

# THE CANADA LANCET.

**A Monthly Journal of Medical and Surgical Science  
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 Lancet," Toronto.*

AGENTS.—DAWSON BROS., Montreal; J. & A. McMILLAN, St. John, N.B.; GEO. STREET & Co., 30 Cornhill, London, Eng.; M. H. MAILLER, 23 Rue Richer, Paris.

TORONTO, JULY, 1884.

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

## RESTRICTION OF NOSTRUMS.

The adulteration of articles of food is held to be a crime against public health and morals, and all enlightened governments have enacted laws declaring such practices illegal, and ordering persons guilty of them to be punished by fines and imprisonment. However imperfectly such laws may be obeyed their universal approval is undoubted. In all this we see the principle acknowledged that the people need to be protected against imposture; and not only so, but protected against themselves. This is freely conceded by the press and the legislature in this and every enlightened country. It is not until we enter the domain of medicine that the principle meets with opposition. Let it be hinted that the people need to be protected against charlatans and nostrum vendors, and a loud chorus of opposition arises from thousands who are advocates of restrictive laws as applied to food and drink. They admit the right of the State, within certain bounds, to declare it unlawful to manufacture or sell certain articles of food or drink, but deny the right of the State in any way to circumscribe the liberty of the subject in the matter of medicine. This is not logical; it is not common sense. The reverse would be nearer the correct view, since the people generally are far better judges of the quality of food and drink, and their effects, than they are of medicines. Moreover, the laws regulating food and drink have regard, for the most part, to the physically strong and mentally sound, a class ordinarily capable of protecting themselves, while laws regulating the sale of

medicines and nostrums, have regard, for the most part, to those who are physically weak, and incapacitated for correct and impartial judgment, from the effects of disease. If any class in the community need to be protected it is those labouring under the physical and mental debility induced by disease. They are the easy prey of every form of medical imposture which promises relief from their maladies. The ordinary layman readily sees the necessity of punishing the man who practices fraud in the matter of his beef-steak, or his ale, but when it comes to guaranteeing that he shall not be injured by the medicine he takes, he does not so readily see the force of the argument.

Happily in this, as in nearly every other civilized country, the law requires that those who undertake to cure disease shall be educated and skilled in their calling—not but there are those who would readily break down the barriers erected against charlatanism. Even in this country, and in this day of high intelligence, we have in our midst those who are willing, nay anxious, to expose the weak and suffering amongst us to the rapacity of the quack and the nostrum vendor. So far as the law can do it the quack is kept at bay, but the patent medicine vendor has full liberty to ply his calling. That he makes good use of his opportunities no one will deny. The vast amount of capital employed, the enormous sums spent on advertising, and the large stocks everywhere exposed for sale, are sure evidences of a thriving trade. It is appalling to contemplate the evils resulting from this cause. There is first the diversion and misapplication of capital and energy. Some faint idea of the extent of this business may be formed from a consideration of the figures furnished in a memorial to the U. S. Congress, presented by the patent medicine men in 1882. In the U. S. there is an internal revenue tax of from 8 to 10 per cent. on manufacturers' prices. This tax yielded nearly two millions of dollars in 1882. From this we learn that the volume of business done by the manufacturers in that year amounted to about \$24,000,000, and if to this be added the profits of the wholesale and retail dealers it will represent double this amount. Frauds on the revenue, and all taken into account, the annual cost of patent medicines to the people of the United States cannot fall much short of \$50,000,000. From the same memorial we learn that the patent medicine men