

PATENT MEDICINES OR QUACK REMEDIES.

LECTURES GIVEN TO THE MEDICAL STUDENTS, LUDHIANA.

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PART II.

ALTHOUGH many of the quack remedies so widely advertised contain innocuous substances and do more moral than physical harm to those who take them, this is by no means always the case. There are certain classes of medicines which contain powerful drugs and if these are indiscriminately indulged in habits may be formed. Medicines advertised as soothing syrups for infants are among these. Many of them contain morphine or bromides both of which drugs soothe the child of course into slumber, but at what cost! When you come to work in hospital, one of the saddest sights you will have to see is that of a mother carrying a baby drugged with opium. The habit is very common; in some cases the mother is working and is forced to leave the child, in other cases there is no such excuse and the child is given opium merely because the mother does not wish to hear it cry. Similarly with soothing syrups or powders. They are effectual because they contain drugs such as opium, morphia or bromides. One of your hardest tasks later on in life will be to persuade mothers that it is better to find out why a child cries rather than merely to still its cry.

Another set of medicines are those commonly known as tonic wines. These are frequently advertised as especially efficacious during convalescence or after child-birth. They are indeed, I regret to say, sometimes ordered by the physician. Quite a number of cases have been reported in which a drink habit has been established by this means. The patient starts by taking the so called tonic wine. She finds that apparently it does her good, but presently she begins to find it very expensive to go on buying bottles of a tonic wine. The habit has however been established and the unfortunate patient has nothing for it but to take to spirits.

The majority of so called "cordials" also contain alcohol. Some of these are largely advertised for dysmenorrhoea *i. e.*, pain during the monthly period. The alcohol contained in the cordial no doubt relieves the pain temporarily, but who would not rather suffer pain than run the risk of falling a victim to a drink habit.

A tonic much advertised is Hall's Cocoa Wine. It contains alcohol, but also what is almost worse, cocaine. By this means the cocaine habit may be established and such cases are not infrequently mentioned in medical journals. Other medicines besides Hall's Cocoa Wine contain cocaine; but owing to the restrictions on the sale of cocaine, they are somewhat carefully advertised. Another class of medicines which are likely to cause habits are the head-ache powders. The majority of them contain acetanilid which is a depressant to the heart and should not be taken without a doctor's orders. Cases have

occurred in which death has resulted from self-treatment with head-ache powders containing acetanilid. Examples are Daisy powders which contain acetanilid only and Stearn's Headache Cure which contains in addition a small dose of caffeine.

Some of the commonest and most advertised medicines are those which claim to cure coughs, colds and consumption. Many of these contain active drugs as morphine and ipecacuanha. Owbridge's Lung Tonic is widely advertised, especially near London where the pleasant green fields are made hideous by the placards advertising it. Its claims are as follows :

"All that is necessary is to take one dose of the lung tonic in warm water on retiring to rest, the cold will have disappeared in the morning. The lungs and bronchial tubes will be fortified and invigorated to an extraordinary degree. Should the cough not be quite removed by the first dose, continue according to directions. Cure is certain." It contains a quite small dose of ipecacuanha and chloroform.

Beecham's Cough Pills are said on the label not to contain opium but analysis shows that it is present.

The Brompton Consumption and Cough Specific is reputed to be a cure for consumption.

"It will save the lives of thousands and prevent consumption, by administering it upon the first symptoms of cough, which will be immediately cured by a few doses."

All of you probably know enough to realise the absurdity, indeed the wickedness of the claim that the cough of consumption can be immediately cured by a few doses. Were this the case would not the medical profession, conservative as it is, be the first to avail itself of such a priceless remedy ?

Quack medicines vary a good deal in the extent to which they deliberately attempt to cheat the public. In the case of some medicines which contain certain proportions of powerful drugs, probably the makers have a certain faith in what they sell. Such medicines contain usually drugs which are in common use for the complaints which the medicine offers to cure. The injury done to the public in such a case is due to the excessive nature of the claims made, the excessive price charged and the danger that the advertised medicine may be taken in a case for which it is unsuitable.

Beecham's Pills which are advertised on railway stations in India are an example of this kind of drug. Their maker died lately leaving a million sterling. In the circular wrapped round the box, it is stated that "these renowned pills are composed entirely of medicinal herbs and cure Constipation, Headache, Insomnia, Indigestion, Lowness of Spirits and all Nervous Affections, Bad Legs, Kidney and Urinary Disorders, etc., etc." The widespread nature of the complaints for which the pills are a specific at once arouses suspicion. The price of a box of pills is 1s. 1½ (13½ annas) but the cost of the ingredients is ½ pice. It contains ½ grain of aloes and slightly over ½ grain of ginger, with a soap basis. The usual dose of aloes is 2-5 grains.

In other cases the fraud is much more deliberate and impudent. It may happen that the most extravagant claims are made for the medicines

which are quite inert. The makers of such medicines set out deliberately to deceive and thereby fill their pockets. Did one believe in revenge one would hope that a special form of torture would be reserved for such persons in a future state.

By the free use of imaginative language, many sufferers can be led to believe that only by taking a certain medicine will they avoid early death. And not only that, but even those who are not ill at all may be led to believe that they or those dear to them are in the early stages of some disease.

After a study of the subject of patent medicines or quack remedies, one soon comes to see that the line dividing the honest and the dishonest purveyors of drugs is exceedingly thin. One has only to go into a chemist's shop in Delhi, where one can get reliable medicines correctly dispensed, to find a cupboard full of proprietary remedies including tonic wines, etc. The public asks for these things and the chemist feels bound to keep them or risk losing his business. Even some of the biggest and most reputable firms are not above profiting through the credulities of their customers, and affixing curious and attractive names to ordinary remedies. A case in point was the drug aspirin which, until a short time ago was a proprietary medicine. The identical compound, acetyl salicylic acid, could be purchased for $\frac{1}{100}$ th the price.

The greater one's knowledge of the existing state of affairs the more does one feel that it ought somehow to be put a stop to. The matter is, however, by no means as easy as it seems. We have to fight against many facts. The chief, however, are (1) The financial power of the quack medicine vendors. (2) The consequent hold they have on the press owing to the enormous amount of advertising. (3) The ignorance and foolishness of the public. To the latter I have already alluded, and it will be your duty in later life to do all you can to enlighten the minds of your patients and to persuade them of the truth. It seems to me that only by a greater desire for that essential quality can anything be accomplished, that, and a desire for the highest good of the community. In our social, as well as in our professional life we must seek by any and every means to make men and women feel that the health of the community is more to be desired than the enrichment of a few individuals.

THE MONSOON.

By JOHN WALLACE, C.E.

THE joy with which we welcome the monsoon can only be equalled by the pleasure with which we hail its departure. Both feelings are justifiable, for the oppressive heat of May called for a change—any change and the devastation caused by damp, by rain storms and mildew, prepare us to offer a welcome to the heat of October with the prospect of cool nights in November. A little study of the phenomena of the monsoon will enable us to avoid many of the drawbacks that accompany it and that are entirely due to the combined effects of heat and moisture. The amount of moisture that air will carry in