

Silas Marner Diagnosed

Fictional hero's ailments are reexamined and found to be not quite fictitious

► THE MYSTERIOUS malady that afflicted Silas Marner was probably an irresistible urge to sleep called narcolepsy, according to a Florida psychiatrist.

This would explain the apparent "fits" that took hold of the character in George Elliot's novel, required reading in high schools throughout the nation, Dr. Robert I. Simon of the Jack-

son Memorial Hospital in Miami believes.

Until recently, scientists knew little about this affliction. But study of brain waves has revealed that the narcoleptic attack is exactly like normal sleep—and may actually be an incidence of dreaming—only it occurs at the wrong time.

People with a mild form of narcolepsy fall asleep periodically and uncontrollably during the day. Probably many automobile accidents can be attributed to the disease, since researchers now believe a large number of people may have narcolepsy and be unaware of it. Those more severely afflicted usually cannot laugh at a joke or get violently angry without collapsing to the ground, sometimes falling into a brief sleep. Other symptoms include waking hallucinations and sleep paralysis—inability to move for minutes after waking.

Hallucinations, loss of muscle tone and paralysis all occur during normal dreaming. But for the narcoleptic, they intrude into waking hours, possibly because of some dysfunction in the sleep or dream centers of the brain.

If Silas Marner had narcolepsy, it was not the common type, however. Rather than collapsing, Marner's body became rigid, as Jem Rodney, the mole-catcher, discovered when he came across Marner leaning against a stile with a heavy bag on his back.

"... he saw that Marner's eyes were set like a dead man's and he spoke to him, and shook him, and his limbs were stiff, and his hands clutched the bag as if they had been made of iron; but just as he had made up his mind that the weaver was dead, he came all right again, like as you might say in the winking of an eye, and said, 'Good night,' and walked off."

Elliot called Marner's condition "catalepsy" which is too suggestive of mental illness, Dr. Simon said. He said the description is more akin to narcolepsy and would fall into the general category of neurological diseases that also includes sleepwalking.

His report was published in the American Journal of Psychiatry, 123: 601, 1966.

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► WHEN METALS are used for implanting in bones, they require alloys similar to those used for aircraft landing gear with yield strength above 100,000 pounds per square inch (psi), a Metallurgical Society meeting was told in Chicago.

Metals are used extensively for medical treatment, Dr. N. D. Greene, director of the corrosion research laboratory of Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, Troy, N.Y., pointed out. Screws, plates and rods used by surgeons to repair bone fractures; as well as coil devices in the womb to prevent conception, and dental materials of various kinds are among the types of medical uses for metals.

Orthopedic, or bone, applications are the most difficult, Dr. Greene said. This is because of the high stresses placed on the implant, the corrosivity of the tissue fluids and the trauma associated with the implantation.

A type of stainless steel with a yield strength of 40,000 psi was bent in supporting a broken bone, he said.

Corrosion must be carefully controlled when metals are implanted in the body, Dr. Greene said. Although measurements have been a problem, new techniques being tried out at Rensselaer hold great promise.

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