

## PHARMACEUTICAL

### SOME MEDICINES OF THE SWAMPEE INDIANS OF THE NORTH\*

By C. Flexon, Winnipeg, Man.

At a late hour during the close of last week, a most interesting gentleman, a stranger to me, hearing that I had been appointed a delegate to this meeting, called to see if a brief record of his experience among the Swampee Indians of the North, with whom he had lived for six years, would be acceptable to me. I thanked Mr. Strath—for such is his name—and he thereupon furnished the following particulars of some of the drugs prescribed by him in his capacity of medical officer at Norway House, about 400 miles due north of Winnipeg. The conversation which I had with him was unfortunately but too short, as it was extremely fascinating. He has evidently been a close observer of those people. Apart from speaking their language fluently, I should say a pretty accurate knowledge has been gained by him of the strength and the weakness of the Cree mind. As a student of Greek and Hebrew, he has a remarkably high opinion of the Cree language. For beauty and perfection, he says, it cannot be surpassed, and to hear him talk of the poetry and eloquence of some of the native sermons which he has heard, has somewhat destroyed my confidence in the language in which we are conversing on this occasion and which we are conceited enough to suppose to be the best in the world.

A large number of the diseases common among the white people are just as common among the Indians, and while many of the drugs used by them are well known to us, the manner of using them is certainly different. In the treatment of worms, for instance, Male Shield Fern, the *Aspidium* of the U. S. Pharmacopœia; Filix Mas, of the Ph. Br., is given as a strong infusion, combined with Senna and

Wild Indigo. The latter article, by the way, is used as an antiseptic, and has excellent drying properties in the treatment of eczema humidum, or "weeping eczema." One of the commonest drugs with them, and which is to be seen hanging up to dry in every wigwam or tepee, is the Wekas or Sweet Flag—the *Calamus* of the Pharmacopœia. It is considered a specific in all throat troubles, with the exception of diphtheria, which is unknown to them. In cases of pharyngitis and tonsillitis it is used externally and internally. The rhizome is chewed and the saliva allowed to wash the throat. Poultrices are made by mixing the powder with boiling water. It is a curious fact that the Indians are not only ignorant of gargles, but of the act of gargling, and Mr. Strath has been amused time and again in his efforts to get a Cree to gargle. This drug is carried about by the natives in the winter time as a tonic, and is chewed because of its stimulating properties by the Indians as tobacco is chewed by the white—or should we say more correctly, by the civilized man. Most of their medicines are in the form of infusions. Very little is known about the salts, and it was with the greatest difficulty that the officer could persuade a patient to take Epsom salts, in consequence of a deep-rooted suspicion that the magnesium sulphate will produce inflammation of the bowels. Pills, no matter how strong, are swallowed ad libitum. Podophyllum Peltatum, or Mandrake, is taken in doses of 20 grains. Carui Fructus, or the common Caraway, is indigenous to this country and is the common remedy for colic, a complaint perhaps more frequent and more stubborn than with us.

Another indigenous plant and one which grows in that latitude in great profusion is the Caulophyllum, or the Blue Cohosh, also known by the name of Pappoose Root, Squaw Root or Blueberry Root. It is used very largely in obstetrics and all female complaints. In doses of 30 to 60 grains the powdered rhizome is given to produce abortion; but the Crees have a powder which they mix with the Co-

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