

Original Communications.

Nature's Power to Heal. By WILLIAM CANNIFF, M.D., M.R.C.S.E., Toronto. Prepared for the Canadian Medical Association.

Mr. President and Gentlemen :

In the paper I now have the honour to present for your consideration, I may not be able to claim much originality. The thoughts and reflections are, in a measure, the faint echo of what has been before now advanced by others. The necessity has been laid upon me of saying something at the present meeting of this Association, upon the subject of Surgery. I can hardly say that it is a report upon the subject, but I wish to declare to you that I did all I could to secure for your prepared appetites something worthy of the occasion. At an early day I wrote to my esteemed friend, Dr. Hingston, reminding him of this particular duty; but he had become Lord Mayor of the great commercial metropolis of the Dominion, and so could not undertake the important work. And I am sure you will allow me here to observe that Montreal, in honouring a distinguished member of the Medical profession, one of her most respected citizens, did itself infinite credit, and is four-fold honoured in the possession of so worthy a head. I also wrote to my equally respected friend, Dr. Grant, who had been appointed, with Dr. Hingston and myself, to report on Surgery. But circumstances made it impossible for him to attend to the matter. Occupying the responsible and honourable position of Medical adviser to the Governor General's family, he could not hesitate to respond to the call, to accompany that esteemed family across the Atlantic; and, if time and brain-work and worth are duly rewarded, Dr. Grant's outgoing, although I have no doubt extremely agreeable, will be followed by more pleasant incomings. So you see that if a proper report on Surgery, worthy of the science and of the Association, is not forthcoming here to-day, it is not because I did not use my best efforts to secure the active services of two of the most prominent surgeons of the Dominion.

With these explanatory remarks I will now venture to present to you a few remarks, somewhat disjointed it may be, upon a subject by no means new, but one of never-ceasing importance. I refer to the subject of *Nature's Power to Heal.*

I trust you will pardon anything I may say which appears like self-assertion or egotism. After one has been in practice a number of years, although he may

lose faith in a good many things he was taught to believe as a student, he is likely to become bigoted, so far as his own experience is concerned.

Before proceeding I would call attention to the fact that, upon this continent, neither in the United States nor Canada, is found a distinction between the physician and surgeon. Here and there in cities and larger towns exist one who gives his attention more particularly to one of these branches of the medical science or to midwifery, but mainly a doctor in this country means a physician, surgeon and accoucheur altogether. Although prepared to admit that the distinction, such as exists in Great Britain may be advocated with some good arguments, I must say I think it is fortunate we have not adopted the custom. In a new country, sparsely settled, it is not often that a field in either branches can be found sufficiently large to satisfy the practitioner in any specialty. This, doubtless, is the reason that mostly all medical men in America are general practitioners. There is to my mind a more cogent reason why medicine and surgery should not be severed. So far as surgery is an art, it may occupy a distinct place without detriment, but, when we regard it as a science, and examine the basis upon which it rests, we find one that is common to it and medicine—the physiological and pathological facts which form the ground-work of one constitutes the basis of the other. And in the field of practice, he will fall sadly short who attempts to treat surgical affections without a knowledge of the principles of medicine; while the exclusive physician, who has little or no knowledge of what more particularly belongs to surgery, will often fail to render full justice to his patient. Such being the case, and with the subject I have to treat, I shall not confine myself entirely to what particularly belongs to surgery.

The power of Nature to restore parts both internally and externally in every tissue of the body, is, I fear, not fully appreciated and trusted; is not sufficiently studied, and therefore not understood; as a trustworthy guide in the treatment of disease and injuries, she is too frequently ignored. I must go further and express my opinion that very often Nature is thwarted in her efforts, instead of being humbly followed. It may seem a startling and severe assertion, but, nevertheless, I believe that in the practice of not a few, as much is done to interrupt the work of Nature as to assist—in other words: as many would recover from sickness and injuries, and as speedily, without treatment as with it, in the aggregate. I do not mean to say that no benefit is