

A Chapter on Sponges.

Sponge, or rather the Latin *spongia*, was an unmentionable word in ancient Rome. The article itself, probably coarse and badly prepared, was used for toilet purposes in those days only in the sense in which "toilet" is employed as a euphemism by manufacturers of certain sanitary articles, and *spongia*, therefore, was actually reckoned as an obscene word. Now we have changed all that with a vengeance. The sponge is symbolic of the greatest of household virtues, and is reckoned the most noble of toilet requisites. And why not, for is it not a Companion of the Bath? It is true that its ready absorption of liquid refreshment has given an unpleasant figurative meaning to the word "sponge," but this is unmindful of the generous way in which the toilet article parts with it again, which the human sponge never does. However, it is this very greediness for liquor and capacity for holding it "with comfort," like a seasoned toper, that makes the sponge the important commercial article that it is. There is nothing like it in nature, and nothing like it could be produced artificially. Its existence looks like a hint from Providence that cleanliness, like honesty, is the best policy, especially when we take into consideration that natural soap abounds, and that natural towels are not unknown. The ingenuity of man has improved on the last two products, but the great Panjandrum of inventors himself could not make a sponge equal to one from Nature's workshop. And, now, what is a sponge anyhow? as our American friends say. The "man in the street," who is rather given to take things for granted, thinks that it is a vegetable of the sea-weed order of things. He is not altogether out of it, for the best explanation of the nature of a sponge, at we can give in a few words is that it is an animalized vegetable substance secreted by a marine organism. This organism, which is lower in the social scale than the jellyfish, sucks in water continually, and with it microscopic atoms of animal and vegetable matter. The former is assimilated as food; the latter is converted into an inorganic framework to assist the ceaseless pumping operation. The sponge may be compared to the silkworm's cocoon, and the fibre of which it is composed has a chemical relation to silk.

The live sponge in no way resembles the sponge of commerce. It is surrounded by an outer skin, a simple inorganized membrane, and when this is cut open the living organism looks something like raw beef.

It is intersected with the canals and cavities which are filled with a sticky glutinous substance called sarcode, of a greyish-brown color and of the consistency of treacle. The sarcode is the only part of the sponge that is alive. The flexible skeleton to which it is attached is inorganic, and it is this that, after certain puri-

fying manipulations, comes into commerce as a sponge. It propagates its species by the formation of cells or by the division of the parent sponge. The cell, in the form of a yellowish capsule, floats out and takes up an independent situation on a rock, gradually growing larger and larger by incessant feeding. Attempts have been made to cultivate the sponge artificially by dividing it and "planting" the separate pieces, but even after considerable growth they still show the marks of the knife, and are so deteriorated in quality in the market that the game has proved not to be worth the candle.

Sponges are found in many warm waters throughout the world, but the commercial articles come to us chiefly from the Mediterranean, British Honduras, Cuba, and Florida. The sponge likes a quiet life, and only flourishes exceedingly in calm waters. Therefore, the best come from the tideless Mediterranean, and the finest variety of these is known from its shape as the Turkey cup. The crop is gathered by trawling and diving, the latter being the preferable method, as the heavy nets damage the sponges. The diving is done with the aid of the most modern apparatus, and also in a state of nature without appliances. The Greeks are the most expert at the work, and in the Mediterranean fisheries amongst the Greek and Turkish islands they are exclusively employed. At least in one of these islands, Himia, the sponge fisheries have affected the matrimonial customs of the place. Himia is a colony of divers, and no girl in the island can become a bride until she has brought up a certain number of sponges. In others of the Greek Islands the fairest of the maidens go to the best divers, paterfamilias deciding the matter without consulting the girl's feelings, probably thinking that a man who can best bring up sponges is most capable of bringing up a family. It does not follow that the best sponges are found at the greatest depth. On the contrary, in certain varieties the deeper they grow the looser is the fibre. The Greek divers, however, have to go down to considerable distances, and diving is a very arduous and sometimes dangerous industry. If the Greek, fishing on his own account, can afford an apparatus (and all these come from England) he buys one. In some places in the West Indies the sponges are in such shallow water that they can be brought up with a long hook, which is one of the causes that makes these sorts less expensive.

When the live sponge is brought up it must be dealt with at once or putrefaction will set in and the whole thing will be spoiled. In fact, even when prompt measures are taken the neighborhood of a sponge boat with a fair "catch" on board is decidedly unpleasant. But, however, the sponge has to undergo much preparation before it is ready for the bathroom and nursery. First of all, the sarcode, which the fishermen call "milk," is squeezed out, and the sponge is then a

dirty, dark brown article, with bits of rock attached to it. It is then either packed in bags as it is or treated on the spot with sulphuric acid, washed thoroughly in the sea, and sprinkled with sand, when it is ready for the market. This is the "unbleached" sponge of commerce. The others, which have been shipped without treatment, on arrival are soaked in permanganate, bleached in hyposulphite of soda and hydrochloric acid, washed, wrung, dried, trimmed, and sorted. They are better looking than the "unbleached" sponges, but the treatment weakens the fibre to a certain extent.—*A. M. Garance, in Oils, Colours, and Drystalleries.*

William Walsh.

After a long illness, extending over a year, Mr. William Walsh, one of Peterborough's most respected citizens, and a prominent druggist of that city, died June 12th, aged 53 years.

Mr. Walsh was born in Cavan on what was known as the "Fallis' Line," on Christmas day, December 25th, 1843. His father was the late Wm. Walsh, who died on May 22nd, 1851. His mother survived until May 14th, 1893. He was the third eldest son of the family, the older brothers being Robert, who resides on the homestead in Cavan, and John who is in the United States. Wesley Walsh, a younger brother, is a merchant in Millbrook. About five years after his father's death, Mr. Walsh came to Peterborough, and shortly after entered the drug store of his uncle, by marriage, the late Dr. Ormond, the firm at that time being Ormond & Gilmour, and the place of business the corner at present occupied Mr. H. S. Macdonald, druggist. After a few years Mr. Walsh entered into partnership with Dr. Ormond, and conducted the business jointly with him till the death of Dr. Ormond, when Mr. Walsh assumed full charge of the business, which he conducted up to the time of his last illness.

As a mark of the esteem in which he was held, the places of business on George Street were closed during the funeral, which took place on Monday 14th.

LANOIL.—A preparation similar to lanoil has been put on the market by Hoffmann, LaRoche & Co., of Basle, Switzerland.

CHRYSTOXINE.—One of the three alkaloids obtained from ergot by Jacoby, viz., chrystoxine, secalinotoxine, and sphacetoxine. It possesses a physiological action absolutely identical with ergot of rye, and as it preserves these properties indefinitely, combines with sodium carbonate without affecting these qualities, and thus becomes exceedingly soluble in water, it is destined apparently to supplant ergot in practice.