

THE CANADA LANCET.

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Criticism and News.**

Communications solicited on all Medical and Scientific subjects, and also Reports of Cases occurring in practice. Advertisements inserted on the most liberal terms. All Letters and Communications to be addressed to the "Editor Canada Lancet, Toronto."

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SECRET PROPRIETARY MEDICINES.

Hitherto the so-called patent medicines have been generally ignored by the profession. That we have acted wisely in simply ignoring this monstrous imposition is open to serious question. Had we been active rather than passive, our influence would not have been impotent in stemming the tide which threatens to overwhelm us, nor are we wholly guiltless of sins of commission. It is not impossible to find testimonials of the alleged virtues of many secret compounds signed by M.D.'s. We anxiously hope, in the interest of mankind, for the credit of our noble profession, and for the advance of scientific medicine, that in future no physician may be found so forgetful of his position as to endorse any secret nostrum, no matter how seductive the temptation placed before him. The manufacture and sale of proprietary medicines have become one of the prominent institutions and established industries of the civilized world. Millions are engaged directly or indirectly in imposing on suffering humanity an innumerable host and variety of alleged specifics for every ill, real or imaginary. No inconsiderable portion of the earnings of the people are engulfed in this destructive maelstrom, for which they not only receive no benefit, but often positive injury; and the sum of human misery is largely augmented by the promiscuous administration of deleterious drugs and compounds contained in these lauded nostrums.

The chief factor in promoting this giant evil is

a purchased press. It has been said that the freedom of the press is the palladium of our liberties. While this is true in a general sense, yet like all other great powers, the press is subject to abuse, and may become a great tyrant. When the financial interests of those who control it are antagonistic to the welfare of the public, its potency for harm is only equalled by its almost unlimited power. Therefore the press should be held accountable for the proper use of so great a power. That it should be required to acknowledge its responsibilities to the commonwealth, and that it should not be wholly actuated by mercenary motives, or promote fraud and imposition in its own financial interests, is obvious. The reading public have a right to demand truthful information, on this, as well as every other subject; and that the press, so potent for good, should not prostitute its high function in the worship of mammon. The common weal is its alleged and should be its prime motive and function, and only on this ground can it claim immunity from censorship. When it fails in its function or degrades its important office, public welfare demands that government should exert authority over a venal press, and restrain its cupidity. "The children of paternal government ask for bread and are given a stone."

One of the duties of government is to protect the governed from the rapacity of foreigners or subjects, from the evil results of want of knowledge and experience, and from the powerful but demoralizing influence of a suborned press. Editors as a rule, are amongst the most intelligent of the community, and cannot be excused on the plea of ignorance; although in justice, we must admit, that many of them are sadly misinformed on technical subjects, especially that of medicine. But the glaring frauds of patent medicine advertisements are so palpable, that it would be an insult to their intelligence to doubt their knowledge. Is there a newspaper in the land which does not pollute its columns in promoting this imposition? Even the so-called moral and religious periodicals are not guiltless of degradation in this respect. Who has not seen, even in the columns of the latter, advertisements criminally suggestive of "the slaughter of the innocents?"

The pulpit, that bulwark of morality, has been culpably silent on this subject in the past, and even ministers of the Gospel lend their names and