

## THE CANADA LANCET.

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### MINERAL WATERS.

It is not proposed in this article to go into the particulars of so large a subject, but to gather up and express a few generalities on the question. The use of mineral waters is of great antiquity, and constituted one of the most valued means in the armamentarium of the physician of the earliest and most barbaric times. It is unfortunate that in these days of more scientific observation, our knowledge of the use of these waters is still in so nebulous a condition. The reason is not far to seek; with scarcely an exception the springs have been controlled by organizations which from financial considerations did not "damn them with faint praise," but with too much, the natural result being lack of confidence in an article extravagantly vaunted. With this has always gone hand in hand an ignorant and purely empiric, and therefore in too many cases, unsuccessful use of what in properly selected cases is a most beneficial therapeutic agent. Leaving out of mention for the time the many famous spas of Europe, great Britain and America, and referring to such sources of information as the appendix of Squire's companion to the B. P., those who wish to study the chemical composition and properties of the better known waters in detail, we may formulate a few general statements regarding their use. It seems to be the fact that artificial waters, made on the basis of a careful chemical analysis of the natural waters, are much less effective. Why this should be so, in the case of a natural

water bottled and consumed at home is hard to say, unless it be that steady temperature, long process, extremely slow and perfect solution, and the intimate blending in certain very fixed proportions of minute quantities of very varying salts, gives the whole a value that the art of man cannot yet compass. When the waters come to be consumed at the spring or spa, that is a very different matter, for here the therapist calls to his aid complete change of environment, with all that that implies in hygienic, dietetic, and scenic variety, regulated habit, relaxation from business worry, congenial company, and the psychical *vis medicatrix* of the "hope that springs eternal in the human breast." Simon Baruch, M.D., of New York, in the article "Hydrotherapy and Mineral Springs," in Vol. I of Hare's System of Therapeutics, insists strongly on this point, and assigns an important part to the baths that accompany residence at a spa. He says, however, distinctly that "the effects of bathing in mineral waters differ very slightly if at all from those of bathing in ordinary water." The point is that the benefits of hydrotherapy, which are becoming better understood of late, can be secured only by the skilled direction of physicians who have studied the question and can direct the proper baths for each case, and by the skilled services of trained attendants. Without these, residence at a water cure is little more beneficial than rest at any ordinary out-of-town summering place.

Apart from the accessory circumstances mentioned, the mere ingestion of a larger quantity of water than usual favors tissue-change, by increasing the amount of plasma and flushing the emunctories, from the minute lymphatic system outwards. It is altogether reasonable to suppose, as indeed it is proved by clinical experience, that a medicated water, particularly a natural water, has these good effects in a much higher degree. It has been found that patients at such resorts as these need control as to the quantity consumed, as they usually think that they cannot have enough of a good thing, and consume so much as actually to cause, what Majendie and Trousseau called "alkaline cachexia," real poisoning from excess of alkali and consequent malnutrition. Baruch, in the article above referred to, makes a very good working classification of mineral waters under the heads: 1, alkaline; 2, saline; 3, sul-