THE CANADA LANCET.

A Monthly Journal of Medical and Surgical Science Criticism and News.

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TORONTO, OCTOBER, 1888.

The LANCET *has the largest circulation of any Medical Journal in Canada.*

THE COLD BATH IN FEVERS.

The use of the cold bath, wet pack, or sponge, in abstracting heat from the body in fever, is generally looked upon as a recent therapeutic measure, and so indeed it is, if we regard the number of cases so treated; though the method has been known and written about since the beginning of the present century at least. Thus, as early as 1812, typhoid fever was treated by Récamier, in the Hotel Dieu, Paris, by the cold bath pure and simple, the patients being kept from fifteen to twenty minutes—two or three times a day—in a bath at from 68° to 70° F. All along from that time to the present, pamphlets and small works have been issued on the subject, the whole showing of which seems to be, that the mechanical abstraction of heat is a very valuable therapeutic procedure in cases of high temperature. In Germany, this method has been generally adopted for the past fifteen or twenty years. In England and America, the cold bath system proper has not been put into anything like general practice; while in France, the hospitals at Lyons are the only ones where the treatment is carried out as a system.

Dr. Thomas says, that "prolonged high temperature kills," and it has been stated and warmly advocated by good men in the profession, that the mechanical abstraction of heat by cold, gives the patient, suffering from intense fever a respite, and allows the physiological processes, or at least some of them, to go on for a time in an approximately normal manner. This seems reasonable, even though it is not stated that the undue formation of heat under the pathological process, whatever it may be, is checked, by the application of cold to the surface of the body. Certain it is, that an improved condition of the nervous system follows the use of the sponge or bath, and the patient frequently gets rest from the wearying delirium, and falls into a slumber which must be refreshing, and places him in a better position for recovery.

That the practice of applying cold outwardly has not been more universal, is probably due to the fact that there has been, and is, a prejudice in the minds of the laity, that cold applied to one suffering from fever, is a potent factor in the production of the untoward result we are so anxious to obviate. This old landmark which has been handed down from generation to generation still holds, and the general practitioner needs a deal of courage, who, especially in country practice, will order cold baths to be followed out systematically. If the patient live, it was in spite of the senseless treatment; if he die, the doctor certainly killed him by the use of cold. Such would be the almost unanimous verdict of the laity.

Now old landmarks are not to be despised, and the light of modern investigation shows that the cold water treatment is not, to say the least, an unmixed good; albeit, the ignorant opinion of the laity is entirely groundless from a scientific standpoint. They fear the patient will "take cold," a result not at all dreaded by the educated physician; and yet facts are now known, which go far to show that the cold bath treatment is not scientifically correct.

"Prolonged high temperature kills," not, it is believed, so much by the actual presence of increased heat itself, as by the *greatly increased activity* of the phenomena of the vital chemistry, upon which this heat depends. If this be true, and it seems to have been clearly demonstrated as true, then the aim should be, not so much to abstract heat, as to check its production.

From a series of observations made by the French scientists, Fredericq and Minquand, it has been shown that the application of cold to the surface "markedly augments the absorption of oxygen and production of carbonic acid, and consequently the production of heat."

This theory, namely, the increase of "intersti-