

esting from some standpoints. There are books filled with the exploits of quacks; but what I want to do here is to run a naturalist's pin through a few smaller specimens of the humbug family, of the medical genus, whom I have known.

The common resort of quacks in the times of a generation or more ago was Thompsonianism. I have heard that Thompson's little book, containing all the secrets of therapeutics, was sold for twenty dollars, the buyer binding himself not to communicate these mysteries to any other person. As the Thompsonians used only vegetable remedies, and for the most part simples, they were called "root doctors;" and from their use of "steam sweats," by means of boiled Indian corn packed about the patient, they got the sobriquet at the West of "corn doctors," but more commonly of "steam doctors." Any bold-faced ignoramus might set up for a steam doctor: it was Gil Blas's "universal dissolvent" come back again; for there is nothing new even in quackery. The steam doctors sneeringly dubbed the regular physicians "calomel doctors"—a term rendered appropriate by the excessive use of mercury fifty years ago. I think it is O. H. Smith, in his "Sketches," who relates that a certain ignorant fellow, in the interior of Indiana, bought a book, and removed to a new settlement, where he set up for a "root doctor." A friend who met him inquired after his success. He got on very well, he said. He thought "root doctorin' a good deal better than calamus doctorin'." He'd had a case the other day of a sick old woman, and he thought he'd just try the calamus doctor's plan, so he dug up some calamus and gave it to her, and she died."

A blacksmith in one of the river counties of Indiana set up for a "botanic physician," and when I knew him was very rich. A steamboat pilot in the same county, with no education at all, removed

to Brooklyn, and engaged very successfully in cures by rubbing. He claimed to have learned all his secrets by a revelation made in a dream, and he kept a sort of hospital, generally well filled with rich fools. Some of the theories which the root doctors came to hold were very amusing. I know a minister of prominence in the West, who was once a "student" or office boy for one of them. He relates that the doctor sent him into the woods to get some of the inner bark of the butternut tree.

"Tom," said the doctor, as he departed, "I want you to scrape this bark downward. It is for a cathartic. Don't you scrape it upward, or it will be an emetic. And whatever you do, Thomas, don't you scrape it both ways. If you do, nobody on earth can tell how it will act."

But these were small fry. The rarest specimen of the quack that I have ever known lived in an important city on the upper Mississippi, and practised curing by mesmerism. Happily he is dead now, though I make no doubt that other quacks have taken his place. This Doctor X. had failed in a very remarkable way, as some men do, in commercial business, and had set up as a mesmeric doctor, though I believe he practised on an "As-you-like-it" system. To the scientifically inclined patient he was a mesmerist, to the pious he was a man who cured by the power of faith; and he was accustomed to remark, with great austerity, that if the Protestant ministers of the city had as much faith as he, they could work as wonderful cures as he did—which, I believe, was the only strikingly true thing he ever said. To spiritualists, again, he was a medium. His method of cure was by the laying on of hands. He stood with his hands on the patient's head for about five minutes each day. He not only cured, but he diagnosticated the disease in the same way. For half the secret of success in quackery lies in the