

ANNOTATION

Ophthalmic "Humbugs"

The eye has always been a happy hunting ground for the charlatan. It would probably not be easy at the present time to find an exponent of ophthalmic quackery whose personality and showmanship compared with that of the Chevalier Taylor in the reigns of the first two Georges. But it is evident from the utterances and writings of the "humbugs" of to-day that the characteristics of the breed have not changed to any marked extent during the past couple of centuries. Boastfulness, pomposity, guarantees of certain cures in all sorts of cases, often by the same methods of treatment, no matter how different the origin of the particular complaint; vulgar showmanship and self-advertisement, either by loud trumpeting or sometimes by subtle and insidious methods, with an occasional display of mock modesty, are among the obvious signs that brand them.

With regard to their writings the "humbugs" of to-day probably compare unfavourably with the Chevalier Taylor; every one admits that his professional knowledge was good, in some cases even, in advance of that of his day. But a perusal of some of the writings of to-day makes it difficult to understand how any one with a medical training, or for that matter, without, could write such nonsense, be so ignorant of true ophthalmological facts and so out of date in their ideas about surgical intervention and what it achieves.

Cures for cataract without operation have long been in evidence among us. It all depends on what one means by cataract, but it can safely be maintained that there is no treatment for mature cataract other than by operation; and it is not unfair to say that in the great majority of cases the results are good and the danger to the eye very small indeed. Accidents unfortunately do happen, but their percentage in most hands is infinitesimal.

It is tragic that patients suffering from chronic glaucoma or retinal detachment, to name only a couple of examples, should waste time over questionable methods of treatment. Delay only leads to blindness and there is much need for a more vigorous education of the public on the danger of obtaining advice and treatment from unqualified practitioners.

The elder Pliny is credited with the sentiment that no book is so bad that nothing good can be found in it. He would hardly have said so could he have seen some of the works which it has been our misfortune to read recently.