

'THE FRAGRANT PINCH.'

BY WILLIAM FRANCIS.

Till man had all he could enjoy,
He had not joys enough,
Nor fully could each sense employ,
Till fortune gave him snuff.

ORIGINALLY snuff was used as a medicine, and not as a luxury. Physicians were accustomed to recommend it for the elimination of gross and petriary humours from the brain, to relieve headache, toothache, ophthalmia, and some paralytic and sporic complaints. Upwards of 400 years B.C., Hippocrates used powder of herbs as snuff in disease.

Antonius Musa, physician to Augustus Cesar, names many disorders of the body in which he deemed snuff bene-

the *Spectator*, where the question is with reason demanded, 'Would it not employ a bean prettily enough if, instead of playing eternally with a snuff box, he spent some part of his time in making one?' In those early days snuff was made by rubbing a roll of tobacco on a brass grater, then fixed in all snuff boxes; the thus powdered weed was then scooped up in a small spoon or shell, placed upon the back of the hand, and was snuffed up the nose. In an old comedy by Thomas Baker, entitled 'An Act at Oxford,' and produced in 1704, a bean remarks to a young lady named Arabella that he carries sweet snuff for the ladies, and produces the box. 'A spoon, too,' cries the fair Arabella; 'that's very gallant; for to see some people run their fat fingers into a box is as nauseous as eating without a fork.'

The use of the fragrant pinch has not been restricted to those members of society who 'take a world of pains to prove that bodies can exist sans brains;' but eminent

mode of inhaling it:—'I drew my snuff-box, rapped it, took snuff twice, and continued my discourse in my usual attitude, my body bent forward and my forefinger stretched out.' Indeed, whenever Gibbon was going to say a good thing, it was observed that he announced it by a complacent tap on his snuff box. Both Pope and Swift indulged in snuff. Addison, Hullingbroke, and Congreve were also among its devotees. Robert Burns took snuff, and a box which he presented to a friend realised in 1825 at a public auction 35. Darwin the naturalist used snuff to stimulate his brain during working hours. That he might not take too many pinches, he kept a jar of snuff on the hall-table. The distance between the hall and his study acted as a check upon over indulgence. But the chink of the lid of the snuff jar was a familiar sound in the family. Sometimes, when in the drawing-room, Darwin would suggest that the study fire must be burning low. The family smiled as he went out ostensibly to replenish it, but really to get a pinch of snuff. Great generals have been weak on this point. Frederick the Great, for instance, used to take so much snuff that he had his pockets lined with leather, and made without corners, so that they served as snuff pouches. Snuff boxes to carry about with him he would not be bothered with, but on the mantelpieces of his palaces they found their proper places. One day Frederick saw a page helping himself to a pinch. 'Good snuff that,' said the king. 'Excellent, sire!' Then take it; it is too small for both of us.' There is another story about Frederick in which the laugh is on the other side. Count Schwerin was presented by the king with a snuff box, which had a donkey's head painted underneath the lid. Next day at dinner the King asked the Count to give the Duchess of Brunswick a pinch out of his new box. 'What an excellent portrait of His Majesty,' said the Duchess, as she glanced at the lid of the box. The King looked somewhat annoyed. The Duchess handed the snuff box to her neighbour. 'Is it not a fine portrait? Such an excellent likeness!' said the neighbour, and so on and so on, until the King ordered the box to be handed to him. Judge his feelings when he found the artificial Count had had the donkey's head cleaned off, and a portrait of Frederick substituted, so as to be able to give the King a lesson in politeness. Napoleon I. was a great snuff taker, or rather waster, for it is said a great deal of snuff never reached that organ which might in truth have been called 'a leading article.' Von Moltke is reported to have used a pound of snuff in the three weeks ending with the battle of Sedan. Learned divines have been guilty of tickling the olfactory nerves. The Rev. Wm. Anderson, an eloquent preacher of Glasgow, was so addicted to snuff that he would take a pinch in the pulpit. Once, while uttering the words 'My soul cleaveth to the dust,' he took a pinch of snuff. He lamented the mastery which the habit had gained over him, and once, while preaching from the text, 'All is vanity,' treated his nose to snuff, and then said, 'And this also is vanity.'

Nor has the snuff taking been confined to the stronger sex. In the battle of the 'Rape of the Lock,' Pope makes his heroine Belinda conquer one of her gallant enemies by chucking a pinch of snuff in his face. Nor does he tell us that she borrowed it; he leaves us to conclude that even she, the pattern of youthful beauty, took it out of her own pocket. In Richardson's novel, *Clarissa's* maid Betty is often described as tapping on her snuff-box and indulging in its contents. In Congreve's 'Love for Love' Mr Tattle commences his advances to Miss Prue by presenting her with a snuff box, whereupon the young lady delightfully exclaims, 'Look you here what Mr Tattle has given me! Look you here, cousin, here's a snuff-box say, there is snuff in it. Here, will you have any? Oh, good! How sweet it is.'

Yes! In spite of the fulminations of kings and censors, popes and priests, the enervating power has held its own, and even now—

Persons staunch and great physicians,
Here have dipped the immortal thumb.
Painters, sculptors, sweet musicians,
Round it still like phantoms come.

Gentle poets, legal ralers,
Playwrights, actors, merchants, squires,
Lords and ladies, soldiers, sailors,
Here had all the nose desires.



W. Esquillan, photo. DUNEDIN AMATEUR BOATING CLUB BUILDING—BEACH VIEW.

social. Anlus Cornelius Celsus, who lived and wrote in the same age with our Saviour, advises snuff in pains in the head, in spasms, lethargy, and hysteria.

One pinch of snuff relieved the vapoured head,
Removed the spleen, removed the qualmsish fit,
And gave a brisker turn to female wit.

Fifty years later Aretæus, a celebrated physician, of Rome, prescribed for the same complaints remedies in power to incite sneezing. It was in this way that our modern snuff (powdered tobacco) was introduced into France. Catherine de Medicis, in common with Francis II. and other members of that royal family, suffered from obstinate cephalalgia. In the year 1560, the French Ambassador at Lisbon, Jean Nicot, having relieved headaches in his own person with the powder, presented some, grated with his own hand, to her Majesty, who at the time was longing for a new remedy for her headache. At once her Majesty obtained relief, and the cephalic virtue of the remedy was so solidly established that the French people of high degree indulged in the fragrant pinch.

SNUFF-TAKING IN ENGLAND.

From France the habit of snuff-taking soon found its way into England, and though introduced as a medicine speedily became known as a luxury. Butler bears testimony to the fact that the Cromwellian saints were not averse to its use, when he wrote:

He had administered a dose
Of snuff mun dungus to his nose,
And powdered the inside of his skull,
Instead of the outward jobbermole.

But though snuff-taking was practised in England early in the seventeenth century, the habit did not become general until after the Restoration. As the eighteenth century advanced snuff-taking became universal. The snuff-box was everywhere in requisition. There was no escape from the universal snuff. In the streets, in the theatre, in churches, in every place where people met together, the little box was always in evidence, and the odour of snuff filled the air. At that period the snuff-box was an absolutely necessary part of the equipment of every fine gentleman. In the *Taller*, Steele ridicules the affectation of a fine gentleman and apostrophises him thus:—'Thou dear outside, will you be combing your wig, playing with your box, or picking your teeth?' In *Oldham's* poems (1682) a hanger on of a stupid nobleman is satirised thus:—

There's naught so mean can scrape the flattering sot;
Not his lord's snuff-box nor his powder pot.

Baker in his comedy of *Hampstead Heath* is severe on the bean, and describes him thus:—

A wig that is full,
An empty skull,
A box of bergamot,

A very commendable suggestion is advanced in No. 43 of

statesmen, warriors, artists, poets, and even divines, have pleaded guilty to a liking for snuff. Was it not said of Sir Joshua Reynolds by Oliver Goldsmith:

When they talked of their Raphaels, Correggios, and stuff,
He shifted his trumpet and only took snuff.

Perhaps life might have been a gloomier thing to Dr. Johnson if he had not enlivened his views of it with an occasional stimulus of a pinch. So fond was the 'great Cham' of the grated powder that he used to take it out of his waistcoat pocket instead of a box. He had a box, however, for in the Lichfield Museum you can see a box that once belonged to the lexicographer in the miscellaneous collection of Johnsonian curios. Gibbon, the historian of the 'Decline and fall of the Roman Empire,' was an excessive snuff-taker, and in one of his letters thus describes his



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