

ON THE INCAUTIOUS USE OF MEDICINE.

BY A FAMILY DOCTOR.



RAY, reader mine, do not say that the Family Doctor waxeth old and doteth, if I take the liberty here of repeating a little anecdote which I gave once before. Twice-told tales sometimes do good. The story bears reference to a friend of mine. Willie was what is called in Scotland a "haffing;" but, if Willie did not possess the same amount of brains that you or I do, if one side of his cerebrum was not patent the other was, and Willie knew how to make use of it too, in his own way.

For he was a witty fool, and many were the queer sayings he uttered. But Willie could never in the whole course of his life be prevailed upon to take medicine. "Snuff, if you like," he would say, "to the rim of my bonnet, but nae physic;" and "Man!" he would add, "my brither-in-law used to tak' salts and senna every day o' the week and twice on Sunday, and—he died for a' that."

Now it is my earnest desire you should keep this remark of Willie's in your mind and memory, for I assure you there is more in it than you might imagine.

You will perceive, then, from the way in which I have commenced this paper, that I do not intend it to be otherwise than a plain and simple one, so that he who runs may read; else could I summon to my aid many of the well-known rules of mathematics and laws of logic. Nor do I wish by any means to shake the patient's faith in medicine. It is against the abuse of drugs I wish to wage war, and to warn my readers against pinning their faith on medicines alone, for the cure of diseases, to the entire neglect of the ordinary laws of nature and hygiene.

The *post-hoc-propter-hoc* line of argument is a very common one with many. For example, an individual is suffering from some ailment, and is induced to make trial of some reputed remedy or specific. In one short week he is better—probably even well. Well, the attribution of the benefit received to the medicine taken is most natural. But is it right? You very probably have heard from medical lips the phrase "recuperative power." It means that innate force planted by nature in our frames, which enables us to eliminate poisons, and get the better of either accidents or illnesses. If you cut a round hole in the bark of a tree, it is the recuperative power in the plant which enables it in a year or two to heal up or quite cover up the wound. This *vis natura* is very strong in the young and not so much so in the old.

Now, we will suppose that for an attack of rheumatic gout you have taken a certain drug, and you find yourself, after a time, well. For my argument it does not

signify at all what the drug may have been—it may have been opium, or lime-juice, or an alkali, or calomel—*n'importe*, one of three things has taken place:—First, the medicine may have, with the aid of nature, cured you; secondly, the medicine may have done neither good nor harm, and nature alone may have pulled you through; and thirdly, the drug you have taken may actually have done harm, retarded recovery in fact, and in spite of this the strong recuperative power of nature may have restored you to health.

Leaving you to digest the above statements at your leisure, I will now mention a few medicines as they occur to me, and endeavour to show the reader their good qualities as well as their bad; so that he may know how to steer clear of rocks and shoals.

Let me first, however, warn heads of families and every one connected with the care of children, to make a rule of avoiding medicines and drugs, with the actions of which they are not perfectly familiar. Let the medicine chest be fitted up in the simplest manner possible, for remember that in skilled hands the plainest tools often do excellent execution. Let them, too, err on the side of giving too small a dose, rather than one too large.

"Aperients" is a good general name for that class of remedies—including laxatives, cathartics, &c.—which do good by relieving the system by evacuation. Such medicines, however, are very much abused, and I know many people who imagine that they may indulge most freely in the pleasures of the table, both in the way of eating and drinking, if only they happen to have a few of their favourite pills in their waistcoat pocket, or feel assured they can find their way to a Seidlitz powder in the morning. This is a sad state of affairs: such persons are assuredly robbing Peter to pay Paul, and shortening the years of their lives. The young, as a rule, ought never to need the assistance of aperients; for, if not actually diseased, the only things necessary to keep them regular are temperance in the evening, a glass of cold spring-water after the morning bath, and exercise in the open air.

Different aperients act in different ways; thus some act by merely increasing the peristaltic or onward muscular movement of the bowel; others, by irritating the mucous membrane of the intestine, act by causing increase of the secretions, and consequent fluidity of the contents of the bowel; while others, such as mercury and podophyllin, are first taken into the blood, and then stimulate the flow of bile, which you are aware is a natural purgative.

And here is something worth knowing: people often complain of the after-constipating effect of aperient medicines, to such a degree indeed that frequently the constant use of purgatives has to be adopted in order to procure relief. This is caused by a want of tone in the intestine, and if with each dose of laxative

medicine a tonic were taken, and uniform regularity in soliciting nature were made a rule, the evil after-results of the aperient would, in all probability, not be felt.

Just a word or two now on some individual aperients. The gentlemanly old remedy which was so great a favourite with the immortal Abernethy—namely, a five-grain blue pill at night, followed by a black draught in the morning—may be employed when there is slight derangement of the biliary apparatus with probably constipation, headache, or giddiness. When there is a determination of blood to the head and probably continuous headache, I should recommend a trial of the compound cathartic pills. They are excellent, containing as they do a little calomel, with a portion of gamboge, jalap, colocynth, aloes, soap, and cardamom seeds, elegantly combined. The dose is one or two at night.

Aloes wine combined with equal parts of the wine of rhubarb, the wine of iron, and the compound tincture of cardamoms, is a mild and tonic aperient, and one likely to do good if taken in the dose of a tea-spoonful in a small glass of dry sherry, about half an hour before dinner. Epsom salts should be taken in the morning, diluted with plenty of water, and a tea-spoonful of orange tincture added. It is an excellent cooling aperient. Senna is a very effectual laxative, acting well when combined with salts; but it should be avoided if there be much, or indeed any, irritation or inflamed condition of the mucous membrane of the alimentary canal. Senna is one of those medicines which, before producing its laxative effect, is received into the blood. The milk of nurses who are under its influence has a purgative effect upon the suckling child. There are many elegant preparations of senna. I cannot, however, say that what is known as the "black bottle" of hospitals is one of these, but I must allow it is a very effectual cathartic, and so I give the reader the prescription, because it is often handy to have medicines ready compounded in a family, especially where there are children. Let me tell you, however, that as a child my mother once, by the promise of sugar-plums, induced me to take a glass of this same black bottle, but the promise of sugar-plums by the cart-load would not have induced me to repeat the dose. You take two ounces and a half of the tincture of senna, one ounce and a half of the compound tincture of cardamoms, and mix them together; then dissolve four ounces of Epsom salts by aid of gentle heat in fourteen ounces of infusion of senna-leaves; when dissolved, add your tinctures, and if the whole does not fill an imperial pint bottle, make it up with more infusion of senna. From one ounce to two is the dose.

A tea-spoonful of the syrup of senna is a nice little aperient for children, and if an adult needs a dose of senna, he will find two tea-spoonfuls of the fluid extract a very mild but efficient laxative.

There is one very mild and almost tasteless preparation of soda, which few people beyond the pale of the profession ever think of using—I mean the phosphate of soda. It is useful for either children or delicate

grown-up people. Dose, about a drachm dissolved in two ounces of the compound infusion of oranges; or for children, in doses of twenty to thirty grains. In giving it to children you should first dissolve it in a little water, and then add this water to the little patient's soup. He won't be any the wiser, but probably much better.

Glauber salts is an excellent and effective cathartic, which I seldom prescribe—never alone—as in many cases it produces griping. Rochelle salts, on the other hand, administered in the form of Seidlitz powder is a nice cooling morning aperient, but better adapted for summer than winter use. Another very mild summer aperient may thus be made: dissolve a tea-spoonful of sugar in a tumblerful of cold spring-water, add a little tincture of oranges, half a tea-spoonful of bicarbonate of soda, and mix. Then pour in a large table-spoonful of lime-juice (not the cordial) and drink while effervescing. It should be taken an hour before breakfast.

The old-fashioned electuary, composed of cream of tartar and sulphur—an ounce of the former, two ounces of the latter—well rubbed up with four ounces of the syrup of orange-peel, is still a favourite, and justly so, with many practitioners. The dose is about half an ounce, and it is an excellent remedy for that troublesome ailment, piles, especially if the compound gall ointment is used externally at the same time.

Syrup of buckthorn is another aperient of former years, which I merely mention for the purpose of cautioning you to avoid it. If Shakespeare meant this medicine, he spoke right well when he said, "Throw physic to the dogs," for equal parts of this aperient and castor oil do excellently well for a French poodle.

One of the most common and most useful aperients and correctives for infants and children is the light grey powder, composed of mercury and chalk. In diarrhoea, too, of children it is often given with much advantage, mixed with a grain or two of rhubarb and aromatic powder. The dose of mercury and chalk is from one to five grains, according to the age and strength of the little patient.

Need I here remind you of the beneficial and mildly relaxing effects of honey eaten with breakfast, or prunes partaken after dinner? Excellent aperients both—simple, efficacious, and safe. A saccharine exudation obtained from the stem of a tree which grows in Sicily and Italy, termed manna, is a mild aperient for children and invalids, but is seldom used alone.

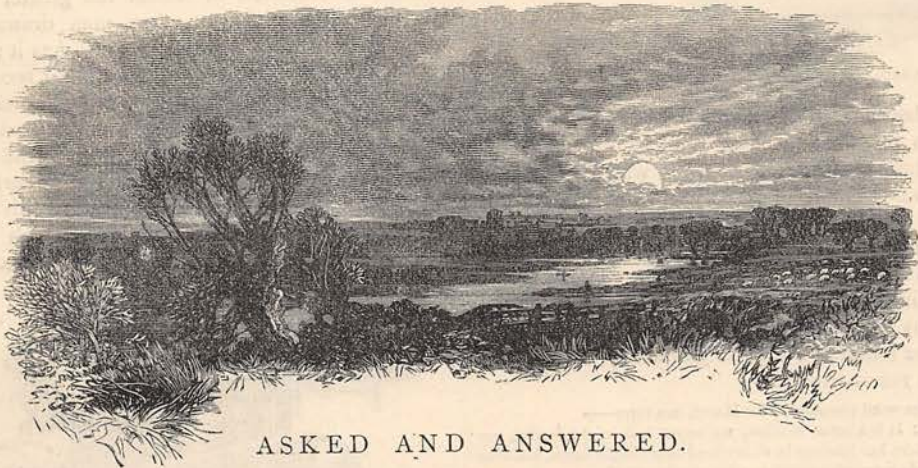
When I have mentioned podophyllin, I think I have given my readers a fair array of useful aperients to choose from. I cannot, however, advise any amateur medico to treat either himself or his friends to the resin of podophyllin, for this reason—it is somewhat uncertain in its action, and is therefore unsafe in unskilled hands.

And now, in conclusion, let me once more impress upon you that you are never on any account to expect permanent relief from medicine alone. If a man is suffering from any troublesome chronic complaint,

which probably gives no great degree of present pain, but which may lead to ultimate illness and death, he must be up and doing, and strive by temperance in all things—early hours, exercise, the bath—in a word, by obedience to all the rules of health, about which I am constantly preaching, to get his system once again into proper working order. Meanwhile, carefully chosen medicines will assist him.


Tell me, now, what would you think of a sailor who,

if drowning in the sea one mile from dry land, suddenly to his joy found an oar large enough to float him, but who, instead of now pushing boldly in towards the shore, was content to remain where he was on the support the oar afforded him? A fool, wouldn't you call him? Just so: we began with a fool and we've ended with one. Have a care, then, that the case be not thine own. Medicine is the oar that will float you, but—*you've got to swim.*



ASKED AND ANSWERED.

BY MRS. G. LINNÆUS BANKS.


 What, or of whom, does my lady think,
 My lady so shy and so sweet,
 As she casts soft crumbs, on the river's brink,
 To the swan at her dainty feet?
 Does she think how proud the white swan must be
 Of her smiles and her care for him—not me?

Of what, or of whom, does my lady speak
 In those murmurs loving and low,
 With the timid tint on her maiden cheek
 Faintly limned in the wave below?
 Blush for the river, caress for the bird,
 Yet for me, her lover, nor blush nor word.

Of what, or of whom, does my lady dream,
 As the river goes gliding by?
 Does she see two forms in the glassy stream,

Or only herself and the sky?
 Can she see how the shadows melt and blend,
 Yet hold me apart, as—only a friend?

For what, or for whom, does my lady sigh,
 Swan and river left far behind?
 Can it be for that which is waiting nigh—
 A true love's heart with hers to bind?—
 Is there a bird in the boughs overhead
 Could tell what beneath them is sighed or said?

Of what, or of whom, does the lover dream,
 Pulling home in his peerless boat?
 Of moon, or of clouds, or winding stream,
 With the gladdest heart afloat?
He knows for whom were the blush and the sigh,
 And all that was meant in the whispers shy.

