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Current Topics

AT HOME AND ABROAD.

LEECHES THAT BLEED THE POOR. A GOOD many readers of the N.Z. TABLET will remember the enterprising lady who, under the title of 'Dr. Anna Potts,' netted such a rich haul of chinking shekels a few years ago by guaranteeing cures for various ills that flesh is heir to in New Zealand. A 'lady doctor' of the same or similar name—Mrs. Longshore Potts—has recently been ordered by an English court to pay £175 damages, with heavy costs, for unskilful treatment of a patient—or rather, victim. The incident sets one of our Dunedin contemporaries wondering 'how people of average intelligence are so readily captured by the medical charlatan, who makes loud-mouthed professions of performing cures which the well-trained medical man, who conducts his profession upon scientific principles, knows to be impossible.' How, indeed? Here is a riddle which even the *Lancet* cannot solve. For it is a question for the psychologist rather than for the physician or the journalist. The solution of the knotty problem may, perhaps, be found partly in the theory that there is an insane spot somewhere in most people's brain-cells, partly in the hope which, as the poet assures us, springs eternal in the human breast—especially in the breast of one who is, or fancies he is, not himself at all'; and partly in the principle enunciated by Butler in his *Hudibras*, that, for the time being, at least,

Doubtless the pleasure it is great
Of being cheated as to cheat.

The known impossibility of the 'guaranteed cures' is no bar to the popularity or success of the brazen impostor who appeals to the evergreen hope and credulity of the masses. A cancer-curer and a consumption-drencher are always sure of a plentiful *clientèle*. Bartholin professed to cure all disorders—especially epilepsy—by repeating rhymes, and very poor rhymes they were, too. And Bartholin was the rage in his day. Paracelsus—or, to give him his full procession of names: Aurelius Philippus Paracelsus Theophrastus Bombastus de Hohenheim—set people crazy through the power he claimed of making men immortal by dosing them with liquid gold. He belied his cure by dying at forty-seven—just as little Methuselah Jenkins played false to his name by dying at six months old. And did not Kenelm Digby set all England by the ears with his new system of curing all human ills with a shake of his 'sympathetic powder'? Speculator Kelly—a Worcestershire man—claimed, besides the gift of prophecy, the power of raising the dead to life. And Wever tells us in his *Funeral Monuments* that Queen Elizabeth 'sent for him out of Germany,' and, it is surmised, knighted him for secret services. The credulity of those days was lashed by Cervantes in Don Quixote's balsam of Fierabras, which the Knight of the Rueful Countenance declared would make a man 'sound as an apple' after he had been cut in two; and in Waltho van Clutterbank's balsam of balsams, two drops of which, 'seasonably applied,' would in six minutes restore life and activity to anyone who chanced to have his brains knocked out or his head chopped off.

Despite our electric lights and our Baldwin engines and our liquid air and our patent nutmeg-graters, there still remains somewhat of the adjunct-bird in the human kind. That long-legged Indian stork will swallow with equal composure and trustfulness a healthy green swamp-frog and a carving-knife or a saw-file. Such, in respect to quacks, is the *gobemouche* of the crowd. They will swallow at a gulp, and without examination, every statement that is made to them. In this respect we have advanced but little since the days of Digby and Paracelsus. The increase of the quack fraternity has probably more than kept pace with that of the population. This is, in fact, the golden age of quackery. The claim of occult power is put forward with as calm assurance in the advertising columns of the secular Press as it was from the

stage in Elizabeth's days by charlatans like Doctor Dee. An ungrammatical trickster, for instance, advertises his semi-miraculous powers in a number of New Zealand papers, asseverates that neither cancer nor any other disease can 'baffle' him, and modestly declares himself the greatest physician the world has ever known. He has probably his *clientèle* of open-mouthed idiots. According to the *Bulletin of Pharmacy*, one of the islands in Puget Sound, near Seattle (U.S.A.) possesses at the present time another prince of quacks who prattles with ungrammatical lips. He is less demonstrative than his New Zealand confrère. But he is evidently not easily 'baffled.' He sets forth his prospectus in the following placard printed by himself on a home outfit:—

Legs and arms sawed off while you wait without pane.
Childbirths and tumours a specialty.
No odds asked in measles, hooping cough, mumps, or diarrhoea.
Bald heads, bunions, corns, warts, cancer, and ingrowing toenails treated scientifically.
Croup, cramps, costiveness, and worms nailed on sight.
Wring-worms, pole-evil, shingles, moles, and cross-eye cured in one treatment or no pay.
P.S. Terms:—Cash invariably in advance. No cure no pay.
N.B. (Take Notice). No coroner never yet set on the remains of my customers, and every one hiring me don't haf to be laying up money bye a grave stone. Come one come awl.

The poor are nowadays the chiefest sufferers from the wiles of the quack. Some of the fraternity would be in appropriate surroundings if placed under lock and key in gaol for playing at dice with human lives—or, to slightly alter Voltaire's words, conveying drugs of which they know nothing into bodies of which they knew less. A few of them would be 'name the waur o' a hanging.' Samuel Rogers kept both physician and quack from his door, and lived till ninety-two on this prescription: 'Temperance, the bath and flesh-brush, and don't fret.' Sydney Smith's saying was: 'The best physicians are Dr. Diet, Dr. Quiet, and Dr. Merryman—an adaptation of the old Latin distich:—

*Si tibi docuit medici, tibi fiant
Hæc tria: mens lecta, requies, moderata diæta.*

If they fail, call in the doctor, not the quack.

SOME of our readers may have heard the TWO MILITANT BISHOPS' story of how Bishop Moorhouse, when in Melbourne, administered a finished and most scientific drubbing to a big hulking fellow whom he caught in the act of pommelling his (the hulking fellow's) wife. The Bishop was an accomplished pugilist in his younger days, and his hand had not lost much of its cunning nor his biceps much of its strength amidst the cares of episcopal life in Melbourne. A recent issue of *Sandow's Magazine* records a somewhat similar exploit by Dr. Short, the first Anglican Bishop of Adelaide. One evening in the Australian bush a party of shearers were amusing themselves by boxing in the shearing shed. Bishop Short was staying the night at the squatter's, and looked in to share the fun. A heavy weight was having it all his own way, and was unmercifully punishing all comers. When everybody had had enough, the Bishop stepped into the ring and offered to put on the gloves with this man. After some laughter and pretended reluctance the shearer took up the challenge, and resolved to give the bishop a lesson. But he was no match for the old Westminster boy. In a few minutes he got a scientific pommelling, and retired after a straight knockdown amid great applause from his former victims.

TALENTS GOING TO WASTE. It is said that at the Record Reign proceedings in London the mob that lined the sidewalks expected to see the Australian and New Zealand contingents with brass rings in their noses, black skin on their faces, and fuzzy hair on the place 'where the wool ought to grow.' Despite our frozen meat, our wool, our gold, and the other enormous et-ceteras with which we comfort the outsiders and

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see them. THE ANGLO-NEW ZEALAND CYCLE CO., 6 PRINCES STREET.