

THE Canadian Journal of Medical Science.

A MONTHLY JOURNAL OF BRITISH AND FOREIGN MEDICAL SCIENCE, CRITICISM, AND NEWS.

U. OGDEN, M.D.,
EDITOR.

R. ZIMMERMAN, M.B., L.R.C.P., London.
107 Church Street, Toronto, Corresponding Editor.

SUBSCRIPTION, \$3 PER ANNUM.

All Communications, Letters and Exchanges must be addressed to the Corresponding Editor,

TORONTO, SEPTEMBER, 1876.

Selections: Medicine.

ON INTERMITTENCY AND IRREGULARITY OF THE PULSE, AND ON PALPITATION, CARDIAC, AND AORTIC.

BY DR. GEORGE W. BALFOUR, EDINBURGH.

Irregularity of the pulse is most frequently associated with mitral stenosis or with gout; no doubt it is also associated with other cardiac affections, or with apparently simple dyspepsia, rarely, however, I think, unless these affections or dyspepsia be associated with the gouty dyscrasia. Simple intermittence, however, stands in a somewhat different category; sometimes it is only an early indication of failure of cardiac power dependent upon anæmia, overwork, or worry, or upon valvular disease or gout, but it is often a purely nervous phenomenon. In the former class of cases we have the affection commencing by an intermission, followed by a thump. As the disease progresses this thump becomes associated with a sensation of tumbling, and by-and-by the irregularity and inequality of the heart's action reveals itself to the sufferer by a rapid and irregular succession of thumps and tumbles of varying force. In the class of cases, however, to which I now refer, the disease never progresses beyond the thumping stage, and the thumps are not even very distinct; the patient has at the most an uncomfortable sensation in his cardiac region of varying intensity, lasting for less than a second, and if we happen to feel the pulse at that moment we become aware that this uncomfortable sensation is associated with the omission of a

pulsation and nothing more; and sometimes this takes place regularly without the patient being in any respect conscious of it. Such cases are of purely nervous origin, and arise from sudden fright, grief, or anxiety; and the intermission thus produced, though for a time of frequent recurrence, gradually dies out, and sometimes disappears entirely, while in many cases it remains permanent, though much more infrequent than at first. This form of intermittence originates in the accidental coincidence of fright or anxiety with a heart congenitally or acquiredly feeble, or with a nervous system from similar causes unduly impressionable. I have known it commence with the shock of a railway accident, and in that case the intermissions were at first every second beat, but in a few months came down to one intermission in twenty beats, and I have no doubt will ultimately disappear. Richardson has known it follow a shipwreck in one instance, with a somewhat similar result, and sudden grief, anxiety, or anger, in several other cases.

This form of intermission is simply an exaggeration of what we have all probably felt at one time or other when our heart has, for the moment, stood still in the face of any impending danger to ourselves or others. It is merely an aggravated form of what our vernacular poet, James Smith, has so graphically described as indicative of maternal anxiety:—

"My vera heart gaes, loup, loup,
Fifty times a day."

This "loup" being nothing but the perceptible thump which succeeds a momentary intermission. In nervous, and therefore impre-