include:

DRIED FRUITS: Figs, raisins, dates, currants. Virtually all the dried fruits except prunes.

THE LEGUMES: Beans, peas, and lentils.

VEGETABLES: All kinds, especially beets, carrots, celery, lettuce, and spinach.

FRESH FRUITS: All fresh fruits—sweet and sour—except plums and cranberries and possibly some forms of acid grape juice.

FRUIT JUICES: All the fruit juices except plums.

Potatoes and bananas.

DAIRY PRODUCTS: Milk, ice cream, cottage cheese, cheese, buttermilk.

SOUPS: All forms of vegetable and fruit soups and broths.

NUTS: All the nuts belong in this list, including almonds and chestnuts.

If, on the other hand, your blood is too alkaline, the following foods should predominate in your diet:

Meat, fish, fowl, etc., including all kinds of meat broths, soups, and beef tea and bouillon.

Eggs.

BREADSTUFFS: All kinds of bread, whether made of wheat, rye, or corn; crackers, toast, and wafflecakes.

PASTRIES: All kinds of pies and cakes (except fruit pies) and other desserts containing milk or sour fruits.

CEREALS: Rice, oatmeal, breakfast foods of all kinds.

Peanuts, plums, prunes, and cranberries.

Because the human body has a tendency to accumulate poisons, we should use constant care that elimination is properly maintained; that we have at least eight glasses of water every twenty-four hours; that breathing is full and free; that bowel elimination is not delayed or interfered with; that sweating is experienced at least two or three times a week. If you would retain good health, these are all vitally important, since they are the only methods the body has of eliminating the poisons which it produces and accumulates.

Happy the person whose liver is functioning properly, as the liver is the refuse crematory of the body.

In the study of health we cannot, of course, commit ourselves to dogmas, to laying down hard and fast rules. It is a fact that many of the substances which, in

large doses, would be regarded as poisons, are highly important to health, and to life itself, when taken in proper amounts. This applies to many of the mineral elements, such as iron, which is an essential element of the red blood cells, and to iodine, which would be deadly in large amounts but is necessary for the prevention of goiter.

Calcium is also essential to the blood. We know now that if the body's supply goes far below normal, a person will be predisposed to frequent colds. There are certain types of colds that can be greatly relieved, even cured, by building up the calcium content of the blood. But this should be done only under a doctor's supervision.

Arsenic, which is deadly when taken in any large quantity, is given by physicians in small doses as a tonic. Phosphorus, which produces severe diseases of the bone, particularly of the jaw—so severe that its use in the manufacture of matches has been practically discontinued—is highly essential to health. It is the absence of phosphorus, in connection with lowered calcium, that produces rickets in babies.

It is interesting to note, also, that certain substances which are secreted by the ductless glands of the body, and which are important to life itself, are poisonous when they are overproduced. Toxic goiter is a common illustration. We should be without vitality, lifeless, if it were not for the product of the thyroid gland, that little body which sits astride the windpipe in the neck. But the moment this gland gets stirred up and starts to work overtime, our eyes bulge, our hands tremble, and our heart goes pitapat. This condition, if allowed to continue, will end fatally.

AS REGARDS the common foods, it is an old saying that "one man's meat is another man's poison." We know that some individuals cannot eat buckwheat cakes without developing a severe rash. Others break out or have a burning, itching redness of the skin after eating strawberries, raspberries, honey, and so on.

Of course, the simplest way to avoid these troubles is to stop eating the foods that cause them. But you can also subject yourself to a series of gradual inoculations until the system acquires a tolerance for this particular chemical reaction.

However, if you are not immune or have not been "inoculated," the best treatment for this form of poisoning is to drink an abundance of water, take a brisk cathartic, and lie for a considerable time in a lukewarm bath in which several pounds of baking soda have been dissolved. The intense itching and burning of the skin are sometimes more quickly relieved by making a soda paste and smearing it liberally on the irritated skin surfaces.

These skin disorders and hay fever, which is caused by a vegetable pollen, show us how small an amount of a certain chemical may cause mischief. In the same way, the vitamins illustrate how little of another kind of chemical may exert a beneficial effect. We are only just beginning to learn definite things about vita-

mins. They are highly complex chemical substances found in our food, which are essential to health, but only a small amount is required. There are four or five groups of vitamins recognized at present, but the subject is too extensive to permit of discussion here. It will suffice to say that oranges and tomatoes come nearer to containing all the vitamins than any other commonly used food.

Tomato juice is about as valuable as orange juice for young children. Even canned tomato is good, although fresh tomato is more desirable. The entire vitamin question would be settled if each of us would eat an orange or a tomato a day, drink several glasses of milk, and in addition have a reasonably varied diet from meal to meal.

VEGETABLE poisons are many and varied, and their effects may be either good or bad, depending on how they are employed. A number of these vegetable poisons act with peculiar selectivity on some part of the body, as in the case of digitalis (an extract from the plant of the same name) with its action upon the heart muscles, and the caffeine and theine of coffee and tea, which serve to stimulate mildly the brain cells.

Some vegetable poisons exert a deleterious or insidious degenerative effect upon the body when they are used habitually. It is chronic intoxication or degeneration of this sort that is most to be feared.

Morphine, opium, quinine, and belladonna are common examples of vegetable poisons. But all of them have beneficial uses in the hands of a physician. Alcohol is another. It is the toxin, or excretion, of a vegetable cell, the yeast plant. This plant is a very lowly organism, and its product, when present in large quantities, is poisonous to all vegetable cells above it in the scale of life, and it is also poisonous to all types of animal cells.

Other poisons which we are liable to take unconsciously into our systems are to be found in very cheap hair dyes, face powders, and various cosmetics. Too often these products contain mineral poisons which are injurious to the scalp or skin.

Another is the carbon monoxide gas given off by automobiles. The majority of us know that it is fatal to close the garage doors while the engine is running. But at the same time we will ride on a cold day in an automobile with all the windows shut. I believe that many of the headaches which follow long automobile rides are due to this gas, which seeps up from the engine or escapes from the heater. People should make it a rule always to have at least one window in their car open, no matter how cold the day. And if you must have a heater in your car, see that it is the kind which gives off no dangerous gases.

All in all, there are many forms of self-poisoning in our present civilization. But if we are reasonably careful, we can avoid the majority of them. We can eat, drink, and be merry without suffering serious consequences. We do not have to commit suicide on the installment plan.