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Criticism and News.

Communications solicited on all Medical and Scientific subjects, and also Reports of Cases occurring in practice. Advertisements inserted on the most liberal terms. All Letters and Communications to be addressed to the "Editor Canada Lancel, Toronto."

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TOO MANY DRUGS.

The innumerable host and indescribable variety of drugs have become an intolerable burthen to the student, the pharmacist and the physician, and a bane to the afflicted patient. What, with the various tinctures, extracts, alkaloids, etc., of every thing that is in heaven above, or in all the earth beneath, or in the waters under the earth, and their infinite combinations, we are overwhelmed. But a very superficial knowledge can possibly be acquired of our *Materia Medica*, by the most industrious student or physician. With the exception of a comparatively few standard remedies, our knowledge of the chemical, physiological, and therapeutical actions, is too vague to admit of intelligent prescription. Yet, fashion almost compels us to prescribe the new remedies, not because our own experience, or that of the profession, has established their efficacy; but because we desire to be up to the so-called advance of science. Many, we fear, prescribe remedies of which they have but limited knowledge, theoretical or practical; not so much in the interests of the patient, perhaps, as in their ambition to be fashionable; and often take credit for their supposed superiority, over the Rip Van Winkles, who still cautiously prescribe those remedies, whose virtues have been established by the test of time. How many of those vaunted new remedies have succumbed to that almost infallible test within the last twenty years, and how many of the present and future will succumb during the

next twenty, it is impossible to enumerate or predict. Yet, fashion will continue to predominate, often, we fear, at the expense of the patient's health, and even life.

It will be admitted that the variety and number of remedies prescribed are usually in inverse ratio to our experience. The young physician, with but a limited theoretical knowledge of *materia medica*, is disposed to vary his prescriptions daily, because of the multitude of remedies placed before him; and to reproach himself for his supposed stupidity and want of success. This frequently results in loss of confidence in all remedies. Whereas, the older physician has, after many failures and grievous disappointments, eliminated all but a comparatively few established remedies, on which dearly bought experience has taught him to rely with confidence.

It might be said that this would hinder if not entirely prevent advance in *materia medica*. But the great majority of our profession have neither time or opportunity for experiments, on a scale sufficiently extensive, to accomplish any good purpose. Therefore, it is in the interest, not only of the doctor and his patients, but of science, to allow new remedies time to become established by the experiments of the minority, whose experience, training and opportunities, enable them to make those experiments in a scientific manner, and on a scale sufficiently large, to command confidence in those preparations which they endorse.

On the other hand, many antiquated remedies and compounds are retained in the pharmacopœia, which might be eliminated without injury to its usefulness. This would, in some degree, relieve the student from almost useless study, and the pharmacist from keeping a stock of articles which are so seldom prescribed, that they deteriorate in value, and become inert through age. Many of the compounds therein described have served their day and generation, and are superannuated by the rapid advance in science in every direction, but more especially by the science of chemistry. The alkaloids, or active principles of most of the vegetable remedies can now be obtained, in which uncertainty of therapeutical action is reduced to a minimum. Hence, many of the preparations and combinations of former days, with their multiple variations in strength and effect are superceded. The shot gun of our fathers should be replaced by the