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## THE VOGUE OF QUACKERY\*

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Whenever quackery is spoken of nowadays, one is likely to think of medical quackery alone. Yet medicine has no monopoly of quackery now nor has it ever had it. Political quacks are common enough in these days and they are honored by their countrymen. It is not bone setters alone who are knighted. The alleged cures of political quacks mislead even greater multitudes than do those of the pretended disciples of Æsculapius. They too take advantage of the credulity of their fellows and the toll of life which they take is far greater.

But quacks flourish in other human activities than these if one be willing to extend the meaning of the term to all public curers of ills and pretenders to knowledge which they do not possess. If fiction is to be taken seriously and is meant to play a part in righting society, quackery is common enough there. Many descriptions of disease and death, for example, convict the writers of being quacks for many of them must have known that they did not possess the knowledge to which they pretended. They spoke as sciolists not as scientists. Diseases very commonly are described and cured, in a thoroughly ludicrous manner by writers of fiction of standing, and not infrequently very exceptional forms of death are delineated as representing the usual manner of passing "beyond the flaming ramparts of the world."

Nor does the vogue of quackery end with doctors, politicians and literary men. According to one of the greatest of saints, quackery was practiced even in religion, and one need only to recall descriptions

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of the devil and his machinations and of hell and its tortures to be reminded of this. Indeed, one is prompted to suggest that even Heaven itself has not escaped the quack.

The cult of quackery has always been with humanity in one form or another. Its advent antedates by far relatively recent opprobrious term and it no doubt will continue to flourish as long as clever scoundrels can make victims out of the confiding; as long as the unknown and the unknowable will continue to face us and arouse our curiosity and fear. Although some times have been more propitious for the spread of quackery than others, no times have been wholly exempt. It must have interested all those carried away by the contemporary claims of rejuvenescence to learn from Breasted that quackery in this matter existed as early as 1600 B. C. Caire was quite right when he wrote: "*Tout passes mais les badauds ne passeront jamais.*" Humankind always has been a motley group and the hearts of men ever have longed for escape from the inevitable. When the truth is unwelcome anything else is more acceptable. That is human—all too human.

The character and methods and the victims of the quack have always been the same; only the means of deception have changed. Today it is chiropractic, naproopathy, sanipractice, etc., and tomorrow it will be something else. Its devotees have worn all guises, but they have possessed certain attributes in common. Bravado, selflaudation, a ready wit and a double tongue, shrewdness, a knowledge of the foibles of men, a blunted conscience and an ignorance of the very things in which they claimed competence always have characterized the quack. Although their number has been great, those upon whose credulity they thrive and whose trust they violate, nevertheless seem to be unable to recognize the wolf in the guise of the lamb and consequently are eternally fleeced. Quacks may come and quacks may go, but quackery goes on forever.



There is no panacea for quackery, not even for that of the medical kind. In the days when medical education was very deficient, some of the best and ablest in the profession of medicine, attributed the presence of quackery to low standards of training, and now when these standards are incomparably higher, we are told that the high standards and the consequent dearth of physicians are the cause. Yes, even the alleged mistaken attitude of the teachers in the fundamedical sciences has been suggested as a contributory cause. Many factors no doubt are involved in this matter, and among these the proverbial conservatism of the physician undoubtedly plays a part, but the public may well consider whether it suffers more from an undue conservatism than it would from rash empiricism.

Everyone knows that quacks are more plentiful in our great cities where medical practice is at its best. That has always been so, but this does not relate the two as cause and effect. Great centres of population give exploiters of all kinds a better opportunity; especially so since our great metropolitan dailies and now radio, afford them ample opportunity to mislead the public. As long as democracy or the ethics of the present day will countenance this, the people will have to foot the bills inevitably with money, illness and human lives. Perhaps the most grievous thing is the fact that our democracies legalize quackery, quite forgetful of Carlyle's statement that: "Putrescence is not more naturally the scene of unclean creatures in the world physical than social decay is of quacks in the world moral."

People forget that average intelligence is no match for the tricks of quackery, and that ignorance of the human body and credulity regarding disease, exist in all ranks of society. The patrons of quackery are not only "women and half witted men" as Lady Montague believed. Gibbon and Handel were among them. Hence Crabbe could write:



Nay, men of skill, of apprehension quick  
Spite of their knowledge, trusted him when sick:  
Though he could neither reason, write nor spell  
They yet had hope his trash would make them well;  
And while they scorned his parts, they took his oxymel.  
Oh! When his nerves had once received a shock,  
Sir Isaac Newton might have gone to Rock.

This stanza undoubtedly does the immortal Sir Isaac an injustice, but it remains as true today as in the days of Heraclitus that "Much learning teacheth not wisdom."

The old slogan, "No cure, no pay" still catches the credulous in all ranks, and people gladly lavish amazing sums upon pretenders. According to the memoirs of William Hickey, even the 18th Century quacks charged as much as two and a half thousand dollars for a pretended cure of gout, and present victims of electronic treatments have paid as much or more to followers of Abrams. A considerable portion of the public spends at least as much, and probably more, on wholly worthless means of relief from bodily ills than on legitimate ones. Not only that, but it pays cash in advance for the former, or even buys a commutation ticket in advance, but defaults on over a third of the latter! Nor is this a modern condition, for Defoe somewhat whimsically asserted in 1719 that: "The quacks contribute more towards keeping us poor than all our national debts, and . . . to suppress the former would be an infallible means of reducing the latter." What a pity that our statesmen (?) have overlooked this possibility in connection with problems of our national debt!

It may interest if not profit us to consider for a moment a few historical examples of these "pitiless plunderers," as Dickens called them. Everyone is familiar with Mesmer and Perkins and magnetic healing and magnetic tractors, and yet J-on-a-co flourishes. Valentine Greatrakes will live indefinitely. He is said to have had the Earl of Orrey as patron and was a lieutenant in Cromwell's army. Had he been surgeon enough to remove the offending calculus



from Cromwell's bladder, he too might have changed the course of history! And since Luther too suffered from calculi, the influence of urinary calculi on history might serve as a topic for some aspirant to the doctorate.

Some quacks have been immortalized in literature. Katerfelto by Cowper, Cagliostro by Carlisle, Gall and Spurtzheim by Hood, and many others. The scourge of quackery was prevalent enough in the past to attract the attention of the best writers. Some of the most marvelous of quack cures are said to have been recorded on the Epidaurean tablets. One of these is said to record the case of a woman, Aristagora, who sought relief from a tapeworm at an Asklepieion at Troezen. The god being absent from the temple the priests undertook the cure. It is recorded that they cut off the woman's head, thrust their hands to withdraw the offending worm, "as large as an animal," from the bowels of the woman, but, being novices at healing, the priests were unable to restore the head to its correct position; hence upon the return of the god, they were roundly berated for their lack of skill, and he "with a certain ease and divine power restored the head to its proper position." The woman is said to have left healed, a living and undying witness to the power of quackery. One must admire not only the audacity of this cure, but the hardihood of recording it in stone. Nevertheless, the opinion which these priests had regarding the credulity of mankind was amply justified, for the truth of this marvelous operation was vouched for, according to McMurrich, by two Roman historians two centuries later. Although such crude performances as these would no longer pass muster, one hears of almost as impossible cures in these so-called enlightened days.

It is well to remember that modern sectarians had early prototypes. Osteopaths and chiropractors should know that Hippocrates wrote: "In cases of displacement backward along the vertebræ, it does



not often happen, in fact, it is rare, that one or more vertebræ are torn from one another and displaced. For such injuries do not readily occur, as the spine could not easily be displaced backward but by severe injury on the fore part through the belly (which would prove fatal), or if a person falling from a height should pitch on the nates, or shoulders (and even in this case he would die, but not immediately); and it also would not readily happen that such displacement could not take place forward, unless some very heavy weight should fall upon it behind; for each of the posterior spinal processes is so constructed that it would sooner be broken than undergo any great inclination forward from a force which would have overcome the ligaments and the articulations mutually connecting them. And the spinal marrow would suffer if, from the displacement of the vertebræ, it were to be bent even to a small extent; for the displaced vertebræ would compress the spinal marrow, if it did not break it; and if compressed and strangled, it would induce insensibility of many great and important parts, so that the physician need not give himself any concern about rectifying the displacement of the vertebræ accompanied, as it is, by many other ill consequences of a serious nature. It is evident that such a case could not be reduced by succussion or by any other method, unless one were to cut open the patient, and then, having introduced the hand into one of the large cavities, were to push outward from within, which one might do on the dead body, but not at all on the living. Wherefore, then, do I write this? Because certain persons fancy that they have cured patients in whom the vertebra had undergone complete dislocation forward. Some indeed, suppose that this is the easiest of all these dislocations to be recovered from, and that such cases do not stand in need of reduction but get well spontaneously. Many are ignorant, and profit by their ignorance, for they obtain credit from those about them."

Hippocrates' statement regarding the belief in



spontaneous replacement of dislocated vertebræ is particularly interesting in connection with the text-book statement of a contemporary chiropractor, Palmer, to the effect that: "While this individual is lying perfectly relaxed, there will be an attempt by Innate to adjust these subluxations with these adaptive recoils, and if the subluxation is not great, he will get well. While asleep there will be an internal adjunct concussion of forces going which will adjust that vertebra. These are not accidents, they are intentional upon the part of an adapted intelligence."

The alleged possession of miraculous powers was all that was necessary to convince people in the past of anyone's competence, and it is almost all that is necessary now. Hence, it should not surprise us that one whom Ben Jonson called the most grossly ignorant man he had ever known had Gibbon and Handel as patients. Some modern Chevalier Taylor can boast almost as much. The most humorous and unbelievable thing in this man's career was an address on the eye to an assemblage at Oxford. According to the *British Medical Journal*, Taylor spoke in part as follows: "The eye, most illustrious sons of the muses, most learned Oxonians, whose fame I have heard celebrated in all parts of the globe—the eye, that incomprehensible, that miraculous organ, the eye, is the Proteus of the passions, the herald of the mind, the interpreter of the heart, and the window of the soul. The eye has dominion over all things. The world was made for the eye and the eye for the world. My subject is light, most illustrious sons of literature—most intellectual. Ah! My philosophical, metaphysical, my classical, mathematical, mechanical, my theological, my critical audience, my subject is the eye, etc., etc." It may seem from this that Taylor must have been guilty of gross impropriety, but apparently this was not the case for it is not recorded that he was driven from this ancient and honorable temple of learning by his offended hearers.

About the only advantage we Americans of today



can claim over the Oxford of Taylor's day is that we do not seem to have permitted such a thing to happen at a University convocation. We must stop there, however, for the following parallel to the above quotation from the Oxford address of Chevalier Taylor is given as a definition in one of our encyclopedias, and also is incorporated in the statutes of at least one of our states. It is contained, in substance, in those of many other states, and stands as an eloquent testimony of the quality of our legislators and electorate.

"Chiropractic Defined: The term Chiropractic, when used in this act, shall be construed to mean and be the name given to the study and application of a universal philosophy of biology, theology, theosophy, health, disease, death, the science of the cause of disease and art of permitting the restoration of the triune relationships between all attributes necessary to normal composite forms, to harmonious quantities and qualities by placing in juxtaposition the abnormal concrete positions of definite mechanical portions with each other by hand, thus correcting all subluxations of the articulations of the spinal column for the purpose of permitting the recreation of all normal cyclic currents through nerves that were formerly not permitted to be transmitted, through impingement, but have now assumed their normal size and capacity for conduction as they emanate through intervertebral foramina—the expressions of which were formerly excessive or partially lacking—namely disease."

Discreditable as this is, many of our states have legalized this sort of thing by legislative action or by plebiscite, and even college men and their college bred wives worked and voted in favor of such a thing as this! Nor is it long since some of our state legislatures appropriated huge sums for Keeley cures just as the English Parliament in the eighteenth century voted five thousand pounds to purchase the formula for a secret nostrum claimed to dissolve urinary calculi. When it had paid this shrewd quack, Joanna Stephens, the five thousand pounds, Parliament ob-



tained possession of nothing but a recipe for the preparation of a powder from snails, the seeds of carrots, burdocks and haw. These things if burned black, mixed with soap and honey and taken internally were guaranteed to dissolve urinary calculi! Nor is this belief dead yet, for it was only the other day that a long standing sufferer from severe attacks of gall stone colic told me that "his physician expected to absorb them."

Queen Anne seems to have been an especially easy mark for quacks. She is said to have patronized "an Anabaptist preacher—or prater, rather—one Roger Grant, a cobbler by profession"; and also is said to have knighted William Read, a tailor, for alleged supernal powers as oculists. "Crazy Sally of Epsom could make a weekly visit to London in a coach and four with liveried outriders and even found herself poetized." It is very little wonder that some mercenary physicians emulated these impostors, "these humbugs living on the credulity of the world," as Dickens rightly called them.

Consequently, we find Dr. James Graham, an Edinburgh physician, becoming a most successful quack for a little while at least. It was this disciple of Æsculapius who introduced Mesmerism into England, and had the audacity to establish himself on the Thames, in 1780, in a mansion inscribed *Templum Aesculapio Sacrum*. His sacred Temple of Health quickly became famous for "Its rooms were sumptuously supplied with odd and quaint furniture designed to impress the visitor. Spices burned in swinging censers and music was always supplied. Pillars of gold and glass, globes of glass and steel were all about, couches were scattered in shuttered compartments. There was a great centre apartment called the Great Temple Apollo Apartment. A woman officiated in this sanctum sanctorum. She was the fair (and frail) Emma, destined to become the wife of Sir William Hamilton and the goddess of Nelson. The nobility and the gentry were direct-



ed to apply through the day from 10 a. m. to 6 p. m. The fee was one guinea. For a house visit two guineas. Over the doors, on the walls, and elsewhere were displayed the crutches, canes, ear trumpets, glasses, etc., which were left by patients whom the doctor had cured and so made further use unnecessary. Graham sold an Elixir of Life and agreed to furnish a constant supply for the sum of 1,000£. He numbered among his patients the nobility and high and mighty of the land. There also was a celestial bed provided with costly draperies and standing on glass legs. Married couples who slept on this bed were assured of beautiful progeny. The fee was 100£ per night."

Formerly the practice of quackery was not confined wholly to the ignorant or to the professional mercenary. Then as now, there were more than "seven as arrant impostors as ever deluded a credulous world." Not only physicians, but philosophers became quacks. We may recall the case of Bishop Berkeley who advocated tar water for all ills and suggested that it might be a universal panacea. According to him tar water was good not only for man, but for horses as well. It sweetened the breath and strengthened the voice. It cured withered arms and restored them completely; piles and hydrophobia; concussion of the brain and scurvy; gout and "Polypusses of the heart"; yellow fever and deafness, all yielded to it. Indeed, this deluded bishop claimed that the drinking of it "would mitigate and even prevent smallpox and erysipelas; that nothing is so useful as this in cases of painful ulcers of the bowels; in consumptive coughs and ulcers of the lungs with expectoration of pus; that it cures asthma, dropsy and indigestion, the King's Evil, all kinds of sores and the foulest disorders." Bishop Berkeley stoutly defended his remedy for eight long years saying, "As the old philosopher cried aloud from the housetop to his fellow citizens, 'Educate your children,' so if I had a situation high enough



and voice loud enough I would say to all the valedudinarians upon earth, 'Drink tar water.' " Berkeley further wrote: "It is hard to imagine anything more dreadful than the case of these men rotting alive by scurvy in its supreme degree. To obviate such putrefaction, I believe the most effectual method would be, to embalm (if one may say so) the living body with tar water copiously drunk; and this is not without experience."

Although the good bishop died not many years after the publication of his treaties on tar water, the reputation of tar water still lives. Only a few years ago our barber shops smelled of tar water—sheep dip and mange cure the scoffers called it. Every barber plagued his patrons to try this wonderful new remedy for dandruff, baldness, and so forth, and hundreds of students and many professors, as well as laymen, gladly paid the price. How the soul of the good bishop must have been delighted over this concrete expression of confidence in his remedy so many years after his death!

The cause for these things lies, to be sure, in lack of penetration and in ignorance and misapprehension of the facts, in an unwillingness to accept their verdict and, perhaps, to a very minor degree, in the sporting proclivities of people. Then, too, the realm of the unknown and also that of the unknowable will long remain a vast one and few persons can bear the strains of suspended judgment. They want to know, nay they must know at once, and when able physicians, cannot give them the information they seek, the impostor quickly supplies it. As Holmes well said: "These inevitable disappointments have kept the medical profession from receiving that degree of confidence and of honor to which its noble function seemed to entitle it. It does its best; but that is not enough for the eager demand of men for health, and length of days. Hence the great number of pretenders and pretentious systems which profess to be able to meet this



want. Men, and, still more, women, wish to be deceived; and it becomes a lucrative trade to promise cures, as it was to promise gold in the days of the alchemists."

In case of dire extremity, only a few courageous souls possess the stoicism to calmly accept or face the inevitable. And as long as human life is not only precarious but also sweet, hope eternal will reign in the human breast. Yes, you may recall that Wordsworth declared that: "Hope is the permanent duty which Heaven lays for its own honor, on men's suffering hearts." To many a person there is no alternative to hope except despair, and surely no one wishes to play the role of a coward. Hence, why not take hope and try everything at least once, for surely that can do no harm, and why not believe anything for in the face of uncertainty anything seems plausible.

"The desire of life" said Bishop Hall, is so natural and strong a passion that I have long since ceased to wonder at the great encouragement which the practice of medicine finds among us. Those who have little or no faith in the abilities of a quack will apply themselves to him, either because he is willing to sell health at a reasonable (!) profit, or because the patient, like a drowning man, catches at every twig and hopes for relief from the most ignorant, when the most able physician gives him none. Though impudence and many words are as necessary to these itinerant Galens as a laced hat to a merry andrew, yet they would turn very little to the advantage of the owner if there were not some inward disposition in the sick man to favor the pretensions of the mountebank. Love of life in the one, and love of money in the other, creates a good correspondence between them."

Another factor involved in the question of quackery is the lure of the extraordinary. Let anyone but claim that he possesses secret powers or remedies and the public will flock to his door. Humanity



loves mysteries and why not? Its origin and its future are shrouded in them, and the mysterious always will have an irresistible appeal. Carlyle wrote: "When any new miraculous kind of doctor was recommended as such, my poor struggling martyr (Jane Welsh Carlyle), conscious too of grasping at mere straws, could not but wish to see him; and he came, did his mischief, and went away. We had even by sanction of Barnes, (and indeed of sound sense never so skeptical) a try of 'Animal magnetism'; two magnetisers, first a man, then a quack woman (evidently a conscious quack I perceived her to be), who at least did no ill except to entirely disappoint (if that were much an exception)."

It seems strange indeed that our people cry out for protection against financial free booters and pass so-called blue sky laws to protect their dollars, while they themselves feel quite competent to protect their bodies, about which they necessarily know so little, against injury from quacks and quackery of all kinds. Not only that, but they actually license these free booters of healing so as to enable them to exploit unmolested whomever they can entrap. People take their watches to watchmakers, but their own bodies, and those of helpless children as well, they take to persons as ignorant of the structure and functions of the human body as of disease. That surely is a tragic thing, for of dollars they have many and can get more, but of bodies they have only one, and this one must serve them a life time. And, alas! in the present, as in the past, voices that should be raised against the exploitation of the credulous and helpless, often favor and foster that exploitation by word and deed. There still are Adam Smiths who would not hinder quackery, but believe in open competition, even in the healing of the sick! Smith held that honoring quacks by Universities did no harm and parliaments, it seems, have acted upon this theory. It should be added that Smith's opposition to regu



lative measures in medicine arose from this *laissez faire* political views, and that these were determined largely by his religious beliefs. It was the old notion that nature if but left alone, will work things out for the best of all.

In a brief manuscript submitted to a society of which he was a member in 1755, Smith stated: "Projectors disturb nature in the course of her operations in human affairs; and it requires no more than to let her alone and give her fair play in the pursuit of her ends that she may establish her own designs."

Dugald Stewart, in his account of the life and writings of Smith, says that it was Smith's belief that "the private interests and prejudices of particular orders of men" disturb the order of nature; and he quotes him as approvingly saying that a French writer in a eulogy on the administration of Colbert, said that it was Colbert's belief that human affairs should be left "to arrange themselves at pleasure under the operation of the prejudices and the selfish interest of individuals. If these run counter to each other, he gives no anxiety about the consequences, he insists that the results cannot be judged of until after a century or two shall have elapsed. If his contemporaries, in consequence of the disorder into which he has thrown public affairs, are scrupulous about submitting quietly to the experiment, he accuses them of impatience. They alone, not he, are to blame for what they have suffered; and the principle continues to be inculcated with the same zeal and confidence as before."

This doctrine permits the crafty and strong to freely exploit the trusting and defenseless. It is the rule of the jungle. Brute creation knows no worse, and even aborigines have risen above it in some respects. Did the burden of quackery fall only upon those who patronize it the situation would not be so grievous, but under modern conditions the crass folly of the ignorant becomes the unjust bur-



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den of the wise, and this, alas, will remain so until the power or influence of the wise will outweigh that of the misguided and foolish, and for that the prospect is not encouraging.



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be the same as the other side of the river  
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