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## CONTENTS.

PAGE.		PAGE.
<b>ORIGINAL COMMUNICATIONS.</b>		
Registration of the Condition of Health, by J. H. Burns, M.D., Toronto, 1—Over-Study in Young Ladies' Schools and Convents, by James Perrigo, M.D., M.R.C.S., Eng., 4—Cases in Practice, by Carr Holstock Roberts, L.R.C.P. Lond., M.R.C.S. Eng., L.S.A., M.B., M.A. .... 5	tation, 6—Phosphorus in the Treatment of Chronic Alcoholism, 7—The Management of Acute Catarrh of the Middle Ear, 7—Acute Meningitis Treated by Doses of Iodide of Potassium, 8—Treatment of Epilepsy, 8—Chronic Suppurative Inflammation of the Middle Ear, a Lecture by O. D. Pomroy, M.D., New York, 9—Advances in Pharmacy, 12—Lecture, Syphilitic Sore Throat, 13—Tartar Emetic in Rigid Os Uteri, 17	—Bromhydric Acid in Tinnitus Aurium from Quinine, &c.....17
<b>PROGRESS OF MEDICAL SCIENCE</b>		
Defibrinated Blood for Rectal Alimen-		
		<b>EDITORIAL.</b>
		The Canada Medical Association, 18—Unus E Pluribus, 19—The Montreal Medical Schools, 19—Personal, 19—Reviews, 19—College of Physicians and Surgeons, Province of Quebec, 20—Medico-Chirurgical Society of Montreal, 22—Medical Items, 28—Birth, 28—Death.....28

### *Original Communications.*

#### REGISTRATION OF THE CONDITION OF HEALTH.

By J. H. BURNS, M.D., TORONTO.

(Read before the Canada Medical Association, at its Meeting in London, September 10th, 1879.)

MR. PRESIDENT AND GENTLEMEN,—It is proposed to make a few remarks upon registration generally, but specially to point out some of the advantages to be gained by the registration of the state of health or the prevalence of disease.

At the present time accurate statistics are so little valued, that our method of obtaining them is far in the rear of that of most civilized countries, and it is only very recently that the public has begun to recognize the benefits of a complete system of registration.

Owing to the fact that little profit has hitherto been derived from statistics as returned, many have been slow to acknowledge the utility of spending time and money in this direction, and we may attribute the laxity with which the prescribed legal regulations are at present enforced, to the want of an intelligent appreciation of benefits to be derived therefrom. It is still too often thought that, being merely to gratify the curiosity of a few, it can be in a great measure dispensed with, and I regret that in Canada the subject has become somewhat

of a bugbear to those imperfectly acquainted with its importance.

Now as regards the registration of mortality it may be safely said that there is not one single place in Canada where the law is by any means satisfactorily carried out, for not only is there a confusion as to immediate cause of death, but the law itself is defective in its requirements, as the true object of registration should be to ascertain *accurately* the conditions attendant on death, with as full information as can be procured. For instance it is not enough to record such facts only as the Ontario Government now requires, viz., age, nativity, sex, disease, and date of death; but the return should state whether the disease was inherited or contracted, if the result of an epidemic or merely an isolated case, and whether the surroundings were disease producing, or not. If in consequence of an epidemic, whether it was the first fatality; some account also of the epidemic should be required, stating whether it was more or less than usually prevalent or fatal, and above all whether predisposition existed. Professor Kedzie of Lansing says: "The first and indispensable quality of all statistics is accuracy, and if the records upon which the vital statistics are founded are notoriously imperfect and inaccurate the deduction drawn from such records will be proportionately unreliable, if not actually misleading—the general cause of this inaccuracy being the present mode of collecting the returns of births, marriages, and deaths." Now, in order that the desired result should be attained, information should be gathered