

SHOP-WINDOW CURES.

"If drugs and physic could but save us mortals from the dreary grave," the Registrar-General's return of mortality would be reduced to nil. For, in addition to the swarms of doctors, male and female, in London, licensed to kill or cure, a vaunted remedy for almost every disease flesh is heir to may be bought in nearly every street. Addison said of doctors:—"This body of men may be described like the British army in Caesar's time. Some of them slay in chariots and some on foot. If the infantry do less execution than the charioteers, it is because they cannot be carried so soon into all the quarters of the town and despatch so much business in so short a time."

But in our days the vendors of "certain cures" do their business much more easily by staying at home and allowing customers to come to them. They do not even trouble to emulate Colgrave's poor doctor of physic, Pulsefeel, who was accustomed to harangue the public that he could "clarify your blood, surtle your cheeks, perfume your skin, tinct your hair, enliven your eye, and heighten your app-tite." Doubtless vendors of medicines, patent or not patented, find it a profitable business. For one of the characteristics of the true-born Briton is an innate love of physic. Often the most nauseous is esteemed the best, although it may be admitted that the taste for nasty medicine is rather dying out. "To quack of universal cures" has ever been a facile path to public approbation and fortune. Brown wrote:—"Saltimbancos, quacksalvers, and charlatans deceive the vulgar;" and Burton said, "Many poor country vicars, for want of means, are driven to their shifts to turn mountebanks, quacksalvers and empyricks." Civilization and progress, instead of leading to a diminution of medicines not recognized in the Pharmacopœia of the Royal College of Physicians, has resulted in an opposite effect. For a number of maladies, or, perhaps, it should be said, names of maladies, have been called into existence unknown to our sturdy forefathers. For instance, we have half-a-dozen new designations for what our great grandmothers would have called a "fit of the spleen." And for every new name which is devised by the ingenuity of nosologists at least half-a-dozen remedies appear with mushroom rapidity. Even the medical journals teem with advertisements of so-called remedies not admitted into the Pharmacopœia. Bromidia, "the hypnotic which does not lock up the secretions;" elixir of cacara, "laxative, palatable, reliable;" pumiline, "for bronchitis, throat and chest affections, fully recognized by over 500 testimonials;" vinolia, "which will relieve the intensest itching from any cause whatever;" liquor cacara suavis, "registered," are a few among many similar articles advertised in a recent medical journal.

Now when orthodox medical journals insert advertisements of the kind they might with grace refrain from, as they sometimes do, calling the lay press to account for the insertion of advertisements of patent medicines. For to the lay mind there really does not appear very much difference between the advertisement of medicated bonbons, "protected by Royal letters patent," in a medical journal, and advertisements of a like character in a daily newspaper.

It is, however, of shop-window cures we now discourse. So profitable does this branch of business seem to have become, that it has overflowed its legitimate position in the chemist's and druggist's mart, and invaded the premises of other tradespeople. Every vendor of sweets, and many grocers, seems to find it profitable to have a special medical agent for sale. In a climate such as this, where coughs, colds, throat and chest affections so prevail, all who sell anything in the way of medicines have certain cures for such prevalent maladies. The number of so-called remedies is legion, and consists of pills, syrups, emulsions, mixtures, tinctures, lotions and potions *ad nauseam*. But there is one called "cough balsam," unblushingly described as the "only known cure for cough, asthma and consumption." Now as cough may depend upon at least fifty different causes, and as consumption kills thousands annually, this must be a very wonderful medicine indeed, and doctors should hide their diminished heads. It is really very stupid of people to go on coughing when they can procure a remedy for a few pence; and quite unnecessary for asthmatics or consumptives to go to the Riviera in the winter when they have a remedy at home. So say the vendors of chest affection cures. The giver of good advice rarely receives his due, otherwise we might say "Don't" to anyone disposed to trust these cures.

Corns and bunions demand a good deal of attention. There are many kinds of corn plasters and several "miraculous cures," which are all "painless, simple and speedy," and which secure "ease, comfort and good temper." One proprietor of a miraculous cure is so enthusiastic that he breaks out into doggerel—

If corn or bunion trouble you, of this you may be sure,
That free from pain you soon will be by using — 's cure.

After this the man who merely advertises a corn rubber is nowhere. We were, however, under the impression that corns originated from pressure or friction, and that the only radical cure was removing that pressure or friction after the corn, if very large, had been taken out. Toothache, being so common, has, of course, a number of cures. A sufferer would dare a good deal to appease the hide us throes of toothache, and when plaintively asked, "Why suffer from toothache when you can cure it by using the toothache pencil?" would certainly try this,

that or the other remedy before facing the dentist. But, alas! the dentist's chair is the ultimate fate of the person with an aching tooth, and he may be happy if on leaving the dentist he carries his tooth—in his jaw—along with him. Nervous debility seems almost as responsible as toothache or corns for certain cures. Among the hundreds of medicines devoted to nervous debility there are "best brain tonics," "botanic pick-me-ups," "golden medical discoveries," "damiana wafers," and "syrups" of all kinds. Liver complaints and digestive imperfections are also well supplied. "Candies" and "jubes," *cum multis aliis*, are all very good for liver and digestion—at least so say the proprietors. There is one advertiser who, having announced, "Remove the cause and the effect will cease," soars boldly above his compeers, and announces, "Head, stomach and liver pills!" It is, however, in the domains of surgery that shop window cures are most pronounced. "Another leg saved!" "Another hand saved!" "Another toe saved!" by a certain ointment and pills is boldly announced. If all is correctly stated with reference to this new ointment and pills, Professor Holloway is outdone. Cancers are exhibited, diseased bone is shown, and corns are produced, all cured by this wonderful ointment. Bills are also distributed purporting to be the history of cures. One begins, "A boy threw a stone and hit him on the finger over six years ago." The remainder of the account may be transferred into, "Affliction sore long time he bore, physicians were in vain," until he was cured by the pills and ointment. Now this was evidently a case of scrofulous disease of the bones, always most tedious, and recovery *post* is not *propter*. We close the list by mentioning first "Oriental pills." Why they are called Oriental pills we do not know, and what they are for we cannot ascertain. The name is curious, for pills in the East, unless introduced by Europeans, are as rare as snakes in Iceland. And, secondly, a cure for chilblains called "Chimethioplaston!" What it means we do not know. And we do not take to it—for the word does not come trippingly from the tongue like the blessed Mesopotamia.

It has been said that faith in the doctor is half the battle. Shop-window cures, however, require more than faith; they demand credulity. Nothing catches a man more than a pretended confidence; and of this among vendors of medicines, patent or not patented, there is no lack. It is astonishing how one is able to persuade oneself into a belief in accordance with one's wishes. Barnum's definition of a humbug was, "A man who gives you your money's worth, but induces you to deal with him by some plausible tale connected with his goods." Shakespeare asked, "Can'st thou not cleanse the stuffed bosom of that perilous stuff which bears upon the heart?" This is not to be