

## THE CANADIAN MEDICAL TIMES.

A WEEKLY JOURNAL OF

MEDICAL SCIENCE, NEWS, AND POLITICS

KINGSTON, SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 27, 1873.

## TO CORRESPONDENTS.

Communications and reports solicited. Correspondents must accompany letters, if intended to be printed anonymously, with their proper signature, as a guarantee of good faith.

## TERMS OF PUBLICATION.

THE MEDICAL TIMES is supplied six months for ONE DOLLAR. Address orders and remittances to JAMES NIXON, M.D., Kingston.

POSTAGE ON THE MEDICAL TIMES.—The rate of postage on the Medical Times is Five Cents per quarter.

It has been established by a recent decision of the Home Secretary in England that no medical witness is bound to give medical evidence even in a criminal case without a tender of expenses having been made at the time the summons is served. This decision has an important bearing on the interests of medical men, as practically it lays open claims to full compensation for loss of time in reaching and attending court. It is the first step towards the payment of medical witnesses. But it appears that to obtain "reasonable expenses" these must be first demanded by the witness before giving evidence.

A circular has been issued under the direction of Dr. S. P. Moore, late Surgeon-General of the Army of the Confederate States, and twenty-five other medical officers, calling a convention of the Confederate field and hospital surgeons, to meet in Atlanta, Georgia, on the 20th May, 1874. The object is "to rescue from oblivion all the important medical and surgical facts developed within the armies of the Confederate States during the late war." Immediate action is considered necessary, and steps are urged to be taken to secure a large delegation. The call is stated to be based, not alone upon the action of the Georgia Medical Association, but the earnest solicitations of many Confederate surgeons throughout the South repeatedly expressed within the past two years. It may therefore be expected that a general gathering will take place, and that the convention will set about the collection and publication of the many interesting facts and reports which, originating in the experience of the Southern military surgeons, are as yet mostly lost to science. Unfortunately, it may now prove almost too late to secure the full experience of the medical officers; and it would have been well to have set about this worthy object earlier. Very likely the publication by the Washington Government of the "Medical and Surgical History of the War of the Rebellion" has stimulated this effort on the part of the surgeons of the South. In this movement we wish them every success. They may not, it is true, be able to present such sumptuous volumes as those which have been got up at Washington; but we doubt not they will be able to bring together contributions to military surgery of sufficient interest to the profession to make a valuable work, and one the publication of which may be undertaken by a publisher on a commercial basis, and so avoiding the scandals which have attached to the mode in which the American History has been distributed.

## THE SALE OF QUACK MEDICINES.

That quackery prevails to a lamentable extent in Canada is unfortunately too true, although it must be admitted in mitigation of the grievance that in other countries, as in the United States, for example, it is carried on more unblushingly and to a yet greater extent. But we have only to turn to the columns of our daily and weekly papers to notice how largely the vendors of nostrums impose upon the public. It is indeed a matter for regret that the publishers of otherwise respectable newspapers permit these extravagant and fulsome advertisements to appear in their journals, and much more so that they should give them the prominence which they receive. The so-called religious weeklies are particularly open to objection in this respect; the keen advertisers of the specious wares are always anxious to gain admission for their advertisements into the religious and family journals, and it is here that they do most mischief.

It is this species of quackery which mostly prevails in Canada; the professional quack has not such a field and does not thrive so well as in other countries; but the vendors of secret proprietary medicines abound. A few years ago all the nostrums to be found in the shops of druggists and dealers, were the productions of manufacturers in the United States; but now, through a change in the revenue laws, the American manufacturers have been led to establish branch manufactories in Canada, a circumstance which of itself has led not a few Canadians to embark in the fabrication of bitters, liniments and pills. The trade is pushed with much energy, the goods are systematically advertised, placarded and posted, and painted on dead walls and fences, and they are in most cases peddled round to all the country stores along the accessible lines of road. The profits of the retailer are made much larger on this class of goods than is possible with groceries and simple commodities, and hence the shopkeeper has considerable self-interest in recommending and pushing the sale of these articles. The man who enters a city drug store or a country shop is sure to find the place decorated with attractive show cards, a glance at which almost invariably leads to a remark from the shopkeeper that So-and-so's liniment (selling at 25 cents) is "a good thing," but that the Digger Indian Bitters (selling at a dollar, with profits at 50 per cent.) "is the best thing out," and that the visitor "had better take home a bottle."

Curiously enough there are men to be found who are quite willing to spend a dollar on a large bottle of medicine attractively put up, who are not so willing to pay even a smaller fee to a medical man. The knowing quacks make their bottles large to take the eye; and the dose is also made large that they may be the sooner emptied and a fresh bottle required. There are even persons to be found, mostly in country places, who are infatuated with the notion that they can study the practice of medicine to advantage and with sufficient completeness by reading the almanacs and annuals which are distributed by the quacks, and which usually contain some wonderful lore respecting the complaints which it is the

province of their nostrums to cure. The great stumbling block of these geniuses is in the diagnosis; but as to the treatment of any complaint they deem themselves fully equal after hearing or ascertaining what it is. Need it be remarked that untold mischief is the necessary result!

There is undoubtedly a vast consumption of proprietary medicines in this country, the money spent on which must be regarded as a misdirected expenditure of means which ought to go to the support of the educated medical practitioner and the respectable druggist. The evil done by such indiscriminate dosing is incalculable, while the example of the trade is demoralizing in its effect. For instance, a certain compound latterly very extensively advertised in Canada had a most extravagant printed lie got up in its favour that it was the discovery of a wonderful French physician (whose very name is unknown in medical annals); other articles have had notoriously untruthful certificates published, and the manufacturers of these compounds, pushing them by such deceptive practices, are known to be getting rich!

It becomes a serious question, how to check or prevent the mischief which is being done by the extension of this form of quackery. How can it be accomplished? Shall we ask the State to step in and exact a revenue from proprietary articles with the view of making them dearer, and so checking their consumption? The thing would be legitimate and not without example from other countries. The revenue stamp adds to the expense, and contributes some income to the State; but on the other hand, the national stamp has in England given a species of license of respectability to certain articles which would not otherwise have attained so ready a sale. In France and other countries on the continent of Europe the Government steps in and by an officer ascertains the composition of the article, which, if deemed simple and harmless, receives authorization. This is done in the interest of the people, but it is not what we would wish to see done in Canada.

Moral means are probably the only effective ones that are left open to be exercised in this country. It is incumbent, first of all that, physicians and surgeons should set their faces against the use of any quack nostrum, and this must be done without any appearance of self-interest. If we go into a house and find that some proprietary pills are being made use of as a family medicine, it will be well to advise the use of the compound rhubarb pill of the pharmacopœia, or some other suitable and legitimate medicine, which may be more cheaply obtained from a respectable druggist than the quack nostrum. In this quiet way much may be done by medical men themselves to check an evil from which undoubtedly they are made to suffer. Then the clergy and the editorial and newspaper publishing professions have to be acted upon. Clergymen must be made to feel that their church organs are taking the devil's money in the pay of the quack advertiser; and that the position and influence of their religious newspapers are perverted by being made the vehicles of such advertisements. If once the true idea can be inculcated that quackery is cheater