

THE DRUG PANIC

is not so remarkable as it appears to Inspector Smellemout, who has no knowledge of medicine whatever, and cares for nothing but the pleasures of bullying and the hopes of promotion. So he goes to Dr. Black, and warns him! The D.D. Act has nothing before its eyes but a (largely imaginary) class of "addicts." Dr. Black is suspected of selling prescriptions to people who are not in real need of the drug. In America, traps are laid for doctors. A detective, usually a "lady," goes to the doctor with a false story of symptoms read up for the purpose from a medical book. She not improbably adds to the effect by shameless seduction; and if she gets the prescription, one way or another, the unhappy doctor is "railroaded" to jail. We have not reached that height of civilisation in England as yet; but we have only to keep on going!

Now what is the effect on Dr. Black? He has been, we may suppose, established as a physician, with perhaps an appointment at a leading hospital, for the past thirty years. He has found it necessary to prescribe constantly increasing doses of morphia—as the only palliative—in hopeless cases of cancer. And now an inspector who doesn't know his toe from his tibia is sitting opposite to him, notebook in hand, browbeating him. "Do you mean to tell me that after prescribing morphia daily to Miss Grey for nearly eleven years she has not become an addict?" And so on.* Of course she is an addict, as much as we ourselves are addicted to breathing—stop it for one brief hour, and death often ensues! Strange! No law about it yet, either—shameful!

The upshot of the Inspector's visit is to make Dr. Black try to prescribe less morphia. In other words, the law tries to compel him, under pain of the possible loss of his reputation or even of his diploma, to violate his oath as a physician to use his judgment and experience for his patients' benefit.

And meanwhile, Dr. White, that good man, who prescribes so little morphia, has an even better brother, Dr. Snow White, who never prescribes it at all, but, being

* A really self-respecting doctor would simply call his servants, tell them "Throw this gentleman out," and fight the matter in the Courts to the death. Alas! that so few of us can afford the luxury of self-respect; we have too often the spectre of wife and children at our ears, whispering "Compromise! Lie low!"