



THE "PATENT-MEDICINE" CURSE

By Edward Bok



EVERY year, particularly in the springtime, tens of thousands of bottles of patent medicines are used throughout the country by persons who are in absolute ignorance of what they are swallowing. They feel "sluggish" after the all-winter indoor confinement; they feel that their systems need a "toning up," or a "blood purifier." Their eye catches some advertisement in a newspaper, or on a fence, or on the side of a barn, and from the cleverly-worded descriptions of symptoms they are convinced that this man's "bitters," or that man's "sarsaparilla," or that "doctor's" (!) "vegetable compound," or So-and-so's "pills" is exactly the thing they need as a "tonic."

"NO USE going to a doctor," argue these folks: "we can save that money," and instead of paying one or two dollars for honest, intelligent medical advice they invest from twenty-five to seventy-five cents for a bottle of this, or a box of that. And what do they buy, and what do they put into their systems? Few know. Fewer realize the absolute damage they are working upon themselves and their households. For the sake of saving a physician's fee they pour into their mouths and into their systems a quantity of unknown drugs which have in them percentages of alcohol, cocaine and opium that are absolutely alarming. A mother who would hold up her hands in holy horror at the thought of her child drinking a glass of beer, which contains from two to five per cent. of alcohol, gives to that child with her own hands a patent medicine that contains from seventeen to forty-four per cent. of alcohol—to say nothing of opium and cocaine! I have seen a temperance woman, who raged at the thought of whisky, take bottle after bottle of some "bitters," which contained five times as much alcohol—and compared to which sherry, port, claret and champagne were as harmless as the pink lemonade at Sunday-school picnics. I have had women rage in letters to this office because this magazine advertised a certain rootbeer, with really no alcohol in it at all, while all the time these same women were swallowing bottle after bottle of "Lydia Pinkham's Vegetable Compound," containing, by volume, 20.6 percentage of alcohol, and allowing "Boker's Stomach Bitters," with 42.6 percentage of alcohol, by volume, to be advertised on their barns!

FANCY, for a moment, the state of ignorance of one young wife who was expecting her first baby. She was suffering some of the discomforts incident to this condition when a friend recommended to her as a sure relief from these discomforts a widely-advertised patent medicine known as "Doctor Pierce's Favorite Prescription." Fortunately, a doubt arose in the mind of the young mother as to whether it was really a good thing for her to take. She asked Miss Maud Banfield, of THE JOURNAL'S editorial staff, for advice; whereupon we communicated with Doctor Samuel W. Abbott, Secretary of the State Board of Health of Massachusetts, who quotes the following extract from an analysis made by the well-known German chemist, Hager, and published in Hahn's Geheimmittel:

"In about nine ounces of this 'Favorite Prescription' there were, among other ingredients:

Tincture of Digitalis	- - -	½ fluid drachm
Tincture of Opium	- - -	¼ fluid drachm
Oil of Anise	- - -	8 drops
Alcohol	- - -	1½ ounces

"This would make a preparation containing about seventeen per cent. of alcohol."

Now, as Miss Banfield rightly says, "think for a moment of the effect on the life yet unborn of the mother taking habitually three times a day any portion, however small, of opium, of digitalis, which is a powerful drug and has a marked effect on the heart, and alcohol! All those who have reared children know the effect which is immediately felt by the child through the mother's milk if she takes comparatively simple remedies. Even if the breasts are rubbed with medicaments, or plastered as with belladonna plaster, this is absorbed through the skin, and poisons the baby. How much more, then, must it be influenced during the even closer contact of gestation. Can you wonder that the newly-born baby is always fretful? It may need its opium, which it has been absorbing through its mother's circulation. Can you wonder that its digestion is out of order, or that, if it survives a weakly childhood, it develops a taste for alcohol? And yet the mother herself has taught this to her own child by taking these useless and harmful medicines. Mothers, too, bowed down with grief in the later years of their lives, when their sons become drunkards, wonder where their sons could have acquired the taste for alcohol when no one in their families ever showed such tendencies before. Hard as it may sound, the fact remains that thousands of drunkards are being created by the first love for alcohol being roused into being through the use of patent medicines liberally filled with alcohol.

"WOMEN may seek to excuse themselves by saying they did not know these facts. But they should know them. No woman has a moral right to give a medicine to her child, or to any member of her family, or to take any medicine herself, the ingredients of which either she does not know or has not the assurance of a responsible physician to be harmless. There is nothing so dangerous as drugs used without intelligence or taken without advice. The physician's fee of a dollar or two, which the mother seeks to save, may prove to be the costliest form of economy which she has ever practiced. The fact that these patent medicines will sometimes give a supposed sense of relief, or tone up a sluggish system, makes them all the more dangerous. Why should they not stimulate and tone up, or soothe pain? The alcohol in these preparations often gives a sense of temporary well-being. Opium, as we all know, will soothe pain, while cocaine will stimulate and excite, making the beggar feel a millionaire. The mixtures containing these drugs are freely taken by people who would be outraged at the very thought of going into a saloon and ordering a glass of whisky; who would be still more shocked if any one suggested that a drink of whisky three times a

The Alcohol in "Patent Medicines"

THE following percentages of alcohol in the "patent medicines" named are given by the Massachusetts State Board Analyst, in the published document No. 34:

	Per cent. of alcohol (by volume)
Lydia Pinkham's Vegetable Compound	20.6
Paine's Celery Compound	21.
Dr. Williams's Vegetable Jaundice Bitters	18.5
Whiskol, "a non-intoxicating stimulant"	28.2
Colden's Liquid Beef Tonic, "recommended for treatment of alcohol habit"	26.5
Ayer's Sarsaparilla	26.2
Thayer's Compound Extract of Sarsaparilla	21.5
Hood's Sarsaparilla	18.8
Allen's Sarsaparilla	13.5
Dana's Sarsaparilla	13.5
Brown's Sarsaparilla	13.5
Peruna	28.5
Vinol, Wine of Cod-Liver Oil	18.8
Dr. Peters's Kuriko	14.
Carter's Physical Extract	22.
Hooker's Wigwam Tonic	20.7
Hooiland's German Tonic	29.3
Howe's Arabian Tonic, "not a rum drink"	13.2
Jackson's Golden Seal Tonic	19.6
Mensman's Peptonized Beef Tonic	16.5
Parker's Tonic, "purely vegetable"	41.6
Schenck's Seaweed Tonic, "entirely harmless"	19.5
Baxter's Mandrake Bitters	16.5
Boker's Stomach Bitters	42.6
Burdock Blood Bitters	25.2
Greene's Nervura	17.2
Hartshorn's Bitters	22.2
Hooiland's German Bitters, "entirely vegetable"	25.6
Hop Bitters	12.
Hosetter's Stomach Bitters	44.3
Kaufman's Sulphur Bitters, "contains no alcohol" (as a matter of fact it contains 20.5 per cent. of alcohol and no sulphur)	20.5
Puritana	22.
Richardson's Concentrated Sherry Wine Bitters	47.5
Warner's Safe Tonic Bitters	35.7
Warren's Biliious Bitters	21.5
Faith Whitcomb's Nerve Bitters	20.3

In connection with this list, think of beer, which contains only from two to five per cent. of alcohol, while some of these "bitters" contain ten times as much, making them stronger than whisky, far stronger than sherry or port, with claret and champagne way behind.

day would make them feel better, and would cure any disease. They might feel better temporarily. I do not deny that. But if it were a question of the saloon and the order across the counter would it be taken?"

EVERYTHING here said about these patent medicines can be readily proved. This magazine could not venture to catalogue these "preparations" by name, and print the percentage of alcohol which they contain, if it were not that the facts are precisely as they are here given. And no one knows better the truth of these analyses than the proprietors or manufacturers of these patent medicines. Let any woman who reads these words ask her physician as to the truth of the statements made here. Every intelligent physician knows that this article is decidedly within the truth, rather than beyond it. But the physician cannot speak of the patent-medicine curse unless he is asked, because, if he does, he lays himself open to the accusation that he is afraid of these "patent-medicine cures," since their use interferes with his practice. As a matter of fact, the more patent medicines that are used the better it is for the medical profession, since few things in the end bring a man or a woman or their child more surely to the physician than patent-medicine tipling. It is a curse to the patient but a moneymaker to the physician.

IT IS not by any means putting the matter too strongly to say that the patent-medicine habit is one of the gravest curses, with the most dangerous results, that is inflicting our American national life. Sooner or later the people of America must awaken to the fearful dangers that lie in these proprietary preparations. The mothers of our children, in particular, must have their eyes opened to the dangers that lurk in these patent medicines. Here and there a hopeful sign of an awakening is seen. Slowly but surely the best magazines are falling into line in their refusal to accept patent-medicine advertisements of any kind. Not long ago one of the insurance companies made an excellent move by requiring its medical examiner to ask of each subject for insurance, "What patent medicines have you used during the last five years?" and gradually other insurance companies are realizing the fact that the use of patent medicines is even more injurious than the use of alcoholic liquors. But much still remains: more should be done. Public interest must be more widely aroused.

I HAVE said before on this page, and I repeat it here, unpalatable as were my previous words to the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, that here, indeed, a campaign lies before that organization. It is not meeting the case by any means, as the officers of that organization have written me, that they have a department of their work devoted to this evil. Not enough has been done, nor has sufficient emphasis been laid on this branch of their work, nor enough prominence been given to it, nor enough well-directed energy been put into the effort. Hundreds of the most zealous members of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, living on farms and in small communities, are allowing the advertisements of these alcohol-filled "remedies" to be painted on their fences, barns, sides of houses and outbuildings. If the officers of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union are in earnest in this matter why do they not notify each local branch to compel every member of their association to sign an agreement, as a condition of membership, that they will efface these advertisements from their lands and houses and buildings, and keep them off? They would soon find out how many of their members are lending direct aid to the spread of alcoholism among the people—unconsciously, perhaps, but none the less surely. If these members are unaware of what they are doing let the organization make them aware of it! Ignorance in this matter is absolutely no excuse when the means of enlightenment are easily at hand.

LET the officers of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union look into the advertising columns of the religious papers of the country, and see how their columns fairly reek with the advertisements of these dangerous concoctions. Yet in these very same so-called religious papers there are official Woman's Christian Temperance Union columns setting forth the "official" news of the organization and its branches. A pretty consistent picture do these two portions of the average religious paper present—advocating, with one hand, alcoholic prohibition, or temperance, and receiving, with the other hand, money for advertising—and thereby recommending to their readers—preparations filled ten times over with more alcohol than the beer which fills them with so much horror in the editorial columns! There are no papers published that are so flagrantly guilty of admitting to their columns the advertisements not only of alcohol-filled medicines but preparations and cure-alls of the most flagrantly obscene nature, as the so-called religious papers of this country. Unable, owing to their small circulations, to obtain the advertising of discriminating advertisers, they are all too ready to accept the most obscene class of advertising—business which the average second-rate secular paper would hesitate or refuse to admit into its columns. I am speaking whereof I know in this matter. Beside me, as I write, lie issues of some twenty different "religious" weeklies, the advertising columns of which are a positive stench in the nostrils of decent, self-respecting people. Let the Woman's Christian Temperance Union officers counsel its members who subscribe for these papers to compel their publishers to omit these advertisements, and if they refuse, let these people discontinue their patronage of the paper. Such measures would very quickly shut out from publicity the majority of these baneful patent medicines. There is vital, important work here for the Woman's Christian Temperance Union—work in a cause which is aiming with far greater danger at the very heart of American homes than the cracking of a bottle of champagne over the hull of a newly-launched craft!

FAR better, ladies, that the contents of a bottle of champagne should go into the water, where it will do no one any harm, than that the contents of a bottle of "patent medicine," with forty per cent. of alcohol in it, by volume, should be allowed to go into the system of a child and strike at his very soul, planting the seed of a future drunkard!