by the reports from medical officers of health in several other parts of the country, there is no ground for surprise. The law strains at the gnat and swallows the camel.

Reviewing the subject as a whole, it may perhaps be difficult to prove from statistics anything as to the growth of quackery, but the ominous fact about it is that quackery is undoubtedly becoming more organized and systematic. The itinerant quacks of the market-place still flourish as much as ever, but the characteristic of the day is the phenomenal growth of the large and well-organized schemes and companies carrying on their business on a scale almost incredible, and in most cases succeeding in defrauding the public into the belief that their treatment is in the hands of qualified medical men. The report issued through the Privy Council Office, incomplete though it is, and bearing on the face of it such obvious signs of imperfect inquiry and hasty replies, nevertheless contains sufficient to warrant the statement that the quackery that is proved to exist is a grave danger to the public health, and that further inquiry by a Royal Commission is urgently necessary in the interests of the community. To general practitioners this may appear superfluous, but it is not clear that statesmen and the more intelligent part of the public have yet realized the dangers arising from the imperfect state of the law and the failure to apply even the powers that exist. It may possibly be suggested that if the Government scheme for sickness insurance is carried in anything like its present form, the facilities for obtaining proper medical advice will be so easy that the day of the quacks will be over, as a registered practitioner will be at the beck and call of the working classes without expense. But experience shows that the high fees demanded by quacks are in no way a hindrance to their success, as the speciousness of their advertising seems to be sufficient to overcome all the dictates of common sense and economy.

In short, the public needs protecting against itself, and I see no possibility of this without a radical amendment of the Medical Acts. I would therefore strongly urge that a petition should be prepared pressing on the Government the necessity, in the public interest, of appointing a Royal Commission with the reference, first, to inquire into the whole subject of unqualified medical practice, including the trade in secret remedies; secondly, to ascertain the extent of existing statutory powers, and to show how best they may be made operative; and, thirdly, to suggest such amendments of the Medical Acts, or other Acts, as are necessary to prevent the existing evils of unqualified practice.

QUACKERY IN RURAL DISTRICTS.

By CHARLES E. S. FLEMMING,
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THE following notes are founded not only on the personal experience of the writer, but on the answers to inquiries of many medical men practising in villages and small country towns in the south of England, and the examination of the advertisements in forty newspapers circulating in the same district. There is no need in this JOURNAL to define what is meant by quackery, and I do not intend to discuss the question of prescribing by chemists, nor that of the irregular practice of medicine by nurses and midwives, nor the supply of patent foods; they are subjects of importance, but each one requires separate consideration.

In examining the nature and extent of this practice, we have to consider the different sorts of drugs, the various mechanical and other appliances, and the specialist practitioners and treatments. The first group includes the remedies of herbalists and wise women, domestic remedies, cancer cures, and patent medicines. In the second group are appliances for the treatment of hernia, deafness, and rheumatism, rings and electric belts; and in the last group bone-setters, masseurs, unqualified oculists, aurists, and dentists, asthma and phthisis cures, and faith healers and all their genus.

Herbalists at one time no doubt were very numerous, and had extensive practices, but they are fast becoming extinct; in all the newspapers examined only one herbalist's advertisement was found. Of thirty-four medical men who

have been good enough to give me the benefit of their experience on this point, all but six write that herbalists do not exist in their neighbourhood; in the six districts where they are reported to exist they only visit the district occasionally, and except for the sale of aperient pills their trade is not large; they are sometimes found in the market-place on a busy day, but the resident herbalist, who had often some local fame, has been ousted by the advertising quack.

Wise women have become rarer than herbalists. In one district only have I any record of them; that is a small colliery district, where there are two or three with "the evil eye"; they are still feared by a few, but their influence is decidedly on the wane. One of them makes and sells elder ointment for all diseases of the eye.

Neither from medical men nor from the newspaper advertisements have I any evidence of the existence of a cancer curer. One occasionally even now hears a whisper about violet leaves; and a doctor in a small town in Somerset told me that some years ago a patient of his, in spite of all advice, insisted on having a cancer of the tibia treated by a herbalist, who guaranteed to cure it with slippery elm sawdust poultices.

Domestic remedies are also being driven out of the home by the army of advertised remedies, and district nurses must have done very much to stop the use and abuse of many of them—certainly of such things as marshmallow poultices for sprains and cuckoo-pint leaves for boils—though there still are some who use them; but I doubt if even a district nurse could dissuade the old woman who explained the use of rabbits' scybalæ as pills by saying: "The rabbits eat the lovely herbs, and they must contain the virtue of the herbs and must be beneficial."

The use of patent medicines has become so enormous that it is difficult to form anything like an accurate estimate of its extent or its exact nature. From every medical man, from every district comes what is practically the same reply—that in every house are to be found patent medicines; that they are sold alike by chemists, grocers, stores, and little shops; that their use has increased enormously of late years. This statement is borne out by the fact that the revenue from labels on patent medicines increased from £266,400 in 1899 to £334,000 in 1908. From the official returns as to stamps it has been calculated that the sale of patent medicines in 1908 amounted in value to about £2,500,000, and the proportion of about 20s. spent for every sixteen of the population is apparently much the same in the country as elsewhere, for in one small town which with its neighbouring villages has a population of about 9,000, the chief chemist and grocer between them sell £600 worth of patent medicine in the year. This seems a large sum for one small district, but it is probably the same in other places. In another small town the chemist said that a quarter of all his sales was patent medicines. A grocer in a town with a population of 10,000 in an agricultural district said that his bill from one firm for patent medicines, enema syringes, etc., amounted to £40 a month, and this did not include certain proprietary articles which he purchased direct from the makers. The leading chemist in this same town said, "Speaking generally, I sell more quack medicines than ever, in spite of grocers selling them." In a large village on Salisbury Plain the amount sold is estimated at £200 a year.

Taking the case of individuals, a doctor in Cornwall writes that a pauper patient of his spent £11 in a stock of a well-known kidney cure, and died the next week. A dispenser, at one time a chemist in a large agricultural village, said that a man earning 12s. a week would regularly buy a patent medicine at 2s. 9d. a bottle. Both chemists and grocers are agreed as to the enormous increase in these sales of late years, both among the well-to-do and the poor, more especially the former. Another source of information about this trade is found in the newspaper advertisements. I referred to forty newspapers that had been examined; they were mostly local papers, but some were London papers with large circulation in the country, such as the *Daily Express*, *Lloyd's Weekly News*, the *People*, *Answers*, and the *British Weekly*, and two of the better-class society papers. Omitting advertisements of physical culture, these papers contained 622 advertisements of patent medicines, an average of 15

to each paper, and in extent they amounted to more than 150 columns. One London paper had five advertisements occupying eleven columns, and one small South Devon paper, to its credit be it said, had only three advertisements occupying altogether six inches. I should say that the area of patent medicine advertisements in any paper varied in direct proportion to its circulation.

As to the varieties of these advertised medicines and appliances, the evidence of the medical men is that the most frequently used are in order as placed here. Aperient pills and digestive medicines, cough remedies, ointments, kidney and blood mixtures, teething powders, and headache powders. I learn from several chemists that aperient pills are easily first. The 622 advertisements are divided as follows:

Drugs for digestive tract, including aperients, 128.
Skin, hair, etc., 111.
Tonics and blood mixtures, 52.
Coughs, asthma, and consumption, 48.
Painceas, 45.
Abortifacients, 44.
Bladder, urinary, dropsy, 39.
Sores and wounds, 35.
Gout and rheumatism, 27.
Hernia, 11.
Tonic wines, 11.
Rings and electric appliances, 8.
Remedies for alcoholism, piles, headache, deafness, diabetes, infants soothing, heart, eyes, fits, obesity, throat, nervous, and one or two others; between them, 52.

These figures probably give some idea of the proportion in which the different remedies are used; those for diseases which are most common or most troublesome head the list. And, as a correspondent writes, "The value of a remedy is assessed by its advertisement. A quite useful application which was at one time much sought after is not now obtainable, because the makers could not afford to continue to advertise sufficiently."

Apparently bonesetters do not exist in rural districts and country towns in the south of England; they are no doubt resorted to by those who can afford to travel to London. I have heard of two brothers who practise in the north of Hereford, but they do not, I believe come further south.

Massage, so-called but really a variety of bonesetting, is practised in the larger towns; and many, especially of the well-to-do, go from the country to these irregular practitioners.

The same may be said of systems of physical culture as a means of curing various diseases; and the sums spent on these cures must be enormous, for the fees charged are by no means small.

The faith healers, under various disguises, are similarly resorted to by the better-off country folk. And the poor man gets his spectacles furnished and fitted by the small chemist or the smaller jeweller; and his teeth extracted and stopped and dentures fitted (*sic*) by the unqualified and advertising dentist or the small chemist. Evidence on all sides shows how prevalent are these customs.

But probably no special treatments are more pernicious than those for the cure of phthisis and asthma. Medical men on all sides tell of them. In one county especially do they appear to flourish, that is in Cornwall, chiefly among the miners returned from abroad.

Guided by advertisements, and the information given by men in practice, I should be led to conclude that of all appliances those for the treatment of rheumatism and of hernia were the most used; and it is extraordinary what some working men will pay for trusses. A gardener grumbled very much because his medical man charged him 10s. 6d. for visiting him at night and reducing a hernia, measuring him for a truss, and advising to go to hospital for a radical cure; within three months he paid 16 guineas for a simple spring truss with brass fittings. Another, a farmer, paid £25 for a truss (worth 10s.) and a bottle of lotion (worth 1d.), and pinned all his faith on the lotion. Others buy four strips of adhesive plaster for 28s. to cure their ruptures.

Electric appliances for the cure of rheumatism and other diseases, and rings for rheumatism, have a steady sale, the latter being sold by most small chemists and jewellers. But at the present time pride of place must be given to apparatus for mechanical massage. I was told recently of a clergyman making a collection to buy one of those

apparatuses for a case of spastic paraplegia. Deaf patients, rich and poor alike, must from all accounts spend large sums in the purchase of various, mostly useless, appliances to make them hear.

From all this it appears that if only man will believe—and he appears very willing—he may find a remedy at his grocer's for any diseases that may afflict any part of his body. And in this country he spends in this way every year probably more than enough to maintain over 40,000 hospital beds.

The agencies for making known, providing and distributing these remedies are varied and numerous. Newspapers come first, and the methods of advertising are ingenious. First it was the ordinary bald advertisement, then the pictures, then came the reading advertisement placed in the midst of the general news, having a literary style not very different to that of the rest of the paper; you read it innocently to the bitter end, which made you feel just as much annoyed as you were when the new patient you welcomed to your consulting-room turned out to be a commercial traveller. But the cleverest, and I am told by a chemist the most efficacious, is the American method, that is, the prescription that is given free to any one that writes for it. When he takes it to the chemist to be dispensed, he finds that one of the ingredients is an expensive proprietary medicine.

Next to newspapers as agents come chemists, stores, grocers, and co-operative societies. The number of "patent medicine" licence holders is considerable in two districts of which I got the figures; there was 1 to every 1,000 of the population.

Other agents are: the post office, the street vendor, and last, and I should say least, the clergyman and the district visitor.

This quackery is distributed pretty equally among all classes of society, and in town and country. Among the wealthy there is a larger demand for those remedies which satisfy comfort and vanity. Among a certain class there is a sort of medical cant, a using of technical terms, and a morbid love of morbidity that makes them a prey to the charlatan. They have a curious mixture of belief and disbelief, like King Saul, of whom Massillon said "Il ne croit plus en Dieu, et il est assez credule pour aller interroger les demons."

The causes of this habit are by no means simple; its prevalence among all classes of society, rich and poor, educated and uneducated, shows that they are not only pecuniary, social, or educational. The primary causes are presumably superstition and ignorance, but with superstition must be bracketed credulity and the illogical mind.

The same superstition that, in the time of Nero, made the crowd believe that the magician, by the touch of his hand, drove the evil spirit from the lunatic, to-day makes it believe that a lotion applied to the groin will close an open inguinal canal. This superstition is nurtured by the credulity that believes all that is said with sufficient fervour and all that is printed because it is printed. When I said to an old man, who had shown me a glowing advertisement of some cure for rheumatism, "Surely you don't believe all that nonsense?" he replied, "You may call it 'nonsense,' but you never will make me believe that any man would dare to put all that in the paper if it wasn't as true as a book"; and this credulity will always flourish in the mind that is untrained to logical thought, that confuses cause with effect as the woman who looks on amenorrhoea as the cause of anaemia, and that confuses coincidence with cause and effect as the mother who attributes all illness in her teething child to the teething or in her vaccinated child to the vaccination.

The ignorance is that ignorance of physiology and anatomy which would not know, and could not understand, the difference between suppression of urine and an impervious stricture of the urethra.

There are, however, other contributory causes for this excessive resort to untrained medical assistance. The patient, in the first place, wants his symptoms treated, and has no idea of the importance of finding out their cause, so that he is quite satisfied if he can help himself from the bottle labelled "Headache," whether he has Bright's disease, eye-strain, or a cerebral tumour.

Again, the patient, not getting from his philosophic doctor the quick relief that he expected, in his despair applies to the plausible charlatan whose assurance is so

comforting. Sometimes it appeals to the sufferer's vanity to be in the fashion, using some much-talked-of remedy; and it appeals to his meanness, which he calls his economy, to save his doctor's fees. At the same time, his innate snobbishness values what he buys according to its price, and he will pay 20 guineas for what he might get in the proper place for half a guinea.

But the most important contributory cause, and the most effectual, is the variety and number of agencies for bringing the claims of these remedies to the knowledge of the public, and for supplying them. There is also the fact that it is to the immediate interest of both producer and agent by every means in their power to maintain and increase the trade.

It may be asked, What matters it if the people do use all these remedies, many of them harmless if useless? The taking of so-called harmless remedies that are useless is indirectly most injurious in that it delays treatment so that the patient has not only remained ill an unnecessarily long time, but has very possibly put off treatment so late that it cannot, when at last adopted, be as efficient as it might have been; or that it fails altogether, as in a case of cancer which had been treated for months with a popular ointment before proper advice was sought and operation was found to be out of the question; and in a case of troublesome vomiting which was treated with a soothing syrup, fortunately without relief, for this meant that a medical man had to be called in; he found that it was a case of cerebral syphilis and was able to save the patient's life, but the delay had caused treatment to be much more difficult and prolonged, and there are records of many other cases that have been left in this way too long practically untreated. Some of the most serious instances are where coughs and consumption have been dosed for months until the patients became incurable. A doctor in Cornwall writes: "A very large percentage of the men here are miners. These men go to South Africa, accumulate what is to them a small fortune, and then come home to die of 'miner's phthisis.' During the dying process the expense to which some of them will go in their desperation is startling. They will spend pound after pound in the various nostrums advertised, sending to America and South Africa for 'certain cures' after they have gone through the whole gamut of our home quack productions. Then the end comes and the widow and children land on 'the parish.' Another case came under my notice a year or two ago. A young man was killed in one of the mines, leaving a widow and two children. Compensation was paid to the extent, I believe, of some £100. The woman suffered from asthma, and after taking all the home 'cures,' sent to America for something at a cost of between £4 and £5. Needless to say, she is already 'on the rocks,' and the elder child is not yet ten years old."

These two instances bring to notice another and a very serious result of quackery—that is, the spending of large sums of money that can ill be spared and that should have gone to the proper support of the patient or others of his family. I mentioned above one small town where £600 is spent yearly in patent medicines; in that same town £200 could not be raised for the maintenance of a small cottage hospital.

From the want of proper diagnosis and information there arises the risk—a serious one—of the spread of infection in venereal, zymotic, and various parasitic diseases.

Lastly, there is at times an immediate and positive danger in the use of these so-called cures. A herbalist destroyed a child's eyesight by the use of some drops; a quack masseuse set up an acute inflammation in a quiet tuberculous joint; a lady developed symptoms of poisoning after taking "headache" powders for a week; and in a case of neuralgia a catarrhal nephritis appears to have been caused by tablets containing acetyl salicylic acid.

If we are to cure this vicious habit we must educate the public mind not to desire its indulgence, and at the same time make its indulgence less easy and remove the causes that prompt the desire. The first means the removal of superstition, credulity, and ignorance; something may be done to effect this by general and technical education and the teaching that medical men and district nurses are daily giving. We as a profession, in our endeavour to make clear the mental vision of the superstitious and

credulous, will need to take some care to make sure that there is nothing likely to blur our own vision.

To make the indulgence of the habit less easy means interfering with the producers and distributing agents, and the only practical proposal that I know of is to increase the stamp duty on patent medicines and the cost of the vendors' licences, and I would suggest that the revenue from both these be devoted to the maintenance of hospitals, much as whisky money is given for education. It seems almost useless to expect any legislation directly designed to get rid of these men, neither is it likely that if passed it would be effectual. A writer of fifty years ago, quoting Tacitus, "*De mathematicis Italia pellendis factum senatus consultum atrox et irritum*," writes: "There is reason to fear that these vermin, the quacks, will no more be extirpated by any decrees than were astrologers from Italy, or gipsies from Spain, or wizards from Israel, never so long as 'the weakness of patients, the sweetness of life, and the nature of hope' remain what they are."

We may, however, fairly expect the State, which has already endeavoured to protect the people from untrained midwives and untrained chemists, to take some active steps to protect them from untrained medical practitioners. They might at least, as has often been suggested, insist on the exact and actual composition of all patent medicines being stated on the cover of each packet.

The causes that make for the indulgence of the desire are sickness, weariness and worry, and the persuasion of the quack. The first three can be alleviated by preventive medicine, better and more easily obtained medical attendance, better housing and surroundings, and better conditions of employment—towards all of which we are making steady if slow progress. But the persuasive influence of the charlatan is as powerful as ever it was, and nothing can lessen it but the control of his means of persuasion—that is, his advertisements. Why not tax them and give that money, too, to the hospitals?

This only refers to the newspaper and magazine advertisements, but there is another form that, in the country, at any rate, is widely prevalent—that is, the postal pamphlet and the handbill; the former, if the authorities would, might easily be put a stop to, as were betting circulars.

Though these notes refer to quackery in rural districts, it is probable that, except, at any rate, in big cities, there is little difference between town and country. Though dispensaries and hospital out-patient departments give ample facility for medical help in cities, the absence of this checking force is made up for in the country by the greater personal influence of the family doctor. The great facilities for advertising and for obtaining goods, and the frequent and easy intercourse between town and country have, even in the most isolated districts, diminished with any distinctions that there were in the past. The town patient, though quicker in thought than his country cousin, is probably no less superstitious in regard to the treatment of his many ailments.

UNQUALIFIED PRACTICE IN EAST ANGLIA.

BY

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EYE, SUFFOLK.

It is probable that the evils of "unqualified practice" are not felt so much in East Anglia as in some other parts of England; still, it is unquestionably very prevalent, and in the opinion of the medical profession of Norwich is "year by year assuming larger proportions." On the other hand, the opinion has been expressed that in the Ipswich district "quackery has been on the decline for some years."

The *itinerant quack* who years ago used to attend at country markets and sell his pills and ointments from a cart on the market hill with all the sonorous accompaniments of the travelling showman has disappeared, but his place is taken by the prescribing chemist, the medical botanist, the consulting optician *et hoc genus omne*, whilst the sale of proprietary medicines flourishes more than ever.

So far as East Anglia is concerned, the *bonesetter* does not exist; his home is more especially in manufacturing or mining centres, where accidents are frequent and severe.