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THE ADULTERATION OF FOOD BILL.

GUY-PATIN, in a letter dated March 2, 1655, writes in terms of strong condemnation of the *opera medico-chymica* of Paracelsus, which it was proposed to reprint, and says of chemistry: "La chimie est la fausse monnaie de notre métier. Je voudrais que, pour le bien public, elle fût aussi bien défendue que les faux quart d'écus pour lesquels on a autrefois pendu tant de faux-monnoyeurs." The celebrated physician, when he wrote in such contemptuous language of chemistry, had not the faintest conception of the important position it was destined to attain among the sciences, any more than he could foresee the inestimable benefits which mankind at large have derived from it. There is, however, one direction in which chemical knowledge has been extensively applied for the injury and seldom for the good of individuals, viz. in the adulteration of articles of food. Thus, by its agency bad wine is made to assume the appearance of good; essences of fruit are manufactured into the composition of which fruit never entered; bad flour is converted into the best bread, and we might mention a host of substances which chemistry is employed to adulterate in some way or other, to the wrong of the consumer and the demoralisation of the vendor. Learned and thoughtful physicians, who have well-considered the question, have arrived at the conclusion that a great proportion of the diseases of the digestive organs arise from this universal adulteration of articles of food, and it has therefore become a matter of grave national importance that the legislature should take some steps to put an end to this abominable perversion of scientific knowledge. With this object Mr. Scholefield, assisted by Mr. Wise and Mr. Villiers, has drawn up a bill imposing a penalty on persons guilty of adulterating articles of food or drink. It proposes that any person who shall knowingly sell an article of food or drink with which any noxious substance has been mixed, or who shall sell as pure and unadulterated any article of food or drink which is not pure, shall on conviction before two justices of the peace be fined and made to pay the costs, and in the event of a second conviction the justices shall have power to cause the offender's name and offence to be published in such a manner as they may think advisable. To prevent adulteration by the purchaser the justices must be satisfied that he gave notice to the seller of his intention to have the article analysed, so as to give him an opportunity of seeing it placed in the hands of the analyst. Vestries and district boards in London and town councils in boroughs are to have the power of appointing persons possessing competent medical, chemical, and microscopical knowledge as analysts, and allow them such office and salaries for analysing food and drink as they may think fit. These analysts are to be bound to analyse any articles of

food or drink which purchasers may bring to them for a fee ranging from half-a-crown to half-a-guinea, and to give a certificate stating whether it is adulterated, and, if so, whether the foreign substance is injurious to health; and this certificate, in the absence of any evidence to the contrary, shall be received as evidence by the justices, and the cost of the certificate included with the costs attending a conviction. The justices are to have power to cause any article of food or drink to be analysed by any person they may think proper to appoint, who may be required to give evidence at the hearing of the case, the whole of the costs to be borne by the complainant or defendant, as the justices shall determine. Persons convicted before the justices are to be allowed an appeal to quarter sessions. The penalties to be inflicted under this act to be paid to the vestry, district board, or town council, to be disposed of for parish purposes. The expenses attending the carrying out of this act to be defrayed, in the metropolis, out of the fund applicable to the purposes of the metropolitan management act, and in boroughs out of the borough fund. Under the term articles of food is included all alimentary substances not taken as medicine. The addition of water to spirits to reduce the strength is not to be considered as adulteration.

That this bill as it stands will become law we think neither probable nor desirable, but the necessity of such legislation once admitted by Parliament it will be easy to modify it so as to make it more effectual for carrying out the object proposed. In the very first clause there is a stumbling block to the conviction of offenders. It says that the vendor must be cognisant of the adulteration. Now, suppose he says that he was ignorant of the article being adulterated, how will the justices proceed in that case? This will have to be amended, and the law must assume that the vendor of adulterated articles is guilty of the adulteration. The motive for allowing the vendor this loophole of escape is, doubtless, to save him from becoming the victim of the wholesale dealer, but this is unnecessary; the wholesale dealer will cease to adulterate when he knows that the conviction of his customer will inevitably lead to his own exposure and consequent loss of custom. If this is not sufficient, a clause might be inserted giving the convicted retail dealer the power of suing the wholesale dealer for the costs incurred by him in the matter.

Another weak point in the bill is, it appears to us, the power of appeal which it gives to persons convicted. This can only tend to deter public spirited persons from prosecuting adulterators, and does not appear to be of use to protect honest tradesmen, as the evidence on which the conviction is founded in one court will be the same in the other, and as it will rest on a matter of fact no amount of argument can alter it.

Let us suppose that a Paterfamilias, honestly indignant at finding that his coffee is largely adulterated with chicory and dried coffee grounds, or that his milk is a compound mixture, determines on punishing the fraudulent tradesman, and succeeds in getting him fined; Paterfamilias is satisfied, and retires from the court with