

Correspondence.

COUNTER PRESCRIBING

To the Editor of the CANADA LANCET.

SIR,—The following is a free translation of an article in the *Union Médicale du Canada* for February, and I hope you may not find it unworthy of a corner in your journal.

"Almost every day complaints reach us in reference to the practices of certain druggists, who without hesitation lay aside the spatula and pill-machine, and donning the bonnet of the doctor, write prescriptions, give consultations, etc., and this in the face of the well-known provisions of the Medical Act—provisions which confer on licentiates of the College of Physicians and Surgeons alone the right to practise medicine and to collect fees for their services." "The attempts of Pharmacy to encroach upon the domain of Medicine is not a thing of recent occurrence, nor are we the first or the only ones who have complained of it." "Similar abuses have for many years existed in the United States and in Europe; and in those countries as well as here great difficulty is experienced in devising a proper remedy for their prevention." "In Montreal their increase is becoming more and more serious." "One particular druggist of this city has, to our personal knowledge, a patient abundantly able to pay, actually under his care as his medical adviser, from whom he annually receives a handsome sum, not only for medical but even for surgical services."

"One of our correspondents writes to us that in his quarter there is a druggist who does not scruple to substitute mixtures of his own invention, for those ordered in the prescriptions of the physician; and who sometimes does not give full weight of the medicines ordered (*when they are expensive, I suppose*), although never failing to make his customers pay the full price, just as if the full quantity had been dispensed."

"Another assures us that a druggist in his neighborhood practises medicine to so great an extent that he is obliged to employ a collector to look after his accounts; he draws teeth, opens abscesses, calls himself "Doctor" if you please; and Montreal does not perhaps contain a more *aristocratic gentleman*" (?)

A third correspondent informs us that the clerk

of an apothecary to whom he sends his prescriptions make a specialty of treating gonorrhœa, and that all the diseases of this nature in that locality pass through his hands, and that his business never seems to suffer any diminution. "In short, if the object of druggists be to create this sort of custom, and physicians send their patients there with prescriptions, they can very soon obtain the formulæ of prescriptions for different diseases, although they may not acquire a knowledge of the different methods of treating them."

"An individual presents himself at the counter of a drug store bearing a prescription signed with the name of some popular physician; this excites the curiosity of the druggist and he puts himself upon the alert. A few days after, the same individual presents himself again and requires the prescription renewed. Inquiry is made as to the effects of the remedy, and the response is that it has acted like a charm, and that this is the remedy that has done him the greatest amount of good."

"By means of a number of adroit questions the diagnosis of the physician is ascertained and then the prescription is carefully laid by to serve in its proper time and place."

"In this manner do our druggists educate themselves at our expense in the science and practice of medicine. According to this charming system of giving prescriptions which seems to satisfy us, and by means of which a prescription once given may be filled again as often as the patient or druggist has a mind to, we have nothing to do but sit down (Micawber-like) and wait for something else to turn up."

"Later on we shall return to this subject; for the present we content ourselves with calling the attention of those whose duty it is to interest themselves in such matters to these facts."

"We prosecute to the bitter end quacks and charlatans who do not injure us, it may be, one-tenth part as much as these practising druggists do; and with reference to this matter we think that if there is a law to regulate the practice of physic and surgery, the same law ought to apply to all classes alike."

Such practices as the above are so constant and so glaring in this locality that I cannot but feel in sympathy with my French confrère. It has been no uncommon thing for me to find some prescriptions of mine doing duty for a druggist in effecting