A SEASONAL SYNDROME

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WE ARE TOLD as undergraduates that we may quote the textbooks, but as post-graduate students we must quote the authority. With this in mind I have been doing some research on a certain syndrome which is very prevalent around New Year's Day and also in early July and September. I refer to the Barfly Syndrome (Fig. 1).

FIGURE 1

I was unable to find the reference I sought, but I think it was Dr. Strabismus of Utrecht (whom God preserve) who neatly described the symptoms and signs in one word: "Syncopation," a musical term which means an uneven movement from bar to bar.

Now for the authorities. Walker (John) considers the syndrome to have been known for over 140 years, as he says "born 1820, still going strong." Walker (Hiram), on the other hand, says that it was not common, in the U.S.A. at least, until after 1933. Haig and Haig hold the view that it is a purely psychosomatic condition found among people who have difficulty in coming to a decision, hence their dictum: "Don't be vague." Calvert is to some extent in agreement as regards the personality of the patient and asserts that it is only found among men of distinction. Corby repeats this parrot fashion and Wiser considers it a deluxe complaint. These views are ineffectively refuted by Lemon Hart, who makes a feeble pun about having a good rum for your money.

Schlitz and Budweiser, in the United States, have published their view that the syndrome probably does not exist, but their arguments are not very strong. In this country O'Keefe has founded a centre and Molson a stadium in which cross-sections of the population are held relatively immobile for several hours. O'Keefe and Molson's presentations are entertaining but are not conclusive.

In France, Martel agrees with Calvert, as does Hennessy, that the syndrome tends to be found among the "Cordon bleu" or "three star" section of the population. Jamieson (John) of Dublin thinks there is a seven-year cycle and gives coffee, particularly of the type served at Shannon airport, a place in the aetiology of the condition. In London, Booth included the House of Lords in his researches, and that eminent Navy investigator, Captain Morgan, remarks that he sees many cases every time he is in town.

A review of the literature reveals that excellent articles have been produced by Gooderham and Worts and by Seagram though Schenley treats the subject with reserve.

I found many other references to the Barfly Syndrome among the more obscure or rotgut publications, but I think these should be taken with great caution.

I have endeavoured briefly to review the vast literature related to this syndrome and have quoted a number of the best known references, some of which you may wish to follow up on your own. I think it is generally accepted that the Barfly Syndrome exists, and I trust that if any of you should succumb to it, it will only be a mild attack.

A word about treatment. The "cures" are legion; every authority has his own. A cold bath, effervescent liver salts, and a large breakfast (British, naturally); intravenous Dextrose and Vitamin B12; tomato juice and Worcester sauce are popularly recommended. The almost universal remedy, however non-official be it noted), is— R_x pilum canis q.s.—a dog's hair.