

SNUFFS AND SNUFF-TAKERS.

What a moment! what a doubt!

All my nose, inside out,

All my thrilling, tickling caustic,

Pynamid Rhinocerosic,

Wants to sneeze, and cannot do it!

Now it yearns me, thrills me, stings me.

Now with rapturous torment wrings me.

Now says, "Sneeze, you fool; get through it."

Shée—shée—oh! 'tis most del-ishi,

Ishi—ishi—most del-ishi—

(Hang it I shall sneeze till spring),

Snuff's a most delicious thing.

THE above is a free version of a passage from a clever little Italian poem on tobacco (*la Tabacheide*), in which the witty author has attempted the description of a sneeze. This titillating indulgence, however, is permitted only to the novice, for your real snuff-taker disdaineth to allow his nasal organ to yield obedience to the thrilling call—his proboscis is proof against such tickling. But if long habit have blunted the sensitiveness of this delicate promontory, it is fully compensated for in the rapture his nose knows, be it Roman or snub, when primed with a liberal pinch of old Pontet's delicate Martinique, or his son's more pungent mixture.

Little do the *sneeze-totallers* know of the inexpressible luxury attendant upon a pinch of fine old snuff after dinner—it is the fit companion to a glass of generous wine: and in shunning the real connoisseur's box, they deny themselves one of the greatest enjoyments discovered by man. Yes, gentle reader, sceptic though you be, it is an enjoyment—a refined, a social enjoyment. Some hypercritics have denounced the habit of snuff-taking as uncleanly, and a few ultra railers have gone so far as to say it is unwholesome, quoting as an authority the late Mr. Abernethy, who, upon being asked by an inveterate consumer of *sapé*, if an immoderate use of snuff was calculated to injure the brain, replied, in his usual caustic and splenetic manner, "Not in the least, sir, for people who take snuff immoderately, *can have no brains.*"

I am no advocate for excess of any kind—although instances might be quoted where the greatest gluttons in this way have had tolerably long heads—Napoleon, for instance, took snuff by handful, and I think even his enemies will allow that he lacked not brains;—but numberless are the examples I could quote, of eminent men, endowed with transcendent talents, who exceeded all bounds in the gratification of this taste. But return we to the rational epicure (for there are epicures in snuff), who takes his pinch at moderate intervals, and who administers the comfort to his nose, with such a good observance of propriety, as to be exempt from censure, and the imputation of uncleanness—why is this class to be decried? Without any claim to the title of sensualist, let me ask why in this short span of life a man is not justified in affording himself all the enjoyment he can? It may be asked why create an artificial want? I answer, if in the indulgence of that want, an extra drop of joy be added to the cup of chequered happiness, *dans ce bas monde*, taste of it, and leave the reasoning to the

noseless. It has been asserted that the man who delighteth not in poetry or music, has no soul, and I say that the man who liketh not a pinch of snuff has no nose. How easily is a genuine snuff-taker recognised amongst a thousand—the very manner in which he handles his box will betray him. He is as easily distinguished from the *οι πολλοι* as Taglioni amid the figurantes. Mark too, the indescribable ease and tact with which he dexterously extracts with the sinister thumb and finger (pardon the anomaly) the soft and fragrant portion—talk of the eighteen manoeuvres! They are nothing compared to the manual and platoon of the snuff-taker's exercise! (although some snuff-boxes *play tunes* of themselves—but this is a digression).

The pseudo snuff-taker, and the uninitiated votary have all the awkwardness of undrilled recruits! For instance, your old experienced hand will take his pinch from out the receptacle *horizontally*, unstinted in quantity, and will inhale the bountiful and precious allowance at one effort, while the neophyte will insert his right finger and thumb *vertically* and falteringly into the box, and compress the scattered grains into the smallest possible compass, applying the aforesaid finger and thumb to the nose in such a questionable manner as to convey the impression that he is endeavouring to abstract some capillary excrescence from the nostril, instead of comforting the organ of smell. The veritable art of snuff-taking, is only to be acquired by long practice, and a close observance of the aforesaid manual and platoon—the air and grace which distinguish the polished gentleman, are the more observable, in snuff-taking than any other fashionable indulgence. The snuff-takers of St. James's and St. Giles's differ as widely in the manner of applying the redolent mixture to their noses, as the votary of Terpsichore at Almacks does from the coalheaver at Greenwich Fair. The democrat, the radical, and the leveller, may not be disposed to admit this—but the truth is undeniable. Some persons eat their fish, and even peas, with their knives, while others use forks—the former are barbarians, the latter, gentlemen.

The number of purveyors of snuff in this demoralized metropolis is enormous. My list, however, will comprise but a chosen few; the *élite* of manufacturers—the elegant extracts from the erudite body of mixture-makers. Their names are imperishable, and will be handed down to posterity, by their grateful customers, so long as good taste, discriminating judgment, and noses prevail. It will be my pleasing task in submitting this tobacconistical list to the snuff-taking public, to point out the several excellences of each firm as regards their mixtures; and as I descant, *en connoisseur*, upon the merits of each happy combination, I anticipate the thanks of many an amateur.

The most celebrated establishments are the following:

Fribourg and Treyer	Haymarket
Pontet <i>père</i>	Pall-mall
Pontet <i>fils</i>	Cockspur-street
Harrison	St. James's-street
Harris	Oxford-street
Hudson	Oxford-street
Skinner	Temple-bar
Skinner	Holborn-hill
Procter	Fleet-street
Beynon	Gracechurch-street

Fribourg's can justly claim precedence in point of antiquity, the firm having been established for upwards of a hundred and fifty years. The race of Fribourg and of Treyer is extinct—they are gathered to their forefathers. The name still adorns the portal, however, and is a tower of strength. The business is now in the hands of the Messrs. Evans,—and oh Evans! what snuff they sell!!! The secret of the Fribourgs has been studiously preserved and handed down to the present possessors, for the peculiar rich, full quality for which their snuffs are celebrated, is not to be met with but in the Haymarket. Where the fragrant leaf is culled, from which they dress their matchless mixtures it is not for me to say, but their snuffs, *cæteris paribus*, are not to be equalled. Certain houses are celebrated for certain snuffs, as I shall hereafter show, and Fribourg's stands pre-eminent for Bureau and Etenne. The concoctors of this plain, gentlemanly mixture, have imparted a flavour to these two snuffs that one may look for in vain elsewhere, and I pronounce it the best for a moderate snuff-taker. It is not so delicate as the Martinique, Bolongaro, and others of the genus brown; nor so rich and luscious as the Cuba, *cum multis aliis*, of Carottes, but admirably calculated for the admirer of the *juste milieu*. The Messrs. Evans purchased nearly the whole of the stock of his late Majesty George the Fourth, for a large sum, which they retailed at a rather extravagant price to their customers. The speculation must have answered, for his gracious majesty's mixture lasted for an incredibly long time; but it is to be presumed the stock was a large one. Talking of regal mixtures, if the reader be a snuff-taker, and like a rich-flavoured, and rather a coarse-grained snuff, and above all, if he be in favour with Mr. Evans, let him ask for some of the King's Carrotte, and if he does not thank me at every pinch, why I know nothing of good tobacco. The name of Fribourg and Treyer gladdeneth the eyes of the city connoisseurs also, for the Messrs. Evans have a branch establishment in Cornhill, facing the dilapidated site of the late Royal Exchange, a formidable rival to Mr. Beynon, of whom anon. The snuffs are the same as at the fountain-head in the Haymarket, of surpassing flavour and richness. The next on my list is Pontet *Père*. He dwelleth in the aristocratic region of Pall-mall. The old gentleman has some very fine snuff, and herein more especially must I mention some splendid Martinique, of which *Papa* Pontet is the undoubted possessor.

Well do I remember in the days of my nonage, and nonsense, subscribing my name as a candidate for two or three pounds of this then celebrated snuff. Reader, in those days it was the fashion, and under its powerful sway, did I enrol my patronymic, together with some score of my acquaintances. You might as well have been out of the world as out of Pontet's book; for not to know Pontet argued oneself unknown. But to my poor judgment, there were snuffs equally as good as the far-famed Martinique, although not quite so much in vogue, in proof of which, in obedience to all-powerful custom, I had a mixture of my own. This was composed of three-fourths Bureau, and one-fourth Havannah *Rapé*, but then such Havannah *Rapé*! Alas! every grain of it is gone, and so ended my mixture. The history of this snuff may not be out of place here. Some twenty odd years ago, when the colonnade was added to the Italian Opera-house, the workmen in digging the foundation discovered

a cellar, in which were four hogsheads; they contained pulverized tobacco, and which had some years previously been deposited in this remote cellar in the more substantial form of cigars, by *Père Pontet's* papa, who had forgotten, ere he made the grand voyage *de l'autre monde*, to apprize his chubby son of the fact of his having built up a wall at the extremity of his subterranean premises.

Thus was the present Pontet accidentally put in possession of the newly-discovered treasure—the Havannah cigars crumbled as they were by age, were worked up into snuff—the most wealthy and influential customers were in due season informed of the interesting fact. One noble lord took one hogshead to himself; another noble lord shared another with a friend; and the remaining two *Papa Pontet* distributed as an especial favour, to the numerous patronizers of his attractive mixtures. The Havannah *Rapé*, as it was christened, was a splendid snuff; soft and silky to the touch, and when mixed with old Bureau in the proportions I have mentioned, was as pretty a mixture as any private gentleman need wish to carry.

In those name-inscribing palmy days of snuff-taking, I was ever and anon poetical, and I remember on one occasion addressing the following to my discriminating nose:

“ Knows he who never took a pinch,
Nosey! the pleasure thence which flows?
Knows he the titillating joys
Which my nose knows?”

“ Oh, nose! I am as proud of thee,
As any mountain of its snows;
I gaze on thee, and feel that joy—
A Roman knows.”

Papa Pontet, like most fathers, has a son, and a formidable rival he is to his fond parent. *Pontet junior's* depôt is located in Cockspur-street, very near to Charing-cross. The son is worthy the sire—a more zealous tobacconist is not to be met with—he is proud of his calling, and is happy in the idea that he excels all competitors in the art and mystery of snuff-making. His own mixture is a delicate compound, and has been eulogized by the talented author of *Pelham*, who carries his admiration of it so far as to assert, that no gentleman should be without it. As far as I am concerned, to my poor thinking, it lacketh flavour; it is an admirable snuff for a beginner, but too mild for an old stager. *Pontet fils* has beyond compare the best collection of snuff-boxes in the metropolis, and his light snuffs are superlatively good—his Martinique quite as delicate as his Daddy's, and those who prefer brown snuffs to black, cannot do better than allow the younger *Pontet* to cater for their noses.

Mr. Harrison of St. James's-street, next to the Thatched House, has some particularly good snuffs, and *inter alia* a certain batch of *Marino*, which, like Hunt's blacking, is matchless; and he had (perhaps it may all be gone now) some of the finest *Bureau* that ever was tasted—this, by the way was only doled out by driblets to a chosen few of his customers—I much fear the stock is exhausted; but Mr. Harrison has still a most admirable collection of genuine old snuffs, which will well

répay the connoisseur should he be tempted to establish a mixture of his own.

In Oxford-street, all the world knows, Mr. Hudson has an emporium; his traffic, however, is principally in cigars, fine tobaccos, and Meerschaum pipes. He has snuffs certainly, but his *forte* lies in the smoking department. He is reputed to have the finest cigars, Canastré and Persian weed of any dealer in London—he *thinks* he has the finest snuff too—but as Mrs. Dolby Lovechild says in Buckstone's excellent farce of the Christening, "He thinks he has, but he hasn't."

On the same side of the way, (but considerably higher up, nearly facing North Audley-street, the curious in Dutch Carrotte, will do well to pay a visit to old Mrs. Harris's shop. This octogenarian widow has a batch of Dutch Carrotte that is invaluable—it is worth a pilgrimage to Mecca, to sniff the ponderous jar the foreman will hand you. He can produce some splendid light snuffs also; but the Dutchman throws them all in the shade. The snuff I speak of is some nineteen or twenty years old, and for a brown has more flavour than any I ever met with.

I must now lead my reader by the nose, and introduce him to Mr. Skinner, some five or six doors west of Temple-bar. It will be some time before a stranger will become accustomed to the flavour of Mr. Skinner's snuffs, they are peculiarly strong, rich, and full, more adapted probably to the gourmand than the epicure. I take generally as a winter snuff, Mr. Skinner's own mixture, and find it especially comforting—of course he will not divulge the secret of his mixture, but I have nearly hit upon it on more than one occasion; it is composed I think of Cuba, a little of the best black *Rafé*, *Bureau*, and Paris, these judiciously apportioned will be found a very tolerable imitation. If the Cuba Mr. Skinner mixes with the other snuffs, were a trifle older, the whole would be materially improved;—it is a capital snuff, however, as it is; indeed, all my friends pronounce it superlative. There is a branch establishment on Holborn-hill—a little poking place of great antiquity, looking more like the entrance to a dustman's underground habitation, than a wealthy citizen's warehouse: but it contains treasures invaluable to the real connoisseur. This little unpretending apology for a shop is under the superintendence of a dumpy sexagenarian, rejoicing in the patronymic of Gibbins—he sports a snuff-coloured scratch, and is eloquent in the praise of his employer's commodities. He has been the presiding genius of this place for upwards of forty years, and is quite "a character;" he never was known to give credit for an ounce of the weed during the above period, and I am certain if the Duke of Northumberland himself were to have his box filled and defer the payment to a future occasion, old Gibbins would empty the contents back again into the jar, and say, "No money—no snuff." He has offended many a wealthy customer, and would still, if the choleric little animal was not well known to all his master's regular *pratiques*. Old Gibbins has a batch of magnificent Marino, of which he is justly proud—it is decidedly good and finely flavoured. If he speak truly the snuff is very old indeed; he charges rather more for it, than the others, but it is cheap at any price.

And now, gentle reader, I must crave your indulgence to follow me as far as Fleet-street, where I will present you to Mr. Procter, whose

splendid establishment adjoins the premises of the celebrated Waithman at the corner of Bridge-street. Procter! (my very nose tingles with delight at the bare mention of the name) thou art the Prince of tobacconists! I could be lavish in encomiums on the precious treasures contained in the cellars of this house. With due deference to all other competitors in the trade, I must pronounce Mr. Procter, the most scientific, and the best purveyor of the day. His snuffs are of the first order, as regards age, flavour, and variety. I should be guilty of the basest ingratitude, did I omit to notice most particularly his old Cuba. Brother snuff-takers it is a perfect nosegay, rich and mellow in flavour, of a surprisingly equable grain, and soft as satin to the touch. This is without exception the very finest snuff I ever met with any where; there is nothing like it in London (and there is none out of it), and, moreover, I think it the best in Mr. Procter's whole stock. For Dutch snuffs, however, he stands again *per se*,—he has some Amsterdam that has never been out of his possession for the last five-and-twenty years, worth a guinea an ounce, and were I to be faithless to my Cuba, I might be seduced by this fascinating brunette, or its rival the Schoelten which is a gem in its way. This very scarce and little known snuff is only to be met with at Procter's, and is a great delicacy; it possesses all the velvety softness of the Martinique and Bolongaro, but excelling them in flavour. The best judge in England has pronounced it the *ne plus ultra* of browns; some few years ago, I was profane enough to mix it in equal proportions with another very scarce snuff, by name "la Ferme;" this also, is only to be met with at Procter's: the result to me was highly satisfactory, for the latter drew forth the flavour of the Schoelten, and made a most delicious mixture. Tastes, nevertheless, may vary; but the casual purchaser may be sure of meeting with first-rate snuffs of all kinds at 101, Fleet-street.

Mr. Procter has had the honour of being appointed snuff-maker to her majesty, and the various presents made by our gracious Queen to the numerous foreign potentates have been furnished by him. Mr. Procter has amassed a large fortune in his vocation, is a most respectable man, and bears the highest character in the city; he is a bit of a politician withal, reads the Chronicle, abuses the Tories, and borders sometimes upon Rad—, but I must not tell tales; the major part of his customers strange to say, are Conservatives, and they listen with becoming patience to the very liberal sentiments Mr. Procter gives vent to, while executing their orders.

Mr. Beynon, of Gracechurch-street, is a leviathan in *his* way. He has a host of admirers—he has certainly some excellent snuff, but a certain effluvium of ammonia pervades nearly all his mixtures, which has not any attraction for me. I must in justice add that two snuffs are exempt from this overpowering aroma—his coarse Bolongaro, and a very rare light brown snuff, named Andula Carrotte—these are both superlatively good; the former, the best of the kind I know of, and the latter possessing more flavour than this class is usually endowed with. Mr. Beynon has some of the finest tobacco in the kingdom, but his head man destroys the genuine natural flavour, by insinuating too much pungency, if I may be allowed the expression. Mr. Beynon should look to this.

Snuff may be compared to wine—age improves it; and snuff, like wine, if not originally good, will never be worth any thing—age may and will meliorate the flavour, but cannot give it. Snuff-taking may also be compared to dram-drinking—you begin by slow degrees, increasing in quantity, and increasing in strength, until “the force of backy can no further go.” One may be a slave to this luxurious habit; it will be well, therefore, to avoid all excess. I would recommend the neophyte to begin with Bolongaro, Martinique, or the younger Pontet’s mixture; he may then regale himself occasionally with some of Fribourg and Treyer’s *Bureau* and *Etrenne*. Or he may pay his devoirs to the Dutch family—there are a variety of *Carottes*, and savoury withal, the black snuffs are the most powerful, and require great age. Bolongaro and Martinique may be likened to Sauterne and Chablis, very light, and very pleasant. The old Cuba, and Mr. Skinner’s mixture, to burgundy and port wine, of great body, richness, and flavour.

Your genuine snuff-taker, and he who is choice in the quality and dressing of his snuff, are oftentimes subjected to unspeakable annoyances. For instance, what can be more excruciating than to have the contents of your box pawed about during its circuit round the dinner-table, by unthinking persons, who never heard of any snuff but Prince’s mixture. Some polite people too, will occasionally insert their noses into your box, instead of abstracting a pinch—an abomination which cannot be sufficiently condemned. I remember my old friend, George Brummell, many years ago giving an admirable rebuke to a stranger, at a party, in Portman-square, at which I was present. On the removal of the cloth, the snuff-boxes made their appearance, and Brummell’s, was particularly admired; it was handed round, and a gentleman finding it rather difficult to open, incautiously applied a desert-knife to the lid. Poor Brummell was on thorns; at last he could not contain himself any longer, and, addressing the host, said, with his characteristic quaintness, “Will you be good enough to tell your friend that my snuff-box is not an oyster!!!”

Beware, if you happen to be travelling on the roof of a coach, or in one of the railroad omnibusses, of pulling out your box, for ten to one, some greasy, unwashed Goth or Vandal will ask you for a pinch of snuff, if he do not unceremoniously thrust his filthy fingers into it, before you can repel the intrusion. If you refuse, you are certain of abuse; and if you comply, the reflection is any thing but agreeable. Keep your box in your pocket if you wish to preserve your snuff uncontaminated; for by parading it, you open the door to familiarity extremely difficult to repress.

An old acquaintance of mine, a bit of a dandy in his way, employed a certain eminent tailor for many years; when the father repaired to the continent, the sons carried on the lucrative business: one of them called on my friend one morning to receive instructions as to the alterations of a coat. It so happened that his snuff-box was on the table, and Mr. Snip, junior, with the utmost *sang-froid* helped himself to a copious pinch. My friend was absolutely galvanized, and determining to see how far his modest confidence could be carried, asked him if he would like a sandwich and a glass of Sauterne. The hospitable proposal was readily accepted; Snip sat down and discussed the luncheon perfectly unabashed. When it was concluded, he touched

upon the shop, and requested his customer to try on the coat, but to the young gentleman's astonishment, he replied,

"I could not think of insulting the friend who has taken my snuff, and eaten my luncheon by talking to him of coats, *that is quite out of the question.* Good morning, Mr. Snip." The bell was rung—Snip bowed out, and his bill paid.

The pinch of snuff and the sandwiches deprived Mr. Snip, junior, of him one of his best customers.

The best kind of boxes for the real snuff-taker are the *papier maché*; they keep the snuff moist and cool—gold and silver have a contrary effect. The potato boxes have had their day; but as they are generally made to open with a hinge composed of copper, the verdigris does not improve the flavour of your mixture. The round deep boxes of a brown colour are unquestionably superior to any others, they are now called Harringtons, from the Earl's decided preference for them, his lordship having first brought them into notice.

Mr. Evans of Fribourg and Treyer's has a few circular potato-boxes, made to contain two ounces each, which are unexceptionable.

Some gluttons fill their boxes to cramming, which is a great error, for it renders the snuff lumpy and clogged; to obviate this, I would strongly recommend every amateur to provide himself with a small sieve and brush, and after the snuff has been well rubbed on damp parchment, let him sift it carefully, and press every grain through with the brush; this process tends to soften the snuff, improve the touch, and renders it infinitely pleasanter than when in a compressed state.

Reader, my tale is nearly done; one word, however, before we part. If you have a maiden aunt, who delighteth to begrime her nose, or any elderly lady with a similar taste, from whom you have expectations of a pecuniary character, send her the following, with a snuff-box, and if it should have the effect of increasing your legacy, why the world will at least give you credit for being, in vulgar parlance "up to snuff."

Friendship imparts to life a zest,
And smooths his passage rough,
Then care for him who gives this test,
At least a pinch of snuff.

A snuff-box and a friend unite
In semblance to an inch;
For both our vacant hours delight,
And serve us *at a pinch.*

Both close or open as we will,
Both yield us what we're pleased at;
And both, if taken with due skill,
Are gifts *not to be sneezed at.*