

Starving for Health's Sake

A REPLY TO MY CRITICS.

BY UPTON SINCLAIR.

IT is now some time since I first published an account of my discovery of the means of attaining Perfect Health, and I am still getting letters about it at the rate of a dozen a day. I could make quite a postage-stamp collection of these letters. I had one from Spain and one from India and one from Argentina all in the same day.

It is a curious commentary upon the alertness and open-mindedness of the medical fraternity that not one in two hundred of my letters comes from a doctor. Quite recently I was talking with a physician—a successful and well-known physician—who refused point blank to believe that a human being could subsist five days without any sort of nutriment. There was no use talking about it—it was a physiological impossibility; and even when I offered him the names and addresses of a hundred people who have done it, he went off unconvinced. And yet that some physician professes a religion which through nearly two thousand years has recommended "fasting and prayer" as the method of the soul's achievement, and he will go to church and listen reverently to accounts of a forty-day fast in the wilderness.

In truth, the "fasting cure" is no new discovery. The Jews have been teaching it for centuries, and the late Dr. Dewey was making a practice of it before I was born.

When I was a very small boy I recall that a Dr. Tainter took a forty-day fast in a museum in New York; and I recollect well the conversation in our family; how obvious it was that the thing must be a fake, and how foolish people were to be taken in by so absurd a fake. "He gets something to eat when nobody's looking," we would say.

A recollection reading a diverting account of the fasting cure, in which the victim was portrayed as haunted by the ghosts of beefsteaks and turkeys. But the per-

pantry and set out a meal for him. I was not troubled at all by the sight of the food.

The longest fast of which I had heard was seventy-eight days, but that record has since been broken by a man named Richard Fausel. Mr. Fausel, who keeps a hotel somewhere in North Dakota, had presumably partaken too generously of the good cheer intended for his guests, for he found himself at the inconvenient weight of three hundred and eighty-five pounds. He went to a sanatorium in Battle Creek, and there fasted for forty days (if my recollection serves me), and by dint of vigorous exercise meanwhile he got rid of one hundred and thirty pounds.

I think I never saw a fatter sight than Mr. Fausel, at the conclusion of this fast; wearing the same pair of trousers that he had worn at the beginning of it. But the temptations of hotel-keeping are severe, and when he went back home he found himself going up in weight again. This time he concluded to do the job thoroughly, and went to Macfadden's place in Chicago and set out upon a fast of ninety days. That is a new record, though I sometimes wonder if it is quite fair to call it "fasting" when a man is simply living upon an internal ladder of fat.

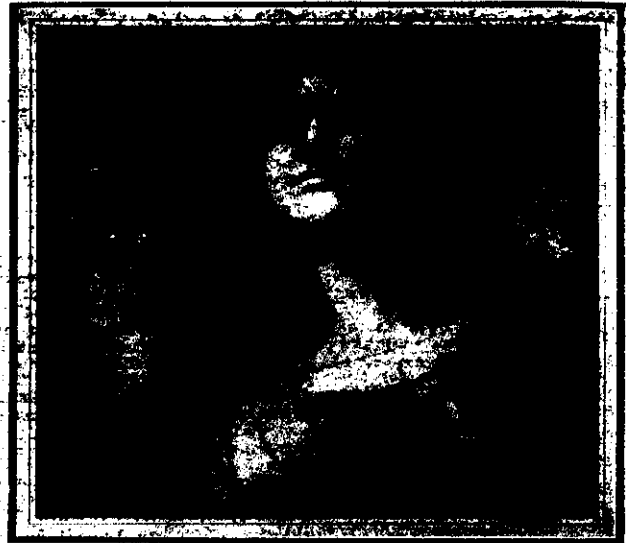
It must be a curious experience to go for three months without tasting food. It is no wonder that the stomach and all the organs of assimilation forget how to do their work. The one danger in the fasting treatment is that when you break the fast hunger is apt to come back with a rush, while on the other hand, the stomach is weak, and the utmost caution is needed. If you yield to your cravings you may fill your whole system with toxins and undo all the good of the treatment; but if you go slowly and restrict yourself to very small quantities of the most easily assimilated foods, then in an incredibly short time the body will have regained its strength.

My experience has taught me that it is well not to be too proud at such a time,

"trouble," added my relative, "if you don't stop advising people to do such things."

I was interested enough in the question of fasting to spend some time at a sanatorium where they make a speciality of it. One can see a sicker-looking collection of people in such a place than anywhere else in the world, I fancy. In the first place, people do not take the fasting cure until they are looking des-

starvation while fasting. The essential feature of the fast is that after the first two or three days all hunger ceases, and that anyone could die of lack of food without feeling a desire for food is absurd on the face of it. Nature simply does not work that way. It reminded me of a young lady who once told me that she would not go to sleep with a mouse in the room because she imagined



A FAIR ARGUMENT FOR THE STARVING CURE: MRS. UPTON SINCLAIR. Mrs. Sinclair's wife was frail and subject to sore throat since girlhood. She took a fasting cure for ten days, and is now a picture of health and engaged in accumulating muscle and enthusiasm.

perate, and when they have got into the fast they look more desperate. At the later stages they sometimes take to wheelchairs, and at all times they move with deliberation, and their faces wear serious expressions. They gather in little groups and discuss their symptoms; there is nothing so interesting in the world when you are fasting as to talk symptoms with a lot of people who are doing the same thing. There are some who are several days ahead of you and who make you ashamed of your doubts, and others, who are behind you and to whom you have to appear as an old campaigner. So you develop an esprit de corps, as it were—though that sounds as if I were trying to make a pun.

All this may not seem very alluring, but it is far better than a lifetime of illness, such as many of these people have known before. I never knew that there was such terrible suffering in the world until I heard some of their stories; they would indeed be depressing company were it not for the fact that now they are getting well. The reader may answer sarcastically that they think they are. But every Christian Scientist knows that this comes to the same thing, and I have talked with not less than a hundred people who have fasted for three days or more and out of these there were but two or three who did not report themselves as greatly benefited. So I am accustomed to say that I would rather spend my time in a fasting sanatorium than in an ordinary "swell" hotel. The people in the former are making themselves well, and know it; while the people in the latter are making themselves ill, and don't know it.

As to the possibility or probability of death during a fast, I have one or two points to note:

First, a good many sick people are dying all the time. It would be an argument for fasting if it saved any of them. It fails to save them all. No one would think of bringing it up against his surgeon or his family physician that he occasionally lost a patient.

Secondly, people might die very frequently without that being an argument against the cure. It might simply be a consequence of the desperately ill class of people who were trying it. A doctor who had a new method of healing, and was permitted to use it only upon those whom all other doctors had given up, would be considered successful if he effected even an occasional cure.

Thirdly, it may be set down as absolutely certain that no one ever died of

the mouse might nibble off her ear without waking her!

As to the possibility that you might starve during those first days while you are hungry, the answer is simply that you don't. It is perfectly true that men have died of starvation in three or four days—but the starvation existed in their minds—it was fright that killed them. That they did not truly starve is proven by letters from people who have fasted over that time and who are alive to tell of it.

There are conditions in the human body which lead to death inevitably, and some of these conditions are beyond the power of the fast to remedy. When a person so afflicted sets out to fast, and dies in spite of the fast, the papers of course declare that he died because of the fast.

As an example of the part that mental disturbances may play in the fast I will cite the case of a woman friend who started out to fast for a complication of chronic ailments. She was rather stout, and did not mind it at all—was going cheerfully about her daily tasks; but her husband heard about it, and came home to tell her what a fool she was making of herself, and in a few hours she was in a state of collapse. No doubt, if there had been a physician in the neighbourhood, there would have been another tale of a "victim of a shallow and unscrupulous sensationalist." (I quote the precious language of a metropolitan newspaper.)

I have thought over the cases of failure of the fast, where I have been able to inquire into all the circumstances, and I think I can make the statement that I do not know a case which might not be attributed either to the influence of nervous excitement or to unwise breaking of the fast. In the last batch of letters was one with a printed account of the disastrous results of a three weeks' fast taken by a woman. It is an example of about all the blunders that I can think of. She describes herself as occupying "a responsible office position," which taxed her strength to the utmost, and she tried to do this work all the time she was fasting. She would get up and go to work when she was "scarcely able to drag one foot after another." On about the nineteenth day her polter dropped at the sight of me, for I had not given a hint as to my condition; but despite my protests she sent for the doctor at once. My didn't he scold and tell me what was what! Mother's heart was so torn with sorrow and pity that she hadn't the heart to reproach me for



BEFORE AND AFTER: A PICTORIAL ARGUMENT FOR THE FASTING CURE

On the left we see Mr. Upton Sinclair as he was—a prey to chills, fever, stomach troubles and other ills. Then he discovered the fasting cure, and found not only good health but perfect health. It must be remembered, of course, that the second photograph was taken after Mr. Sinclair had regained the weight lost by fasting. The benefits of the cure are only apparent when the patient has commenced to take nourishment. Then it is he discovers himself to be a new man with a new system.

son who is taking the fast knows nothing of these troubles, nor would there be much profit in fasting if he did.

The fast is not an ordeal; it is a rest, and I have known people to lose interest in food completely as if they had never fasted any in their lives. I know one lady who, to the consternation of her friends and relatives, began a fast three days before Christmas and continued it until three days after New Year's Day, and on both the holiday cooked a turkey and served it for children.

I myself took a twelve days' fast while living alone with my little boy, and three times every day I went into the

but to get someone to help you. And it ought to be someone who has fasted, for a person at the end of a fast is an agitating sight to his neighbours, and their impulse is to get a "square meal" into him as quickly as possible. Quite recently there was one of my converts camping on my trail in New York City, and he called at the home of a relative of mine, an elderly lady, who does not take much stock in my eccentricities. I shall not soon forget her description of his appearance: "I thought he was going to die right there before my eyes!" she said. And no wonder, since the poor fellow had climbed four flights of stairs to the apartment. "I know you'll get into