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TO CORRESPONDENTS.

Communications and reports solicited. Correspondents must accompany letters, if intended to be printed anonymously, with their proper signature, as a guarantee of good faith.

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A very suggestive inquiry has been put by a correspondent, who writes briefly to ask, "If this is not a favourable opportunity to attempt a Dominion Medical Bill." Undoubtedly it is, and we are expecting the measure proposed by the Medical Association to receive a weight of authority and recommendation from the meeting of the Association at St. John. There can be very little difference of opinion as to the greater value and estimation of a central and national "College of Physicians and Surgeons" above one of mere provincial limitation; but under our system of Confederation educational matters are altogether left to the provinces themselves, and there may possibly be questions of constitutional law to hamper the enactment of a comprehensive Dominion measure. The great extent of our country also places obstacles in the way of establishing the much desired one-portal system in this country, but even these obstacles are not insuperable. It is for the profession to frame a suitable draft bill, and after discussing it fully in the general and local societies, then to test the question in the Dominion Parliament.

Another meeting was held at Manchester on the 11th July last, with respect to the reform of medical charities. This meeting adopted the principle of provident dispensaries as the one best fitted to meet the case of the large number of working people above the condition of pauperism, who, while unable to pay the ordinary medical fees, are yet well able to make small periodical payments for medicine and medical attendance. A committee was charged with the duty of drawing up a scheme showing how the provident system could best be established in Manchester and Salford.

The Manchester meeting was attended by a deputation from London, including Sir Rutherford Alcock and Dr. J. Ford Anderson, of the Charity Organization Society. Dr. Anderson's speech in support of the measure is interesting, because it showed what has been done in the capital in this direction. He said that in London, as a result of the agitation carried on by the Society, seven new provident dispensaries had been formed, five of them being instances of the conversion of the old system into the new. In 1870 there were only nine provident dispensaries in London; now there were sixteen. He estimated that there were 40,000 members, 15,000 of whom had been recently added, and that the payments of members in the London institu-

tions averaged £320 for each annually. The most successful institutions, he said, were those away from the competition of the free hospitals and free dispensaries. His experience had taught him that provident dispensaries would never succeed until they closed the doors of indiscriminate gratuitous medical relief.

From this it may be seen how the provident dispensary system is extending, and how likely it is to take the place of the "medical clubs," which in most parts of England have been the working-man's resource to meet the pecuniary trials of sickness.

The question which will naturally arise among Canadian practitioners is, whether it will be advisable to encourage the formation of similar institutions in this country. And in relation to this question it is proper to say that there are wide differences of opinion among the profession in England with respect to provident dispensaries. There are medical men who view them as the best means of relief from a class of non-paying or very poor-paying patients; and there are others, again, who conceive the provident dispensary as a piece of machinery put in operation to compete with the unfortunate medical practitioner whose practice lies wholly or chiefly among the humbler ranks. Our own opinion is that on general principles of political economy it will be advisable to encourage the formation of every provident resource of the industrial orders in this country. We should encourage self-help in all things. On the ground of purely professional interests, it may be urged that the very existence of self-supporting provident institutions must serve to repress the abuse which consists in persons throwing themselves entirely on the charity of some good-hearted doctor. Why, for instance, should a doctor conceive it to be his interest to incur a lot of bad accounts when by pointing to the provident dispensary he could induce the non-paying class to contribute something at least towards the salary of a paid medical officer. To some practitioners in Canadian towns a provident dispensary might possibly be a competitive agency, but to most medical men such an institution would be a means of relief. It is worth while, we think, that attention should be given to a movement like this, taking place in a country whose progress in all matters that affect crowded populations and the organization of charitable and provident institutions is in advance of our own, so that when the question is mooted by those who usually lead in these matters an intelligent and ripened opinion may be formed by the members of the medical profession.

In a medico-political article the *Lancet* objects to the action of the Medical Council in taking up the question of the education of dispensers and nurses as beyond the province of the Council. But it strenuously insists on the necessity of having educated midwives. We quote:—"The education of midwives bears so vitally on the preservation of the life of women in childbed that it cannot properly be ignored. As a matter of fact a large number of women are attended by midwives, and the practice has a certain sanction

from both law and custom. Not only so; it is very desirable that medical men should be saved from the drudgery of very cheap midwifery. It is very doubtful indeed whether the physical strength of woman is equal to the duties of a large obstetric practice. The affirmative view of this question is too readily assumed; but it has to be proved. Be this as it may, a very large midwifery practice is injurious in a high degree to men who have all the other duties of medical practice to do; and it is so especially among the poor, the hygienic condition of whose dwellings terribly enhances the bad effects of loss of sleep and tedious waiting. Sir Robert Christison gave it as the result of his large observation that nothing was more injurious to the health of rural medical men than heavy midwifery duties. Even in the interest of medical men, then, we think it very desirable that women should be educated in the practice of midwifery, and as a matter of prudence and humanity there cannot be any doubt about it."

There is undoubtedly much force in this special view of the question. It applies more particularly of course, if not indeed altogether, to the case of the poor. Educated midwives, willing to work among the poorer classes, would undoubtedly relieve medical men from a great deal of unremunerative work. On the other hand, the licensing of women as midwives leads in the way of flooding the profession with women doctors. Midwives are apt to go beyond their province, and having the confidence of their patients inspired by their specialty, are ready enough, as we have had frequent occasion to notice, to venture upon matters in which they are not specially educated.

We think the arguments for the education of midwives lose much of their force in North America. There are, happily, but very few heads of families in this country too poor to be able to pay a moderately remunerative fee to a qualified accoucheur. In the cities the indigent poor can have recourse to the general and lying-in hospitals. So far the question of the education of midwives has been little agitated in Canada, and is not likely to be so long as the ranks of the profession are well filled.

The English bill for amending the law affecting the registration of births and deaths, has been dropped. This is the government measure that proposed to make the giving of certificates by medical men compulsory and without pay. The main objection to the bill, however, and that which appears to have ensured its failure, was a defect in that it did not consolidate and unify into one comprehensive measure the laws which apply to death registration in different parts of the United Kingdom.

M. Vulpian communicated at the Société de Biologie, June 21 (*Gazette Hebdomadaire*, July 4), the interesting and novel lesions which he had observed in a rabbit whose trigeminal nerve had been divided. The cornea presented congestive lesions, which produced a singular change; the cornea became the seat of calcareous formation, and calcareous salts were deposited in it.