

The Pharmacopoeia of the Botanical Physician Eighty Years Ago*

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IN early times in Upper Canada there was a dearth of regularly educated physicians; it was not easy for a professional man to make a living by his practice—except in the towns, patients were few and generally poor. But there was no scarcity of those who undertook to cure the sick. The place of the regular physician was not infrequently filled by the herb doctor, the “yarb doctor,” as he generally called himself. Most of these came from the United States, few remained long in the same place, and they were generally ignorant quacks—although occasionally a man of real genius in the treatment of disease was to be found amongst them. Not a few were of the Thomsonian school, of which the founder was Samuel Thomson, born before the American Revolution in what is now New Hampshire (n. 1769, ob. 1843); he patented some of his medicines, which are not yet completely forgotten, and which seem to have met a ready sale.

In 1832 at Hamilton, in Upper Canada, was published a small volume of 120 small octavo pages, which purports to contain his practice of medicine except what he reserved to be taught orally to those who bought the right to use his system. His theory was that “medicines suited to every disease grow spontaneously on our native soil,” and that these “are better suited to our constitution.”

In this book he names the plants he employs and gives their qualities and the methods of applying them.

I propose in this paper to give an account of the pharmacopoeia. I italicize the names Thomson uses, and in giving the

* From a paper, contributed to the Botanical Society of Edinburgh by the Honourable Mr. Justice Riddell, of Toronto, Life Fellow and Local Secretary of the Society. Some portions of the paper which are purely botanical, are here omitted.