

### About Menthol.

The medicinal use of menthol in China and Japan goes back into the dateless ages. Isolated references to its application in the East are met with here and there in the records of Western travellers in those parts, but we shall probably never know the name of its discoverer or the early history of its introduction. We do not even know with absolute certainty when, and by whom, menthol crystals were first brought to the notice of European pharmacologists. It is said that they have been used pharmaceutically on the Continent as long ago as the end of the last century, but if that statement is capable of proof, the drug must have fallen into oblivion shortly after its introduction, for it was certainly utterly unknown even by repute, to most persons in the drug trade twenty-five years ago. Somewhere about 1864 a consignment of the drug was received in London under the name of Chinese peppermint oil, and passingingly commented upon for its curious property of solidifying with a fall in the temperature. To the late Mr. John Mackay, of Edinburg, belongs the distinction of first having called the attention of British pharmacists to the valuable properties of menthol. Mr. Mackay is believed to have brought "Po-Ho oil" with him from Paris, where it was then sold, in the small red-labelled Chinese bottles familiar to Eastern travellers, as a kind of proprietary article. Had menthol been an utterly valueless quack medicine, it would, perhaps, have taken Europe by storm then, and reigned for a season, just long enough to gather a fortune for its first exploiter. But as the drug happened to have a solid therapeutic value it had to wrestle through the familiar stages of contumely, ridicule, animosity, and unreasoning popularity, just like any new creed or reformer. The commercial history of menthol practically dates from 1878, when an English firm in Yokohama made a small shipment of it to London, determined not to rest until they had succeeded in securing for the remedy a footing upon the market. After many months their shipment went back, with a note from their agents, announcing that the "stuff" could not be sold here, as no one knew what to do with it. But the Yokohama firm persevered, and they reaped their reward. Four years later, menthol crystals were the rage of the season, selling at 60s. per lb. wholesale, and carried about in cone-shape by all persons with any pretence to the possession of a civilized nervous system.

That was the hot youth of the drug, when Cocking and Christy were kings, and the vicissitudes of speculators alternated between the poles of elation and despair as rapidly as those of the lovers in an Adelphi melodrama. But though the twenty years of menthol in Europe have been immeasurably more exciting than all its cycles of Cathay, the drug has since settled down to an eminently respectable position among the well-established arti-

cles of commerce. Perhaps its early excesses may be due to the circumstance that it was not quite happy in all of its first sponsors. Anyhow, it came to stay, and has settled down in our midst to a steady career of usefulness in the inhaler, plaster, cone, and snuff lines, and only recalling the days when its heart was volcanic by an occasional splutter of mild speculative energy.

Such a period of decorous excitement is now in progress. The menthol stocks in Europe are believed to be very small; and shipments from Japan are known to have fallen off considerably. Previous to 1890 no separate official records were kept of peppermint oils and crystals. In that year the shipments of menthol alone from Japan amounted to 36,091 lbs.; in 1891 they were 22,017 lbs.; and in the first half of 1892, 4,684 lbs. That is a very considerable reduction, particularly significant because a much smaller proportion of the exports now goes to Europe and to America than formerly. During the first six months of 1892, only 1,000 lbs. were cleared in Yokohama for New York, 880 lbs. for Hamburg, and 320 lbs. for New York. There exists a widespread belief that the coming winter will witness a recrudescence of the influenza epidemic, and that we may prepare ourselves for a cholera visit next summer. Menthol has been widely recommended as a remedy for the one, and peppermint oil as a prophylactic against the other complaint. Furthermore, the Eastern exchanges have lately taken a turn for the better, and any small advance in silver reacts at once upon the value of Japanese goods. These are the main points upon which the bull-speculators rely for a continued rise in menthol crystals, the price of which has already advanced from about 7s. 6d. in April last to 12s. per lb. at the present time. Their hopes appear to rest upon pretty solid foundations; but the serious factor of the unknown stocks that may possibly be held in China and Japan and for the non-existence of which we have no other security than the assurance of a few speculators, should not be left out of account. In our trade report we give a review of the principal price fluctuations of menthol during the last ten years, from which it will be seen that the price is now already higher than it has been since the beginning of 1887. It appears to us that one of the facts most likely to exercise an advancing influence upon the price of menthol must be sought for in the fact, which now appears fairly conclusively established, that the selling prices of Japanese peppermint oil and of menthol since 1887 have been too low to make it worth the while of the producers to place their land under the very exhaustive peppermint crop. There are two harvests of the herb in Japan, the principal one in June, and the smaller one in August. Allowing for the time required for the distillation and marketing of the product, the last of the oil and crystals of this year's harvest ought to be now well on the way from Japan; and the fact that

the exporters there offer very sparingly, and require higher and higher prices for their holdings, also goes some way to uphold the views of those who "think well" of the article.—*Chemist and Druggist*.

### Salol in Solution.

Salol has at last been obtained in solution as a pleasant, palatable liquid. Elixir of salol, as described, is a solution by mechanical means only, of five grains of salol in each dessertspoonful making a palatable liquid, the advantages of which can be clearly seen in the fact that it renders the administration of salol very easy, especially to children and those who cannot take powders or pills.

When the elixir is administered, the saliva, or the water that it may be mixed with, produces a permanent emulsion, which insures a much speedier therapeutic effect on account of its fine state of division which can be obtained by triturating the powder.

As the therapeutic properties of salol are well-known, it is unnecessary to dwell upon them here. Salol is frequently prescribed in combination with phenacetine, and also with acetanilid, both considered insoluble. We are pleased to state that both are soluble in the elixir. The result is that salol and phenacetine, or antifebrine, or all three of these valuable remedies can be obtained in solution together.

The solubility of phenacetine in two grains to the fluid dram, and of acetanilid two and one-half grains to the fluid dram, indicating that each dessertspoonful of the elixir or five grains of salol may be combined with four grains of phenacetine or five grains of antifebrine by simply adding the powder to the elixir of salol and agitating for a short time, when a permanent solution will be obtained.

The solubility of two ounces of the elixir would therefore be thirty-two grains of phenacetine and forty grains of antifebrine, rendering the administration of the largest doses very easy.—*Indian Pharmacist*.

### Can a Pharmacist Refuse to Prepare a Prescription?

This question is raised by the *Union Pharmaceutique*, and advice is given to pharmacists never to refuse to prepare a prescription or the sale of a medicament unless by so doing their responsibility is unduly engaged or there is danger to the public health. The pharmacist is naturally within his right if he declines to prepare medicine concerning which a doctor has clearly made a mistake in the recipe. The editor considers it necessary to add that a pharmacist may decline to supply medicine if he considers that there is no chance of being paid for it. French pharmacists are further told that they are legally within their rights in refusing to supply medicaments to gratify a customer's whim.—*Bulletin of Pharmacy*.