

Some thoughts on sleeplessness

Sleeplessness *Health Daily 17.2* BY F.A. ANVERY

is always upsetting and the sleepless hours seem to get nowhere. Nestle up as snugly as you can, but sleep hovers above the borders of slumberland

TO sleep like a spinning top is the dream of a person who is repeatedly denied a good night's sleep. A sleepless person forgets that, during an eight-hour sleep, a human being of average health does not sleep like a top but changes position as many as 35 times, if not more. But can twisting and turning like a pop singer produce sleep? And yet, there are people who can sleep on clothes lines.

Slumberland, nevertheless, provides the delicate balance of life between wakeful and sleeping hours, which we call the benign substance or health. If it is disturbed, God forbid, the mirror will not hesitate to show you what you have done to yourself — puffed up face, bulging eyes like a frog's, dark patches under the eyes. Of course the poor mirror cannot reflect the smarting back and shoulders, the painful neck which is difficult to turn, and low spirits making one incapable of facing the day lying ahead. The mirror is also incapable of showing similar looks produced by under or over-sleeping, or of forewarning you that sleeping late into sunrise may shorten life.

land like a spy aircraft on recce.

I am writing these lines from my sleepless bed to beguile my time which I have miserably failed to sleep off. I don't know what O'clock it is, but the best part of the night has gone by without a wink, and it is beginning to grow into daylight. I can hear the birds rejoicing the birth of a new day which, to me, lacks any lustre at all.

What exactly chides sleep away, I do not really know. I went into my kip as usual, by which I mean that I had gone through my nocturnal chores as usual. The only unusual thing was a slight change in the usual patterns of light and shade. A new street lamplight of yellowish lustre fell direct on a reproduction hanging on the wall right in front of my eyes because I like it so very much. It is called *Florero de Crista* by J. Brueghe (1568-1625), which was presented to me some 23 years ago by a very

dances! The still-life 'Florero' on the wall in front of me suddenly seemed to beckon me and I thought I could smell the beautiful flowers, inviting me to come and kiss them. Sentiments disentangled me from my wont to compose myself to sleep.

But just then the neighbour's donkey-pump rattled up thunderously. It is carelessly installed so close to the dividing wall our houses that, when it primes up, the whole of my small house begins to shiver, as if suddenly afflicted by ague. It keeps on running madly for upward of an hour. Finally, it comes to an unwilling pause, but no sooner than that the other pump takes over pushing water into the overhead tank.

This second pump sounds like a very angry locomotive pulling a train uphill. It is a real ordeal with no escape. My humble reconstructions with the

Spain and of the Basque country up in the north.

I was thinking of Brueghe's *Florera* when a strong waft of wind parted the curtains and rushed in a sharp and aggressive smell of chypre from another neighbour's house, in which he runs his perfumery. This was a clear affront to my olfactory sensibilities, but there it is something to tolerate, thankfully, for it often helps to overcome the ill-smells of the overflowing gutter lines in the service lane behind our houses. You can easily spray out the flies and mosquitoes, cockroaches and jekkos, but an offensive smell is a difficult customer. It takes its own good time to allow the air to dilute it and coax it away.

This done, I now had to make a very determined effort to induce sleep. The popular prescription is to start counting sheep.

Ah, those bags and balls of wool! But can you start counting your sheep before walking up to the wicket-gate in the village down the hill. So I took the hairpin turn. A few scattered, thatched houses betokened the village of my imagination. I could see and smell it! Aha! Soon I see adobe huts, meadow lands growing hay crop to pasture cattle, sheep and goats. Culinary fires with dungish reek. Poultry in chicken runs, cattle in the pens chewing cud, sheep returning from the slopes, hobbledehoyes returning from toil with ploughs hoisted on their shoulders, leading teams of bullocks. Oh! Such a landscape of peace and tranquillity. Now the sheep shepherded by the over-vigilant sheepdog forces the lazy sheep to run headlong and to jump over the sty like prodigious woolly footballs. One, two, ten, twenty, a hundred and thirty-one — one sheep, heavier than the rest, falls rolling head-over-hooves. The angry shepherd



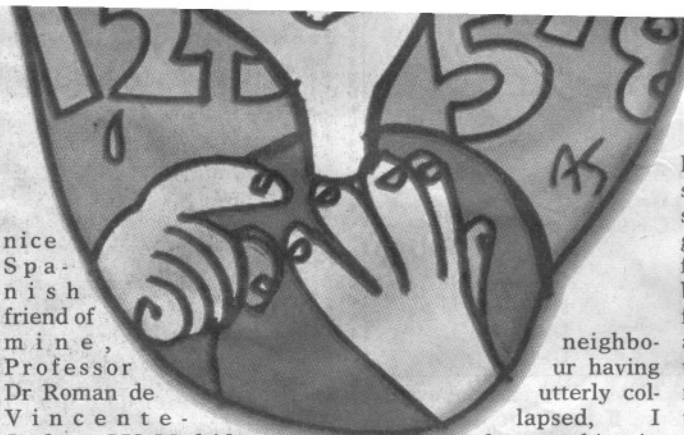
Who doesn't know that a good normal slumber is nature's unfailing relief? It is said to be best before midnight. It is generously ready to shower its blessings, like Peace, when every element is in its place, when God is in His heaven and all is well with the world, when you are aroused naturally in the morning, the beginning of a fresh new world and a life worth living. Such a peaceful repose, and this delicate balance of life is possible only if you have the courage to refuse any compromise with your sleeping schedule — not to stay up long into the night and avoid fragmented sleep, provided that all other things are equal.

And who does not take sleepless nights with a pinch of soporifics, somnifics and sedatives? Sleeplessness is always upsetting and the sleepless hours seem to get nowhere. Nestle up as snugly as you can, but sleep hovers above the borders of slumber-

nice
Spa-
nish
friend of
mine,
Professor
Dr Roman de
V i n c e n t e -
Jordana, CJS, Madrid.

In the new light, the yellows and reds became a shade richer and the overshadowed colourless tumbler of a vase came at once alive as the flowers.

It transported me to Spain, and quickly to the Basque country and to all those happy memories which I dearly treasure. Oh the sights, the smells, the food, the friendly people and their enchanting music and their exhilarating



neighbor-
ur having
utterly col-
lapsed, I
have nothing in
my power to escape
this ordeal but to bear it with
perseverance and prayer.

The night was running into small hours when the angry loco finally pulled up and I regaled myself with an ebullient feeling of freedom and relief! The peaceful repose of a civilized life seemed to be restored at long last. I rearranged my pillows, curled myself up for a snooze, hoping to dream sweet dreams of

the master.

I hear a real bark, a sharp one, from across my street. Am I on the farmyard counting my sheep or in my kip doing all I can to persuade sweet sleep to come? Snap, snap. Bark, bark. A whole gang of derelict dogs join in a free-for-all. The hue and cry baffles all description. The fairy of my sleep is frightened away. All my count of sheep is uncounted and, making the noise worse, a couple of rut-tish tomcats on my roof begin to wail love-worn cries.

All of a sudden, there comes a welcome gap followed by a chain of somewhat gentler noise — prolonged trilling sound of millions of insects and frogs croaking. Just the right nocturne to welcome sleep, like a sign from heavens that my prayers are accepted! Am I really so lucky? But, I have my doubts. Usually, there are five senses, plus a common-sense and a horse-sense. The

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horse-sense intervenes as I coax my body to relax and my eyes to feel drowsy. But my temperature cleanly refuses to drop an iota, my pineal gland is unwilling to send up enough melatonin. The horse-sense was right as usual.

I hear a rumble of distant drums coming nearer every minute. Soon, there is an uproar. Now I remember. The new yellowish light up on the street lamp opposite my house was in honour of a wedding nearby. Did I not notice

also the huge tent pitched right across the one-way street? Now I understand that sudden burst of sirens, hooters, motor-cycles without silencers and pressurized noise-makers. It is the bridegroom's party returning home in triumph.

Floating above all this clangour comes the shrill mockery of music of the ice-cream vendor's loud-speaker. What a time to eat ice-cream! But the marriage party would be feeling thirsty. The trills, however, ring a bell. It is a mouldering relic of the quondom of some famous opera — *Il Trovatore*, *Don Giovanni*, *Faust*, *Lucrezia Borgia* — that *Florero de Crista* hung on the wall in front of me in a new yellowish light now turns greenish.

Should I reach for the sleeping pill? But, soon enough, it will be time to be up with all my bodily zest, cruelly sacrificed at the altar of sleeplessness.