

worker shed twenty-seven guineas in fees and lost wages. Therapeutical result (as related to a 'Press' representative by the surgeons who treated the worker, after the quack had had his two innings): a case of 'inoperable' malignant disease. 'Mr. Brown had had ordinary epithelioma of the lip, a common form of cancer, which in its initial stages could have been operated for with perfect success. The outbreak, however, seems to have been aggravated by acids, the result being that the glands under the jaw were affected and the mischief spread beyond remedy'.

Will the dying worker's story reduce the rush of the credulous to the charlatan who offers 'guaranteed cures' of refractory or incurable disorders? Locally and for a time—perhaps. At best, only that and nothing more. The guarantor appeals to the ever-green hope and the boundless credulity of the masses. And with those smitten with real or fancied ailments of a certain nature, these grounds of appeal are as strong to-day as when Bartholin professed to cure epilepsy by rhymes; when Keneim Digby set all England by the ears by banishing all ills with a shake of his 'sympathetic powder', and when Paracelsus (or, to give him his full processional name, Aurelius Philippus Paracelsus Theophrastus Bombastus de Hohenheim) set people crazy through the power he claimed of making them immortal by dosing them with liquid gold.

A 'Chain'-prayer Calculation

The social mischief done by joltheads and lackwits has many a time led precipitate aphorists to declare that they are more harmful than the wicked in this 'wale of tears'. The extent to which folly may on occasion be the tool of fraud and sin finds ample illustration in the 'elder's chain-prayer' nuisance that has been for some time past afflicting a long-suffering public. A mathematician in our clever contemporary, the Bombay 'Examiner', publishes sundry calculations which show what a stupendous and costly infliction these chain impostures may become. Recipients of the chain-prayer are variously requested to write and distribute nine copies (without other proviso), and one copy each day for nine consecutive days. By distributing the nine copies on the day of receipt, the result would be as follows: first day, nine copies; second day, 81; third day, 729; fourth day, 6,561; fifth day, 59,049; and so on, multiplying by nine each day, until, on the ninth, the copies of the pestiferous American hoax placed in circulation would reach the enormous total of 435,848,482. The 'Examiner' also publishes a table giving the rate of distribution day by day for a month at the rate of one copy by each recipient each day for nine consecutive days. Picking some of the figures from the table, we learn that on the first day one copy is put into circulation; on the second day two; on the third day four; on the fourth day eight; on the tenth day 511; on the fifteenth day 16,272; on the twentieth day 518,145; on the twenty-fifth day 16,499,120; on the thirty-first day 1,049,716,729, or over a thousand millions!

With these stupendous figures of a stupendous folly, the 'Examiner' had little trouble in sustaining its statement that 'the cost of paper and stamps wasted in circulating the elder's chain-prayer might, if collected, build a hospital'. It would be more appropriately spent upon an insane asylum. Judging by the 'Examiner's' calculation, if a chain-prayer were continued for a few months, the money wasted upon it by the rattle-poles of the English-speaking world would suffice to build two first-class fleets or pay a nation's ransom. But the 'elder's chain-prayer' has been circulating in ever increasing volume for over a year. The 'Examiner' makes the following 'very practical suggestion':—

'If the postal authorities wish to give us a universal half-penny postage for letters, and a reduced rate

for parcels and newspapers, let them start a chain-prayer! All the foolish people will spend their money in helping to circulate it; and from the vast contribution of their foolishness all the wise people will derive an enormous benefit. Nay more, if the British Government wants to pay off the national debt, or to secure unlimited resources for the equipment of the army and the navy, without throwing the onus on the taxpayers! let them make a secret agreement with the post office to halve the profits, and then keep a series of chain-prayers in circulation. In fact, we are rapidly coming to the conclusion that a chain-prayer affords the most effectual solution of all economic and administrative problems which in any way rest on finance. The man who first invented so great a boon ought to have a monument!

Which is 'wrote sarcastic'. It reminds us of the prayer of Billings: 'God save the phools and dcm't let 'em run out, for without 'em wise men couldn't get so good a livin'.' In the long, long ago, fortune tellers in Alexandria used to pay to the city a tribute out of their earnings. It was called 'fools'-pence' because (says an old writer) it was 'made by their own ingenious folly and the credulous dotage of their admirers'. For some time past the coffers of the post office in many English-speaking countries have been bulging with the 'fools'-pence' of beef-witted and superstitious folk (mostly non-Catholic) who, in their 'credulous dotage', have allowed themselves to be made the tools of some knave or practical joker west of the Atlantic. The Boeotians are a fruitful generation, and their race shows no signs of dying out.

Bathybius and Radiobe

True science is without prejudices. Scientists, however, start sometimes with prepossessions that impair the value of their work. Have we not, for instance, the historic case of Darwin in a tremor of expectant fear lest some of his investigations might upset one of the theories to which he was wedded? And when Huxley was inquiring into the origin of life, and found that it came only and always from pre-existing life, did he not express his disappointment that the evidence was not the other way? If a train were to run up against a cow, it would (said Engineer Stevenson to the Lords' Committee) be 'sae much the waur for the coo'. When a fact bumps a theory, it is so much the worse for the theory. But among sciolists, and among scientists of strong prejudice, the theory is not shaped to suit the facts, but the facts are filed down or built up or pulled and twisted this way or that to suit the theory. In 1868 Huxley first described a deep-sea slime which had been dragged up from the floor of the Atlantic. This slime (Huxley thought) bridged the gulf between the inorganic and the organic worlds, and showed low forms of life in the actual process of being spontaneously generated out of non-living and formless matter. He named the stuff 'Bathybius Haeckelii' (Haeckels bathybius). Careful experiments by Mr. John Murray, however, conclusively proved that the mass of ocean-slime that was supposed to be matter spontaneously generating life, was 'only a gelatinous precipitate of sulphate of lime from sea-water mixed with alcohol.' Huxley had sufficient reverence for scientific truth to abandon his 'bathybius'. Haeckel, however, clung to the beloved slime that had been named in his honor. But the mystery of life remained where it had ever been.

A similar fate has befallen the interesting investigations of Mr. Butler Burke, accounts of which were cabled to our shores, coupled with wild statements and unscientific inferences and predictions which went vastly farther than the facts at any time warranted. We take from a contemporary the following story of the upshot of Mr. Burke's investigations:—

'It has now been demonstrated that Mr. Butler Burke's investigations of the action of radium on gelatine and other culture media, by which it was claimed about