

Chapter IV Matters of Life and Death.

Asked to name the greatest medical advancement in the 19th century including the progress made in surgery, and the pioneering work in the use of antiseptics and anaesthetics, one might be excused from omitting the humble aspirin, yet this little white pill, with its ingredient derived from the botanical genus salicacae, (the Willow family) revolutionised the treatment of various complaints from headaches, toothache and colds to rheumatic pains. Its introduction into everyday medicine as an analgesic and anti-inflammatory remedy came very late in the Victorian era, not in fact until 1893. Until then the relief of many minor ailments had been dealt with by various homely medicines and potions, such as Seidlitz Powders (tartaric acid, bicarbonate of soda and Rochelle salts , an early ' health salts ' with aperient effects). For more severe cases, drastic prescriptions were given, including laudenum, opium and chloroform, which the Victorians administered with misguided complacency and confidence, even to their children.

As a printer of chemists' labels, it is not surprising that Charles Strutt attracted plenty of advertising for patent medicines to his ' Gazette ' most of which made extravagant claims in equally extravagant prose (or even poetry!) . One of the more spectacular of these was the ' Cure for Cholera ' , Swain's Revivifying Drops. ' During the late most fearful ravages of Cholera in Soho and St James' and adjoining districts ' the advert. stated in October 1854 ' every remedy bearing with it a feasible title to application in cases of the kind was resorted to for relief or cure. Among the most successful was the patent medicine of Mr Swain of Oxford Street . This gentleman for some time past has been assiduous in his care for the district poor but the strain on his private benevolence increased so rapidly during the progress of the epidemic that he was advised by the medical officers to patent and vend the medicine, which he did, and the most efficacious and safe astringent on sale is that which is known as the Revivifying Drops. The mixture to which this name is given was composed by an eminent physician after its application to cases in every state of Diarrhoea and Cholera. From the unequivocal success which attended his use of it he was induced to take the universal method of making known its virtues and thus extend the means of saving life which was hitherto confined to his own experience.

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' During the months of July and August, large quantities were given to the poor gratuitously, sufferers who had been abandoned by their medical attendants revived under a course of this medicine in a brief time.... '

There is no inkling of what Mr Swain's miracle cure might have contained but it was ' available only in London' from Messrs Barclay in Farringdon Street, Hannay & Co in Oxford Street and at Mr Swain's own establishment, also in Oxford Street (No 379) price 2s 9d a bottle.

To understand the reliance of the poorer classes (and many of the richer too) on patent medicines and home remedies one has to know something of the background of medical care in the mid-nineteenth century when doctoring was only recently emerging from a poor public image. The wealthy had their own physicians and surgeons, not always to their great advantage as they were as susceptible to the frightful ills of the age as anyone , poor Queen Anne, for instance, with her countless miscarriages and stillbirths, Queen Mary's death from smallpox, and George III's ' madness ' or ' flying gout ' which has been modernly diagnosed as porphyria, a far more complex but treatable disease.

The Royal College of Physicians was a ' closed shop ' with entrance restricted to University graduates, which also immediately excluded Jews, Non-conformist Dissenters and Roman Catholics barred from those academic institutions under the Tests Acts. The medical and surgical genius, John Hunter, was largely self taught, gleaning his knowledge from practical experience in hospitals. The big division in the medical profession was between the university-educated academics and the apothecaries who were only one removed from shop-keepers in the social scale but often as well, or better informed, than many of the so-called physicians. Conscientious, they were often the only person who could help the sick poor by giving them advice when they sold them medicines and drugs which were freely available over the counter, even the most potent, such as opium, or cyanide (although that was intended for photographic purposes !) .

The apothecaries were very conscious of their lack of status which they sought to improve by founding their own society in 1815, with examination entry which required a year's apprenticeship and practical work in a hospital. This encouraged the hospitals to organise their own schools, the first being attached to University

College. When trained the young men were sent out as ' practitioners who did not have the social status of a physician or surgeon but were probably more highly trained and skilled from their practical experience than the more scholarly academics, their ' upper class' counterparts. This description gave rise to the term ' General Practitioner ' which is still in use today, although now these are Members or Licentiates of the Royal Colleges of Physicians or Surgeons. Among the early General Practitioners was John Snow who had shown such perception in the Cholera outbreak and whose pamphlet on the Mode of Communication of Cholera came nearer to a full understanding of this and other infectious diseases than any other medical opinion for several decades after him.

John Snow was also ' honoured ' by what must have been a terrifyingly responsible operation, that of administering chloroform to Queen Victoria at the birth of her eighth child in 1853 . In 1844 an American dentist W.T.G Morton, had used ether for tooth extraction and in the following year it was used by the English surgeon, James Simpson, for difficult births, which he followed by further advances in the use of chloroform which had been discovered by a German, Justus von Liebig, in 1832.

The use of anaesthetics was also allowing more ambitious surgery to be carried out but it was still highly dangerous owing to infections and it was not until Joseph Lister, a Professor of Surgery at Glasgow General Hospital, developed the theories of Louis Pasteur that antiseptics made surgery infinitely safer. Temperature taking was not given much importance until the 1860s although high fevers were a feature of so many of the dangerous infectious illnesses and the clinical thermometer had been known for over half a century.

The Royal College of Surgeons had been founded in 1800 and by 1834 had 200 Fellows and 8000 Licentiates, most of the latter having been apothecaries. Reforms were also instituted at Oxford University where a course under Sir Henry Acland gave science instruction to students before hospital experience .

The British Medical Association was founded in 1855 but it was not until 1858, following a Parliamentary enquiry , that a General Council of Medical Education was set up and doctors were required to register, with standards of qualifications and approved exams

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Specialisation had already become established in the various branches of medicine, one of the earliest being Opthamology (Moorfields Eye Hospital was founded in 1804) . The development of scientific instruments for examination encouraged the profession of opticians and in the 1850s Mr Strutt's 'Gazette' carried a number of advertisements for this service, one at least of which reflected the general distrust which people still had in medical and scientific innovations. ' Nothing is more destructive to the human eye than spectacles '..... ran the catchline in the advertisement of Mr F. Clark Optician and Spectacle-maker of No 13 Park Side, Knightsbridge, who qualified this rather strange announcement by adding... ' not properly adapted to the defect of sight' But he also cautioned ' those persons who require spectacles not to trust to inexperienced persons as the result is very often total blindness '.

Another maker of spectacles, F.A. Pizzola, of Hatton Garden, also produced instruments such as sympeisometers (for measuring the pressure of the atmosphere) lactometers (for measuring the proportion of cream in milk) saccharometers (for testing sugars) and ' all kinds of mathematical and philosophical instruments, ' indicating the Victorians' obsession with statistics.

Until its elevation to a profession the selling of spectacles had been almost entirely in the hands of street traders and hawkers, mostly Jewish, who did their trade in the pubs and on kerbsides , one of whom told Henry Mayhew that trade was nothing like it used to be . Opticians charges had been higher when he started in the business about twenty five years earlier and when customers bought glasses as much for the look of them than their being of any practical help to their sight. ' Most of the young swells mixed up with gaming sported eye glasses, ' he told Mayhew , ' but they're going out of fashion . '

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The dentists were also trying to improve their image, tooth drawing, a ghastly business, had been practised by anyone with the strength and stomach to tackle it, especially the barber surgeons, for many centuries. In the days of Queen Elizabeth, her Bishop of London, John Aylmer, agreed to have one of his teeth drawn in order to persuade her to suffer the same operation. Dental repair work or 'stoppings' had been carried out in the late 18th century but one can imagine that the primitive nature of such a craft made alternative medicines a more popular option. Among these was Pelletiers Anodyne for the immediate cure of toothache and Tic Doloreaux offered in an advertisement in one of the early issues of the 'Gazette'

This 'singular specific' it said had been introduced through the 'valuable discovery of Monsieur Pelletier, the celebrated Parisien dentist. During the past few months thousands have been cured by its application.' Pelletiers Anodyne, said the advertisement, would not only cure toothache but arrest decay and was well adapted to be used by dentists and the public as a temporary stopping, 'thus saving many valuable teeth, the loss of which, inducing other diseases, renders old age comfortless or hurries an individual to a premature grave'. The Anodyne was obtainable from Cresswell Davis, chemist, of Upper York Place, Fulham Road, price 1s 1½d.

Another cure for toothache was offered by Mr C. Norman of Caroline Street, Bayswater, whose vegetable remedy was 'never known to fail' and supported by impressive testimonials. 'My daughter was confined to her room for three weeks, distracted with the toothache, and was cured in ten minutes ... Mr T. James, Cheesemonger. 'I cured six of my customers with one box' said Mr Tomlinson, a bootmaker, of Ebury Street, Pimlico. The price of this wonder cure was a shilling and the poor were 'cured gratis by applying before ten o'clock in the morning.'

If Pelletier's Anodyne or Mr Norman's vegetable remedy did not live up to their promises, as a desperate last resort Mr C. Albert 'surgeon and mechanic dentist' of Fitzroy Square, could be contacted there from 9 a.m to 6 p.m and for the convenience of country patients from 10 a.m to mid-day on Sundays. His fees for dentistry varied from 2s 6d for a filling to £5 for a complete set of false teeth, produced by a 'system which combines the latest systems with economy. One mineral tooth 'the best that can be made' cost five shillings. As a side-line Mr Albert also offered a service to the deaf, being the ^{sole} inventor of voice tubes at one guinea a pair. cont./

Mr Bellis , Surgeon Dentist of Lonsdale Road, Notting Hill, whose advertisement featured a grisly set of enormous false teeth, ' with pink gutta percha gums ' offered the incentive of teeth being extracted gratis on Tuesdays and Fridays between nine and ten 'c clock in the morning The patient could then be fitted out with a set which ' required no wires or fastening and gave the greatest support to the adjoining teeth when loose or rendered tender by absorption of the gums. '

Rival dentist to Mr Albert was Mr Athey, of Hereford Street, Park Lane, who offered false teeth 'of the most elegant construction' (defying detection) combined with real usefulness with moderation in price, and would also extract teeth for the working classes at one shilling a time. (no mention of an anaesthetic!)

Although the first half of the century had seen the opening of numerous hospitals in London, in addition to over seventy dealing with specific diseases, these institutions were reserved for the acutely ill and most would not accept patients suffering from infectious illnesses, children, or those with terminal complaints. With nursing still in the 'Mrs Gamp' era, Florence Nightingale and Elizabeth Fry having not yet elevated it to a ladylike profession, and primitive sanitary and antiseptic conditions, hospitals were avoided by anyone who could be provided with home treatment. In poor families, where any number of people shared a room with little or no sanitation, such care was impossible and the victim was lucky if he or she ended up in the poor house infirmary.

The dependence of such poor people on the chemist for medical attention was highlighted by Mrs Gaskell in 'Mary Barton' in 1847. Although set in Manchester, the conditions applied in urban areas all over the country. Her two characters, Mr Wilson and Mr Barton, are searching for a friend in an evil quarter of the town, amid filthy conditions, with women tossing slops from their front doors into the gutter of the ill-paved streets. They find the family they are seeking, living in a cellar, the broken window panes stuffed with rags, and three or four children rolling on the damp brick floor through which stagnant filthy water oozed up from the street. 'The fever from which they were suffering was of the new putrid Typhoid kind, brought on by miserable living in a filthy neighbourhood and great depression of mind and body. It is most virulently malignant and highly infectious but the poor are fatalists with regard to infection, and well for them it is so, for in their crowded dwellings, no invalid can be isolated.'

So Mrs Gaskell continues 'But could any doctor be had? In all probability not until the next day could an infirmary order be begged, but meanwhile the only medical advice they could have must be from the druggist...' so the two benevolent visitors set off to find one.

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(Matters of Life and Death).

Mrs Gaskell's reference to the ' new Typhoid type fever ' is a reminder of the confusion that existed until late in the 19th century between the two similarly named but very different diseases, Typhoid and Typhus. Typhoid was usually caused by the bacillus being introduced into the intestine through food or drink, causing acute inflammation and ulceration, Typhus was transmitted by lice and fleas, the patient's scratching of the irritating bites carrying micro-organisms from the vermins' excretia into the blood stream. The symptoms of the disease which damaged the small blood vessels, particularly those of the brain, were extreme prostration and delerium. Both diseases were frequently fatal and highly infectious.

Much less dangerous to life but very unpleasant to the sufferers was the highly contagious Ringworm and it was a common sight right into the 1920s to see children with shaven heads the accepted treatment to remove the parasites which caused the infection. The 'Gazette', of course, had a remedy for that too, Woodhouse's Ringworm Cure, sold at 1s 6d a bottle at the Court Hairdressers in Alfred Terrace, Bayswater, which suggests it was not necessarily a complaint confined to the poorer classes !

These and other infectious and contagious diseases, caused or encouraged by poor public health, were beginning to impress upon the mid Victorians the need for what its critics called ' medical police ' who offended against the traditions of individual freedom and a man's home (even if it were a hovel) being his castle. The pioneer Edwin Chadwick had already expressed the opinion in his Report on the Sanitary Conditions of the Labouring Population that a doctor might blame a patient's condition on his occupation, when the real culprit was the environment in which that work was carried out. He had studied the difference in health of workers in large well-ventilated factories compared to those with poorer conditions and concluded that 'if there were a regular system of inspection of places of work or places of large assembly it would be attended with great advantages to the lower orders !

Similarly conditions in people's homes would improve the health of those who lived in them and in December 1855 Charles Strutt is recommending the appointment of Dr Ogier Ward, of Leonard's Place, Kensington for the post of Medical Officer of Health for part of the parish. Dr Ward had been Secretary to the Board of

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Health at Wolverhampton and published a report of the Cholera epidemic there and was now Surgeon at the Kensington Dispensary only a few yards up Church Street from Mr Strutt's printing office. 'The Gazette' recommended him as being 'thoroughly conversant with the habits and wants of the labouring portion of the community and generally esteemed by them so that he would gain admission to their homes without being obtrusive.'

In making such an appointment the parish of St Mary Abbots was being remarkably progressive, although it did not follow up other recommendations for general public health for many years. These included the provision of baths and wash houses which they could have been able to supply under an Act of 1846 (these were not built for another forty years) and the Vestry was equally slow in implementing another Act which enabled them to inspect common lodging houses, a particular source of infectious diseases especially tuberculosis, and regulate the numbers using them.

'Vaccination Gratis' was advertised in the first issue of 'The Gazette' on December 7 1853. This free Institute, at Peel Street Notting Hill offered 'perfect Vaccination to all classes of the community so that no persons need be put under obligation to the parish in respect thereof.' The Vaccination Act of 1840 provided that any person could be vaccinated free of charge, a service administered by the Boards of Guardians and the Poor Law. Although Edward Jenner's discovery of Smallpox vaccine in 1798 had saved thousands of lives the disease was still a killer, claiming over 12,000 victims between 1837 and 1840. By 1853 this had been reduced considerably. The Vaccination Extension Act made it obligatory for parents to have infants vaccinated when they were four months old, but as the death rate gradually declined this was not so strictly enforced. In 1867 the Vaccination Act, with penalties for those who did not comply, aroused fanatical opposition until the Smallpox epidemic of 1871-73, by the end of which 44,079 people had died, over 10,000 of whom lived in London.

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Although less dramatic than cholera, typhoid, typhus and the other virulent infections which killed speedily, tuberculosis, or consumption as it was most frequently called, was the greatest scourge of Victorian England, thriving in overcrowded living conditions and among undernourished people. Statistics reveal that 'T.B.' was the cause of death of one person in six, more than small-pox, whooping cough, measles, scarlet fever and typhus together. Hospitals were loathe to admit tubercular patients as their illness was long lasting and usually ended fatally.

In 1841, a young London solicitor, Philip Rose, disturbed when one of his clerks who fell ill with tuberculosis could not be accepted by any hospital, wrote to various friends asking them if they would join him in an effort to aid not only this young man but others like him. A meeting was held at Rose's house in March 1841 and plans made to raise funds to set up a specialist hospital which opened in 1842, first as an out patients clinic in Westminster followed by a lying-in hospital in Smith Street, Chelsea, where patients were admitted on the recommendation of governors or subscribers to the fund.

Rose, who was later to become financial adviser to Benjamin Disraeli, and made a baronet in 1874, remained Honorary Secretary of the now Brompton Hospital for Diseases of the Chest until 1883. The first Chelsea Hospital had soon expanded and a site was acquired on part of one of the nursery gardens at Brompton, ensuring first that there was a good space between it and the grand houses being built nearby on the Smiths Estate, the site today of Onslow Square

The virulence of TB and its common incidence did nothing to discourage the patent medicine manufacturers, such as Sherrington's Aniseed Candy, produced by F. Sherrington, Confectioner, of New Church Street, Portman Market, Edgware Road, who warned against frauds and imposition 'as many in the trade are presuming to deceive by imitation'. Its extravagant claim was that it effected a cure for Consumption as well as Hooping Cough (sic) Colds Influenza 'the Breath' and Diseases of Throat, Chest and Lungs. When considered how many thousands have fallen victim to this most destructive of diseases, 'says Mr Sherrington, referring to Consumption 'the value of an article which can arrest the progress of so fatal a malady is invaluable.'

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' This candy should be kept by all families to take upon the first symptoms as inattention and neglect are the cause of numbers losing their lives . Those who have taken it in the first stages of Consumption and Asthma found it always effected a cure'.

Herbal remedies were as popular as they are today during the revival of interest in ' alternative medicine ' . Hoopers Fluid Extract of Taraxacum (a genus of plants including dandelion) for affliction of the liver, was highly recommended by eminent medical men, including Sir Benjamin Brodie and Sir David Davies, as well as many other untitled and more obscure doctors, and was obtainable at Hoopers in Pall Mall and Grosvenor Street. Another herbal preparation, Barnes Irish Moss was advertised for coughs, colds hoarseness and sore throat and specially recommended to clergymen vocalists and public speakers, 'well known for its emolient and expectorant virtues and presented in the form of a jujube. '

Doubtless such prescriptions would have been approved by W. B. Fordes' Medico Botanic Establishment which was about to move to 134 High Holborn. This was the London agency for the famous (if unfortunately named) Dr Coffin, who could be consulted there gratis between 10 a.m and 1 p.m. Dr Coffin was one of the most celebrated ' quacks ' of the era, not all of whom were as disreputable as the term suggests . Although unqualified, some of them had considerable practical experience and expertise and Dr Coffin had built himself a high reputation in Manchester in the 1840s .

Early mentions of other alternative treatments which still exist today, even if in modified forms, are Homeopathy (the Hammersmith Institute offered treatment on Homeopathic principles free to the poor and to others for five shillings a consultation at 6 Angel Terrace) and Galvanism, the alleviation of rheumatism by electrical treatment by Mr J.B Field at 12 Westbourne Gardens who also included Indigestion and Debility among his successful cases.

Dallens Gout and Rheumatism Pills prepared by Lowe and Wylde of Chelsea would be sent free by post on receipt of fourteen postage stamps and were recommended by Elizabeth Ogden of 15 Little John Street , Manchester, who ' after suffering most acutely for 18 months trying various remedies and being given up by Manchester Infirmary found great relief after taking only six pills, and after taking a few more was quite cured '.

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It is to be hoped that these and other tablets and lozenges which were regularly advertised in the ' Gazette ' had no relationship with the grim cartoon in a contemporary issue of ' Punch ' which showed a skeleton apothecary stirring up a concoction with a pestal and mortar from ingredients marked Arsenic and Plaster of Paris, although it is more than likely that many contained generous proportions of opium or laudanum (the use of such sedatives by the classical poets of the time, Coleridge, Swinburne and so many others has to be viewed in the light of the common use of these and other similar substances). There was no restriction on shopkeepers making up their own preparations in which opium was a popular ingredient, these including remedies for Dysentery and Diarrhoea and Teething Troubles. Godfrey's Soothing Cordial, a medicine for babies and young children, was sold by the gallon in most cities and contained a considerable proportion of opium which was not banned until the 1860s when the prohibition aroused great resentment among the poor, who regarded this, together with movements towards temperance and teetotalism, as yet another oppression on the poor by the rich by removing their only alleviations for pain and misery.

There was no restriction on advertising by medical men so Dr Hardinge of Albert Terrace, Notting Hill ('near the turnpike ') was able to take space in Mr Strutt's ' Gazette ' to announce that he was able to ' speedily and effectively cure not only rheumatism in all its forms but epilepsy, hysteria and all nervous diseases such as Scrnfula (Kings Evil) and ulcerated legs, (no matter how long standing) ' Dr Hardinge also offered advice to the poor gratis. a characteristic which was surprisingly common in an age long before any form of health service. In fact the Robin Hood philosophy was adopted by the medical profession right into the first half of this century when doctors often gave generous free treatment to the poor, relying for their livelihood on their richer patients.

Among the few illustrations used to enliven the ' Gazette ' columns were those in the advertisements of Mr William Huntley Bailey, of 418 Oxford Street who supplied Spinal Stays for the treatment of curvature of the spine. Only back views were discreetly used to illustrate the ' light spinal support the timely application of which has rescued many young persons from the worst of all complaints, consumption '. Experienced females were said to be in attendance (presumably ^{only} to wait upon the women customers.). Mr Bailey also

sold elastic stockings for weak knees and ankles , crutches and trusses .

Mr Morris of Kensington Church Street was able to boast that he was ' Chemist to the Queen and the Duchess of Kent, although only the latter still lived at Kensington Palace. He was advertising Green Gum Plasters for Corns and Bunions , although this was not meant to imply, one imagines, that his royal patrons suffered such plebian afflictions

If the patent medicine manufacturers displayed a cheerful disregard to dangerous substances in their prescriptions , the producers of foodstuffs were hardly more particular about the ingredients in their products . The ' Gazette ' reported in its issue of July 18 1855 a report of a meeting of the Select Committee on the Adulteration of Food at the House of Commons which heard evidence from Dr Arthur Hassall that additives, many of them extremely harmful, were to be found in almost every article of food which he listed. These included arrowroot, bread, cinnamon, coffee, cayenne pepper, custard and egg powders, curry powder, flour, gin, rum milk, mustard marmalade, oatmeal , potted meats and fish, pepper spices, tea and vinegar. Substances employed in adulteration included chalk, sawdust, red lead, alum, arsenic of copper, chromate of potash, powdered glass, red earth , Venetian red, vermilion annatto (a yellow dye used to colour butter) Prussian blue and black lead. Tea was frequently adulterated with used tea leaves or the leaves of sycamore.

The Chairman of the Select Committee asked if any of these substances were not only injurious to health but actually poisonous ? He was told that samples had been taken from tradesmen in various parts of the metropolis and in some , such as arrowroot, and mustard, scarcely a particle was what it was reputed to be. Copper was extensively used in the manufacture of pickles, especially gherkins and beans red lead was found in cayenne pepper and was apt to be very injurious to the system if taken two or three times a week. Chromate of lead was used extensively in snuff, as frequently as to produce paralysis. Children were said to be particularly affected by the adulteration of coloured confectionary and the Committee was told it made little difference as to whether this was bought at large or small shops.

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Dr Hassall said that the use of the microscope would greatly assist in the detection of these additives

In the light of this evidence, and the unknown contents of many patent medicines it was no wonder that many housewives preferred to make up their own preparations, although the ingredients were hardly more encouraging. The first of a series of 'useful practical recipes which may be relied upon for their real utility' appeared in the 'Gazette' in 1855. An 'excellent powder for removing and preventing tartar on teeth' consisted of Rahatny Root one ounce; Cuttle Fish bone, two ounces; prepared chalk, four ounces and Borax 1 dram. Another recipe was for 'gums when spongy tender and disposed to bleed' also 'when affected by a course of mercury'. This consisted of Powdered Alum 1 dram; Peruvian Bark 1 ounce; prepared charcoal 3 drams. A 'useful wash for purifying the breath and cleansing the mouth and removing odours' needed an ounce of chlorinated soda and 19 ounces of distilled or rainwater

'For the toothache' the remedy was 1 dram of camphor; 2 drams of rectified ether and 3 drams of laudanum, a few drops to be applied to the cavity. 'As the tooth sustains much injury by medicines containing mineral aids' the readers were presented with 'an excellent recipe for an alterative lotion which could most assuredly prevent the mischief'. For this they would need half an ounce of bicarbonate of soda; two teaspoons of eau de cologne a teaspoonful of sol volatile and half a pint of rainwater. The mouth was to be rinsed out with this brew immediately after taking the medicine.

Not all illnesses caused by food were the result of adulteration but by its poor quality and lack of any understanding on nutrition or vitamins, especially in the case of Rickets, and the part that sunlight and fresh air plays in healthy living. Although more common among the poorer people, Rickets was not confined to them but affected the more affluent who shared the mistaken belief that babies should be kept indoors and not exposed to sunlight. Apart from its illeffects in early years of life, Rickets had long-reaching consequences, particularly through the narrowing of the pelvis in women causing miscarriages and still births, as well as crippling and stunted growth in both sexes.

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Although Dr John Hughes Bennett had written a treatise on oleum fecoris useli (Cod Liver Oil) as a treatment for Rickets in 1841 , describing it as ' worthy of a place besides Iron (for anaemia) Peruvian Bark (Quinine for malaria) and Mercury (for Syphyllis) the Gazette's advertisement for Dr De Jonghs Light Brown Cod Liver Oil, although effusive in its claims , did not include Rickets among its cures, being ' the most effective remedy for consumption, bronchitis, asthma, gout, chronic rheumatism and all scrofulous diseases '. By 1865 however, the Boards of Health were allowed to supply ' expensive medicines such as Cod Liver Oil ' to the sick poor.

It is doubtful whether this early ' national health ' service ' would have provided another of the Gazette's more fanciful advertised medicines to be provided free of charge. This was ^{Francis'} Samaritan Oil , a cure-all ' prepared entirely from herbs and flowers ' and described in immortal verse.

For now 200 years or more
This oil was famed for cut and sore
For wounds, for burns, for scalds and sprains
Chaps, face aches, sore throats, chilblains,
Excrescences, bumps and bruises
Are eased or cured as each one uses
Or will this precious oil apply
Its healing virtues only try.
Lumbago, piles, with bites and stings
And pains which rheumatism brings,
All parts inflamed are soon restored,
And festering wounds though deep explored
And suffering men with joy shall smile
When told of Francis' precious oil.
Their wounds are cured, their pains removed
And Francis Healing Oil approved.
All female breast disorders cured
The pains removed though long endured
And worms in children soon destroyed
And strength and health again enjoyed
A bottle buy and only try
And all such plagues shall from you fly....

Obtainable from Barclays of Farringdon Street and all respectable chemists. Agents were also invited to promote the wonder cure.

The Victorians were not great believers in either exercise or fresh air, windows were shut most of the time, and no wonder as the pollution from fog and smog was as great as that from putrid pools and open sewers. One of Charles Dickens' vivid descriptions of a foggy day in London is found in 'Our Mutual Friend'.

'The fog was heavy and dark, causing London to blink, wheeze and choke, Even in the surrounding country it was a foggy day, but there the fog was grey, whereas in London it was at about the boundary line, dark yellow, and a little within it, brown, and then browner and browner until in the heart of the city it was rusty black.' Elizabeth Barrett Browning paints a similar picture in 'Aurora Leigh' from high up in a house in Kensington, where 'the lurid dawns and sunsets were encouraged by the London air, but any possible beauty is expunged by the horrors of the pea-soupers which engulf the city so often, the great tawny weltering fog which involved the passive city, strangling it alive and drawing it off into the void, spires, bridges, streets and squares, as if a sponge had wiped out London'. (What a contrast to Wordsworth's view from Westminster Bridge in 1802 when those same spires had been bright and glittering in the smokeless air!) Although a Smoke Nuisance Act had been passed in 1853 the local Vestries were slow to enforce it.

Early in the century, in 1834, Edwin Chadwick had advocated the value of exercise and fresh air. 'In rural districts as well as in the vicinity of some of the towns I have had very strong representation of the mischief of the stoppage of footpaths and ancient walks as contributing, with the extensive and indiscriminate enclosure of commons which were playgrounds, to drive the labouring classes to the public house?' He was perhaps thinking more of moral dangers than those to health and fitness and his views were shared by few, walking was regarded as a necessity rather than a pleasurable exercise. However those who may have thought there was some virtue in his advice but had no byways or footpaths to traverse could take their exercise in the privacy of their own homes on a sophisticated contraption known as the Chamber

Exercising Horse, regularly advertised in the 'Gazette' for 'persons who cannot take pedestrian or equestrian exercise'. 'This truly useful machine exceeds any yet invented for the relief of persons inclined to dormancy. It is well known that a carriage affords little or no exercise, on the contrary the

exercise on the Chamber Horse is similar to the canter of the managed trotting horse and by the use of the arms only will cause genial warmth and general circulation of the blood. ' It could be regarded as a very early effort in preventive medicine in an age which was more likely to wait until the symptoms struck rather than taking steps to eliminate the cause.

No wonder the Victorians learned to live in the constant presence of death in a manner which few generations before or since have been obliged to accept. The old rural communities had of course their bereavements but the very smallness of their populations and a comparatively healthy life made these^a less constant reminder of man's mortality. In cities where conditions shortened life anyway more people witnessed the harvest of the grim reaper as part of their daily life.

The 'Death Notices in the ' Gazette ' provide an apt commentary on the ages and causes of death, a random selection over a few weeks in the late summer of 1855 shows

August 14 1855 at 3, The Crescent, Camden Road Villas , Ann Drury wife of William V Drury MD , of Consumption.

August 22 1855 at Kensington, Agnes Brereton, aged 8, the beloved child of the Rev John Brereton.

September 18 1855 at 10 Wadbroke Villas Notting Hill, Florence Isabella , daughter of G.A Treyer and Emily Evans , aged 9 months.

September 21 1855 Frederick Maynard, second son of Charles Maynard Frost, aged five years.

September 26 1855 Blanche Emma , second daughter of Mr Alfred Bruton Cowdell, of Hereford Square, Old Brompton, aged ten years after scarlet fever.

The high death rate in areas of ever increasing population having placed an intolerable strain on the existing churchyards the outbreaks of Cholera and other epidemics in the first half of the century had further alarmed the public and the authorities. This was fueled by professional opinion as well as the gruesome stories already related. A London doctor declared that burial grounds in towns were 'a national evil the harbingers if not the originators of pestilence and the cause directly or indirectly of inhumanity, immorality and irreligion.'

Among the leaders in cemetery reform was George Frederick Carden, a London barrister, who carried out an extensive personal survey of burial grounds before issuing a prospectus for the General Burial Grounds Association with proposals to establish a large cemetery on the pattern of that of Pere Lachaise outside Paris, probably at Primrose Hill. This was a very conventional scheme compared to the highly fanciful one dreamed up by the fashionable architect Thomas Willson and exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1824. He envisaged a great pyramid higher than the dome of St Pauls to accommodate the coffins of over five million Londoners, in sealed chambers. The great church architect A. C Pugin also produced a scheme in which he may have had the co-operation of Marc Isambard Brunel and in 1830 Carden held a meeting in his Chambers, with a supporting exhibition in Parliament Street, to launch yet another plan, this time the work of Francis Goodman, for a cemetery covering 15 ½ acres decorated with replicas of classical Roman and Greek temples. Carden had a supporter in Andrew Spottiswoode MP. who petitioned Parliament to take action on a matter which was given its final boost by the Cholera outbreak in 1832, and a Bill was passed to allow the establishment of a General Cemetery for the Interment of the Dead in the Neighbourhood of the Metropolis and the General Cemetery Company permitted to raise £45,000 in £25 shares. The clergy were also to be compensated for the loss of their burial fees, one of the main sources of livelihood for the poorer clergy, who would receive from five shillings to one and sixpence for each person from their parish buried in an outside cemetery, according to the type of grave.

The company chose to purchase 54 acres beside the Grand Union Canal at Kensal Green but the way ahead was still far from smooth, starting with a quarrel over architecture, should it be Roman or Gothic or Grecian?. Cemeteries were to become places to visit and enjoy and were a source of inspiration, as well as income, for many great artists and sculptors, making the hallowed acres a memorial to an age as well as its people. Kensal Green Cemetery was consecrated in 1834 by the Bishop of London among the early interments being that of the Duke of Sussex, brother of George IV and William IV and one of the Queen's 'wicked uncles', who was so shocked by the confusion at the funeral of William at Windsor that he desired not to be buried there.

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Popular features of cemeteries such as Kensal Green and Brompton, which was consecrated in 1840, were the catacombs where coffins lay exposed behind grilles on stone racks. and it was customs such as this which had inspired Edwin Chadwick in another of his pioneering moods when in 1834 he was Secretary to the Poor Law Commission and drew up his report on the Practice of Interment in Towns . When he became a member of the new General Board of Health in 1849, at the time of the next great Cholera epidemic, which brought the topic to public notice, he issued another report which criticised the private cemetery companies for having done nothing to relieve the evils of catacombs and mausalea instead of earth burials, and ' giving no relief of expense, especially to the poor '. He considered that the interment of the dead was a most unfit subject for trading profit.

Elaborate funerals were part of the ritual surrounding death which was once reserved for the aristocratic classes. Royal funerals were as splendid as royal weddings, as were those of great statesmen and soldiers, such as the Duke of Wellington, with deep mourning, elaborate corteges, great processions and much pomp and ceremony. Now even more ordinary mortals left the world with at least some of the splendour once reserved for their 'betters'. Clocks were stopped in the bereaved house, and blinds drawn, and the family's status assessed by the number of carriages pulled by horses bedecked in black plumes and draperies.

In 1850 the government's Metropolitan Interments Act was passed under which the Board of Health was empowered to provide burial grounds, buy up cemetery companies and close all the old grave yards. Funeral costs were to be controlled by the Board who would make contracts with undertakers. Not surprisingly the companies had no wish to be nationalised so compulsory purchases were sanctioned the first two to be bought up being Mr Strutt's own local cemetery, Brompton, and another at Nuneaton. However, after strong opposition the government had second thoughts, a new Bill was drafted and eventually only one cemetery came into public ownership, Brompton, which to this day is still managed by the Department of the Environment, coming under the jurisdiction of the Bailiff of the Royal Parks.

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On August 22 1855 The ' Gazette ' announced that a prospectus had been issued for a new cemetery company incorporated by Act of Parliament by which 160 acres of land had been secured seven miles from London near the Colney Hatch Station of the Great Northern Railway. The capital is to be £150, 000 in £5 shares. Nearly 3,000 cemeteries were to be established in the ten years from 1853 to 1863.

One of London's oldest established undertakers , James Nodes, which is still in business, advertised in the ' Gazette ' in October 1854 as a ' Furnishing Undertaker to the Trade ' at 42 Archer Street (now Westbourne Grove) Their scale of charges offered a Hearse and Pair, Mourning Coach and Pair, with feathers and velvets for horses, elm coffin covered and finished neat, attendance, use of velvet pall and goods for mourners, for £7.10s and the same class of ' walking funeral ' for £3.5s A walking funeral was of course only possible where the deceased was being interred in the local churchyard or lived near to one of the new cemeteries.

The provision of mortuaries was also bringing to an end the horrible necessity of a corpse remaining in home , which could consist of only one room, in an inadequate coffin or on the bed, for a week^{or more} while the family tried to collect enough money to pay the undertaker. The rituals of death nurtured a desperate need to give the deceased a 'good send off' and Edwin Chadwick's research revealed that of £24 million in poor people's savings a quarter or more was set aside for funeral costs . Where a family could not possibly meet such a charge, the expense has to be met by the Poor Law and the body would be interred in a communal grave without a headstone, cutting right across the sentiments of those whose grief at the loss of a member of the family was intensified by this anonymous end . What is more, even if the relatives had saved enough to pay for a ' decent burial ' the Guardians would be likely to deny any assistance to the dependents because the money had been squandered on a lavish funeral.

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The church was aware of the difficulties that many poor families faced when a death occurred and decades earlier a Bishop of London, Robert Lowth, had been so concerned about the situation in Fulham where he had his palace that he dedicated a piece of his own land to extend the churchyard and suggested that burial charges should be reduced because they were too high for poor people to afford.

' The Gazette ' also announced in October 1855 that a Guild of St Alban had been formed at the church of St Paul and St Barnabas at Knightbridge which intended to provide biers, palls and cloaks and all other articles necessary for the reverent performance of the Last Rites of the Church and to establish a fund from which grants could be made in part payment of the necessary expenses to bury the extremely poor gratuitously and obtain a truly Christian burial for poor men of the church ' .

Although Francis Place, who had drawn up a People's Charter with William Lovett, founder of the Working Men's Association, had dared to suggest in the 1820s that a restriction on breeding might alleviate some of the dreadful conditions of poverty, the combined influence of the Church (that God would provide) and economics (children might care for you in your old age) deterred any hope there might have been in the scientific approach to birth control, especially when infant mortality was so high that numerous pregnancies might still result in only one or two surviving progeny. John Mill, father of John Stuart Mill, is reported to have poked birth control pamphlets down the area railings in slum districts and it was proposed that Trade Unions should instruct their members in this otherwise unmentionable subject.

The tragic frequency of death among young children may have bred no more than a stunned fatalism among the working classes, but in higher circles it inspired the sentimentality which made statesmen weep when they read of the death of Little Nell in The Old Curiosity Shop (Daniel O'Connell, the Irish nationalist, is said to have been rent with sobs and threw the book out of the window) but very little else was done to ease the lot of either the children themselves or the mothers who bore them.

Elizabeth Fry the Quaker philanthropist is remembered mostly for her prison reforms, particularly the treatment of women prisoners and

Matters of Life and Death

conditions of the transportation ships, but she was also a pioneer in nursing. The daughter of John Gurney of the famous banking family, her work inspired a German Pastor to found an Institute of Protestant Deaconesses to care for the poor and prisoners, similar to those which were to be established later by the Anglican church in England. Mrs Fry spent some time herself at this small hospital at Kaiserwerth and in her turn established an Institute of Nursing Sisters in this country. When Florence Nightingale realised her vocation in nursing she too spent a short while at Kaiserwerth five years after Mrs Fry's death.

Although her work was first concerned with the care of wounded soldiers her elevation of nursing to a profession for educated women from more sensitive backgrounds than the elemental 'Mrs Gamps' must have greatly influenced the attitude to childbirth, which even the Queen considered was treated by the male dominated medical world as more of a farmyard procedure than a surgical operation. It would be nice to think that the fact that England had a ruling Queen who was also a wife and mother (nine times over) also had something to do with the status of childbirth in the eyes of the medical profession, but it had not done much for poor Queen Anne the last of the Stuart monarchs over a century earlier. She had been pregnant eighteen times but only five of her babies were born alive, the longest to survive being the frail little Duke of Gloucester who died when he was eleven. Certainly she was not Queen at the time of these disastrous pregnancies but it would hardly have helped her had she been so, royal births were treated like side shows with statesmen coming and going at the scene of the delivery to ensure there was no hokey pokey, such as substituting the offspring. Queen Victoria made no secret of her dislike of the whole business, and and she suffered some difficult births before 'blessed chloroform' at the hands of Dr John Snow gave her 'soothing and quietening beyond measure' at the birth of her eighth child. The Queen's Physician, Sir James Clark, had given his blessing to the operation but the Lancet was not so confident and the press openly apprehensive of the possible danger to the Queen's life, but the use of the anaesthetic on such an illustrious subject contributed enormously towards its general acceptance and Victoria's courage (even if born of desperation) brought relief not only to women in childbirth but to hundreds of sufferers who without it had to choose between agonising butchery or death in cases of amputation or other drastic surgery.

Matters of Life and Death.

As far as ordinary women were concerned , hospital births were rare outside the poor law infirmaries, there were dangers enough without the added risk of ' childbed fever ' encouraged by insanitary conditions and in 1855 Charles Strutt made an appeal in his ' Gazette for a charity which supplied bundles of ' swaddling clothes ' and linen on loan to poor mothers . ' In cases of ordinary illness where poverty prevents the patient from obtaining needful necessities , not to mention comforts ' says Strutt, (by now the father of five children) ' we advocate approach to those very benevolent institutions, our public hospitals, but in the cases of poor married women near their confinement we are of decidedly different opinion, there being much to deter them seeking help and refuge away from home, such as admission only being given when the applicant is actually in labour.' There was also, he said, 'the absence of any kind word or look of sympathy from anyone belonging to them' apart from the fact that there might also be a young family to care for. These kindly words did not lessen the patronising morality of the charity's strict rules which apart from excluding first confinements and those who had not lived in the parish for six months, made the loan of the linen dependent on the production of a marriage certificate and on its return a gift of a roll of baby linen would only be made if the mother could show that she had been ' churched ' and her baby ('if living ') baptised.

The only help that most poor women were likely to receive at such a time was through charity and a month later Charles Strutt was to report that a ' poor an industrious woman named Pollard residing at 40 Dabtmoor Street, Kensington Place, Silver Street, was delivered of three fine children, her family previously consisting of seven.' Any benevolent person disposed was invited to render pecuniary assistance (presumably also on production of the mother's marriage lines !) .

On September 5 1855, Samuel Cornell, Clerk to Kensington Workhouse placed the following advertisement in the ' Gazette '.

' Two Guineas Reward..... On Sunday August 26 at 6 o' clock in the morning an infant male child about 12 months old was found in a brickfield at Addison Road, Kensington. It has grey eyes, a fair complexion and light coloured hair. It was dressed in a cloth frock trimmed with blue braid, cotton pinafore, flannel petticoat, calico shirt, white socks and leather shoes, it had a cambric cap marked ' E. C. ' and was wrapped in a white wrapper.' . The reward was to be paid to anyone who was able to give information leading to the conviction of the person or persons by whom the child was deserted

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Even this poor abandoned waif was well wrapped up, for the poor like the rich had been schooled in the belief that fresh air was too strong a stuff for babies, and toddler children were as overdressed as their elders in layers of petticoats (little boys not being ' breeched ' until they were four or five years old).

Poor families would never have owned one of the new perambulators their babies would be lucky to have a box for a cradle in the corner of some overcrowded basement or attic, so R.H. Brocklebank, coach builder and manufacturer of Infant Propellers at Islington Green would have been aiming his advertising in the ' Gazette ' at the carriage trade, with the snob appeal of the ' Victoria and Albert ' pattern, hoods fitted for protection from the sun, price £ 2.10s single £3 10 s double, a rival supplier offered Weales' Improvement on the Patent Pram, a most elegant little carriage which adds all the comfort to the infant it can lie or sit in a reclining position so as to form a mini coach '.

The progress of these mini-coaches about the pavements of Kensington aroused the anger of at least one ' Gazette ' reader who wrote a letter to the Editor about the ' daily annoyance of those juvenile carriages known by the name of perambulators which throng our streets and not infrequently stop transit along narrow parts of old Kensington. ' his he blamed on ' the carelessness and impertinence of nurses and servant girls whose business it was to push the pram, ' not to mention their beaux. ' The question is, ' he added, ' whether these vehicles are not injurious to the child, depriving him of healthy exercise and inducing drowsiness ? ' I notice that the little occupants are generally asleep with their little heads hanging over the side and cramping their limbs by a constantly contracted position. '.

Familiarity had not bred contempt in Charles Strutt's sentiments towards his young family and much of his poetry was inspired by them such as little Catherine, or ' little Kate of Kensington '

' Could love compute our darlings' preciousness
My tongue would say, when clasping Catherine's charms
Un numbered Indies hold I in my arms.....'
Or ' Blessed child, it is a sight
Blending awe with hushed delight
Thus upon they couch to creep
Thus to watch they peaceful sleep.....

cont.

Henry, his fifth child who was six months old in 1855, also received poetic tribute

' With thy tricksy smile and full dark placid eyes
Could Summer bind her dainty flowers in one
It were a weed compared to thee, my son.....'

He did not know then that Ethel, still to be born, would carry his ' Gazette ' triumphantly into the mid twentieth century had he done so, his muse would have done her proud.

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