

REGISTRATION OF DEATHS.

Dr. Botsford's address on Hygiene at the recent meeting of the Canadian Medical Association, reiterates (what no one interested in the subject will deny) the importance of an efficient system of Registration. This has been urged again and again, and has been recognized by the Legislature of Ontario, which four years ago passed an Act to provide for the registration of births, marriages and deaths. The Act, however, has proved ineffectual for this purpose, owing principally to the apathy of medical men generally on the subject. In most civilized countries, a more or less efficient system of registration is carried on, accurate enough (at all events, in England) to furnish a series of statistics, from which the death-rate, and the prevalence and mortality of different forms of disease in every city and county in the kingdom can be calculated. Here, in Canada, we have absolutely no means of doing so, and it is almost impossible for any one desirous of information on this point to obtain it. Apropos of this subject, is the medal offered by Drs. Grant and Worthington, for an essay on "Zymotic diseases and their prevalence in Canada." The second division of the subject of this essay can only be the opinion of the writer, and cannot be reliable until statistics exist from which an accurate knowledge of those forms of zymotic diseases met with here, and their relative mortality, could be deduced.

The Registration Act of 1869, having as is generally admitted failed to secure its object, it becomes our duty to enquire into the causes of failure and how they can be remedied. The principal of these are four in number :

1st. The number of persons upon whom the duty of registering a death devolves, viz., the physician and some "person residing in the house," "or present at the death, or having any knowledge of the circumstances attending the same, or the coroner." "What is everybody's business is nobody's business," and so in this case where nobody has any particular interest in attending to the registration, each is apt to leave it to another, and the thing is left undone.

2nd. The person registering is required to take a greater or less amount of trouble to seek the registrar. This may be considerable if he is not generally known, or, as is often the case in sparsely

settled districts, if his residence is at a great distance from that of the deceased.

3rd. The difficulty of compelling registration. Although the Act provides penalties for the neglect of the duties imposed by it, and directs how these penalties may be enforced; yet, the doubt as to who is liable, and the indifference of all parties, make the compulsory and penal clauses ineffectual.

4th. In country places where the nearest doctor is many miles away, many patients are only seen at long intervals of time by the physician, possibly only once or twice, and that may be weeks or months before the death of the patient. In such a case it would be manifestly unjust to make the doctor liable for non-registration, as death may have occurred from some acute affection that did not exist at the time the visit was made.

The foregoing are, we believe, the principal causes of the inefficiency of the present Act. It remains now to consider what amendments will remedy the defects mentioned. It appears to us that a modification of the English system will be most effectual. Under it no body can be interred without a written permit from the Registrar, who grants it on receiving from the medical attendant a certificate of the cause of death. An objection to this might be made here that the responsibility would still be divided amongst too many; but this might be avoided by the modification proposed, *i. e.*, that it be incumbent on the Superintendent of every cemetery to require the friends of the deceased to furnish him with a certificate of the cause of death from the medical attendant, before the interment of the body be permitted; or, where no medical man has attended the deceased for a given period before death (say, two or three weeks), to require some person present at the time of death, to fill up and sign a declaration to that effect, stating the duration of the illness, its nature as far as the knowledge of the informant goes, and the age, nationality and employment of deceased. It should be the duty of the Superintendent of the cemetery to record these in a book kept for the purpose, and to forward the certificates and declarations to the District Registrar, to be by him entered and filed as is done at present; it being also his duty, from time to time, to inspect the books of the Superintendent of the cemetery, and compare them with his own, to see that no inter-