

THE CANADA LANCET :

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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.

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TORONTO, NOVEMBER 1, 1873.

WHITHER ARE WE DRIFTING.

Our last issue contained no less than four letters from correspondents, complaining of various shades of departure from honorable professional conduct. The frequency of these appeals would make us question the universal application of the quotation,

*"Ingenuas deducisse fideliter artes
Emollit mores, nec sinit esse ferus."*

more particularly as from the alphabet of letters affixed to the names of some of the parties complained of, we should be justified in presuming that a long study of a liberal profession (which alone we should imagine could have supplied the string of titles,) had necessarily resulted in a cultivated mind, and with that the other requisites for constituting a gentleman. We had hoped that the more medicine became cultivated as a science, the less it would be practised as a mere road to a living, competence, or ephemeral reputation; that with the exit of the mountebank at the fair, quackery, pure and simple, had passed away. It would appear, however, that we had indulged in an optimist mood, and that now, as of yore, we have too much reason for admitting

"Populus vult decepti, et decipitur."

Perfectibility would simply be an utopian dream, as it would be founded on a radical ignorance of human nature. But we have surely a right to expect that the general increase of intelligence and sound medical education would to some extent afford protection from the degree of empiricism prevailing in the last century.

The communication from Tara, of last month, requires more than a passing comment. If the facts are substantially as narrated, the coroner's conduct

is such as to demand a thorough investigation, and if proven, instant dismissal from office. This official may probably urge that it can never be wrong to follow conscience, let it lead to what it will, and believe, with Barrow and other casuists, that "a conscience, however erroneous, obliges;" but although it is true that a man must follow his conscience when made, the question returns whether he may not have had a trifle to do with making it; whether the desire to crush and disgrace a rival had not been one of the impelling forces. Bentham, in his book of fallacies, thus discourses of the self-trumpeter's fallacy: "There are certain men in office who, in discharge of their functions, arrogate to themselves a degree of probity, which is to exclude all imputations and all inquiry. Their assertions are to be deemed equivalent to proof, their virtues are guarantees for the faithful discharge of their duties, and the most implicit confidence is to be reposed in them on all occasions."

The office of Coroner or Attorney for the Queen is too sacred to allow its prostitution, and we cannot imagine that the gentleman charged with malversation of office will quietly submit to the censure that must necessarily follow Dr. Washington's letter, if the accusations are susceptible of disproof. Only in the case in which a man has impartially dealt with evidence is he blameless; and blameable, much or little as he has deviated from that standard. Coronerships are not presumed to be given as a means of eking out an existence, much less as a tyrannous power.

The case referred to by the correspondent from St. Jacobs, and another by an inquirer,—so full of the milk of human kindness that he refrains from giving the name of the offender,—may perhaps be viewed as a belief on the part of these *soi disant* medicos that singularity fills the general run of mankind with wonder, and from wonder to admiration the transition is easy: or a belief that by any means "*Il faut vivre.*" To such individuals the reply reported to have been made on one occasion to an individual thus speaking, guilty of a breach of moral honesty, by Talleyrand, "*Je ne vois pas la nécessité,*" would be peculiarly apposite.

It might be deemed presumptuous to offer advice to gentlemen who, for seven years, have never lost a case of cancer, croup, quinsy, erysipelis, bronchitis, cholera, &c., &c.; but at the risk of being held officious, we will copy for their benefit part of a