

Selected Articles.

THE ACTIVE PRINCIPLES OF PLANTS IN MEDICAL PRACTICE.*

BY WILLIAM F. WAUGH, A.M., M.D.,

Fellow of the Chicago Academy of Medicine.

Is the old therapy satisfactory? So little that it injures one's standing to confess to faith in the curative value of drugs. Therapeutic nihilism is one of the earmarks of the truly scientific physician. And the same spirit prevails among the laity, as is shown by the popularity of any method of treatment that is not regular medicine. The way people flock to the advocates of Christian science, faith cure, homœopathy, hydropathy, Chinese and Indian "doctors," (God save the mark!) Father Kneipp, vegetarianism, Perkins' tractors, the grape and whey cures, osteopathy, Keeleyism, electricity, hypnotism, mineral waters and other forms of suggestive therapy, attest to the public's eagerness to take up anything that is not drug medication. The reason is not far to seek. We are not lacking in valuable drugs, but we have not the requisite skill in applying them. We may classify our ignorance under three sections: we lack a knowledge of physiology, of pathology, and of therapeutics. In each there has been progress in the last quarter of the century, but in none has there been developed a great central, comprehensive conception, such as the evolution theory, by which the isolated facts may be grouped into an harmonious whole. Nor has this work progressed so far that the workers in each field can lend a helping hand to those in the others. The human brain has its limitations; there is a saturation point, which we reach sooner than we like; and the pathologist leaves little brain power to be utilized by therapeutic studies. And these have unfortunately taken the form of the exploration of a vast number of new remedies, introduced and pushed by commercial interests. During their transient popular term someone reaps a harvest and then the drug is forgotten, its true value lost sight of in the crowd of its successors.

I desire this evening to call your attention to some improvements in dealing with old drugs. The profession tends more and more to the use of chemical remedies, the reason for neglecting drugs of vegetable origin being the uncertainty and variability of the latter class. This objection is emphasized occasionally by such occurrences as this: A patient had been taking the fluid extract of conium, gradually raising the dose to 40 ℥. Refilling the pre-

*Read before the Chicago Academy of Medicine, January, 1898.