

PILL-TAKING AND PILL-MAKING.

We smile pityingly on the curative arts of savages, with their fetichism, incantations, charms and exorcisms, but the physiological ignorance of our own people is quite as abjectly absurd, and therefore as painfully pathetic. It is these unenlightened intellectual children who enthrone the princes of the pill and potion—the Holloways and Beechams—by making them millionaires at the expense of their own money and health, to say nothing of the local chemist, who, in democratic neighborhoods, makes a comfortable competence by playing on the people's want of knowledge and wrecked constitutions. Such a man has his repertoire of pills, which he sells in penny and twopenny boxes by the gross, in addition to three penny, six penny and even shilling boxes to those who buy more at once—a family supply. On Saturday nights, multitudes—perhaps the majority of the toiling multitude, both men and women, take cathartic pills with an unflinching regularity as the moon quarters.

At a shop with which the writer was at one time associated, the purgative pill trade amongst the class referred to was enormous.

Pill-taking as a habit is handed down from generation to generation. The children not only see their parents always pilling, but they are periodically given aperient powders till old enough to take pills instead. Among these poor creatures the superstition prevails that unless an aperient operates seven times it does them no good. At the shop referred to, we prepared pills galore of all kinds and strengths. There were anti-bilious pills, composed of calomel, colocynth, aloes, cayenne, scammony, soap, gamboge, oil of mint and oil of juniper, the cayenne and the essential oils being designed to prevent gripping by the powerful intestinal irritants. Then there were strong five-grain anti-bilious pills, strong enough to debilitate a navy, always taken two at a time, and composed of only the most powerful cathartics, such as gamboge, colocynth, and aloes, undiluted with milder ones with oil of peppermint added. There were also liver pills composed of blue pill (mercurial or quick-silver pill) and compound pill of colocynth in certain proportions.

The pill-taker is not the only victim; for instance, the apprentice on one occasion, an uninitiated youth, had to make all these pills in addition to others. The shop faced due east, and the shop door was kept open in the bitterest weather, as the proprietor considered a closed door discouraged custom. The liver pill-mass had to be kept plastic by warmth to enable it to be rolled out, and it was necessary for this purpose to hold and knead it in the hands. The temperature being so low in winter that a lump of the necessary size was no sooner rolled out to the length required for dividing with the pill-machine than it would crumble up and have to be again kneaded in the hands, causing the process to extend over hours and even days, during which time the operator was kneading mercury wholesale into his system. Worse and worse became the health of the apprentice, until he was so profusely salivated as to be laid up and treated with antisialogogne medicines.

In addition to the foregoing, there were compound rhubarb pills; rheumatic pills—containing as an ingredient that deadly debilitating drug, colchicum. Then there were female pills of aloes and sulphate of iron: pill a rooti (pill of aloes and myrrh) was also occasionally sold at a scruple for a penny. There was further that antiquated, country-bumpkin resource on Pil Cochia, a pill mass made of colocynth, aloes, soap, jalap, oil of cloves, etc., rolled into lengths marked for breaking into eight pills and wrapped in lead paper.

On Saturday nights the demand grew fast and furious. "A pennyworth of liver pills?" "Two pennyworth of anti-bilious pills?" And so it went on, and all this pilling in addition to boxes of Cockle's, Holloway's, Beecham's, Norton's, Scott's, King's, Whelpton's, and endless other quack aperients, to say nothing of salts, senna, castor oil, powdered jalap, hiera picra, rhubarb powder, syrup of buckthorn, black draught, etc., until one wonders less at the deteriorated health and physical and mental stamina of the masses, than at Nature's astonishing power of vital resistance, which enables them to survive so long in the face of this systematic evisceration. If a remedy relieves some urgent symptom, these simple people regard it as a wonderful cure, and the shallow-minded