

# 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.*  
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**The LANCET has the Largest Circulation of any  
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## THE LITERARY EQUIPMENT OF THE AMERICAN MEDICAL MAN.

A very recent graduate of Old Trinity, in Medicine, has been resting on his oars while waiting for the dust to settle (in spite of this mixed metaphor, he is not Irish), and, inasmuch as rest intellectual, lies not in inactivity of mind, but in change of mental occupation, has been dipping once more with delight into reading, not medical, or at least, not technical. If the overwrought medical student or practitioner, at times when, as is inevitable, disgust rises in his soul and whelms him fathoms deep at the weary round of "shop," practice, late and accumulating professional literature, all with tiring reiteration, conspiring to keep his nose at the eroding grindstone, if at such unquiet moments he would only turn to the vast field of æsthetic and not utilitarian literature, he would find it, even in homœopathic doses, a prompt antidote to his sensation of satiety. Not that it would act as did the doses taken, as Tacitus, I think it is, records, at those Neronian orgies, when repletion was realized by a temporary retirement from the table of Bonlimia. On the contrary, the very joy of retreading the paths, now by press of work forbidden him, and dipping, if only a half hour, into Horace, or Tennyson, or Harper's, or the pages of that most genial of the genial profession, Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes, by sheer force of contrast would enable him to return with zest re-awakened, to the pages of his medical

journals and to his case-reading in the standard works. Reflections such as these led our new-fledged master in Chirurgy to certain animadversions upon the general literary style and tone of English and American professional literature. And his animadversions were unpleasant, or at least, would have been, could the writers he criticized have spent a quarter of an hour within hearing of his thoughts. He concluded that very few medical text-books are passably written, or to be read with pleasure by one who is hypercritical in the matter of his English. Most notable exceptions do exist, especially among English as against American writers—Michael Foster's Physiology, Fagge's Medicine, are examples. The reason of this difference, and the comparison is not meant to be odious or invidious, is plainly that the average literary and primary training of the American student is so low. After entrance upon a course of study so exacting as the medical student's, further advance in general culture is impossible except in so far as the mind is improved by the gymnastics through which it is put by the study of medicine as well as of any other subject. The medical man, on the other hand, who before his medical career began, had been blessed with a fair training in the Greek and Latin and English Classics, Ancient and Modern History, a dip into Moderns and Mathematics, such as an English public school career provides, is not by any means such a *rara avis* in England as in Canada, and the United States. Now this is not meant as a slur upon American practitioners. It were unkind to upbraid them with their misfortune. The social and economic conditions of the new country call upon the general public to put up with many new, raw, and unpleasant things, among them a medical profession of no high grade of attainment in things outside their own special branches of knowledge, and as time goes on this state of affairs is rapidly curing itself. So far as professional training, zeal, acumen, and ingenuity are concerned, no set of surgeons in the world have proved themselves more capable than the surgeons of America. This side the Atlantic is admittedly the home of elegant pharmacy. Why then are American degrees in medicine so ill thought of in most European centres, that the holders of them can get no more recognition than if they were just beginning their studies?