

THE CANADA LANCET.

A MONTHLY JOURNAL OF

MEDICAL AND SURGICAL SCIENCE,
CRITICISM AND NEWS.

Original Communications.

THE THERAPEUTICS OF BLOOD- LETTING.*

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Born at a time when venesection was recognized as a great therapeutic agent, and having from my earliest infancy the run of a surgeon's office, there is nothing more firmly fixed in my early memory (except perhaps the extraction of refractory molars with the key of Garangcot), than the bared arm, the flowing blood, the lancet and the bandage.

Later, when as a boy I became acquainted with the practice of medicine in the woods of Canada, bleeding was the popular remedy for all fevers, on their accession, sudden pain and injuries. There was scarcely a settlement that did not possess at least one man who kept a lancet and could use it. If at a gathering a woman fainted, or a man was knocked senseless, the sleeve was drawn up, and some neighbor—perhaps with a penknife—opened a vein; and the fact that when the blood began to flow the patient revived, firmly convinced the operator of the value of this remedy.

Venesection was considered *the* remedy in pneumonia. You will remember that when O'Meara was arguing with Napoleon on his want of confidence in the value of medication, he instanced inflammation of the lungs as a disease not likely to be removed without it. Bonaparte asks, "What is the remedy?" "Blood-letting is the sheet anchor." "Oh!" says Napoleon, "'tis the surgeon cures it. I always had faith in surgeons." The pregnant woman thought bleeding a necessary precaution to prevent the accidents and diseases peculiar to her condition, and I have repeatedly seen her come to be bled on her own responsibility,

without asking a question as to whether it was necessary or useful. The farmer bled his horses when he turned them out to pasture, and had himself bled when the weather became warm. The lancet, like the swallow, was the harbinger of spring.

From time immemorial bleeding in some form had been recognized as a valuable agent in the treatment of diseases, and as little likely to do harm as any other remedy in use. Virgil, in one of his pastoral poems, talking of the diseases of sheep, says, as rendered by Dryden:—

"Deep in their bones when fevers fix their seat,
And rack their limbs, and lick the vital heat,
The ready cure to cool the raging pain,
Is underneath the foot to breathe a vein."

Now we have changed all this. If we were to propose to our patients to take sixteen, twenty, or forty ounces of blood from them, the proposition would shock them more than the loss of the blood affected their fathers or mothers, and it is doubtful if among the younger members of the profession, there could be found a man that would know how to draw it. Bleeding has truly become a "lost art." I doubt whether you could find one in fifty of the graduates of the last fifteen years who had ever bled a patient, or seen a vein opened. When in consultation I have advised venesection, I have been repeatedly called aside by the doctor and asked to do it, he adding "I have never seen a patient bled."

To what can we attribute this complete neglect and disuse of a remedy so universally employed in the memory of men still practising—that had been in use so long, and that had been endorsed by so many celebrated physicians? Was it wise to give it up so entirely? Is it useless as a remedy? Is it dangerous? Were our forefathers all fools?—all mistaken? Or have we other remedies quite as efficacious, and less unpleasant?

The days of venesection were the days of enormous dosing. We read in the old medical works of the "*vis medicatrix naturæ*," but the ordinary practice of the time would lead one to suppose it was little trusted in. The patient seemed to be considered in a slough, out of which he was to be lifted bodily by the power of medicine and medication; and, besides bleeding and blistering, the enormous doses of crude drugs, and the rapidity

*Read before the Ontario Med. Association, June, 1893.