

THE
CANADIAN PRACTITIONER

FORMERLY "THE CANADIAN JOURNAL OF MEDICAL SCIENCE."

EDITORS:

A. H. WRIGHT, B.A., M.D. Tor., M.R.C.S. England. - J. E. GRAHAM, M.D. Tor., L.R.C.P. London.
W. H. B. AIKINS, M.B. Tor., L.R.C.P. London.

Business Management, - - THE J. E. BRYANT COMPANY (Limited), 58 Bay Street.

TORONTO, DECEMBER 16, 1889.

Original Communications.

ALCOHOLIC STIMULANTS AS REGARDS QUALITY.*

BY ANGUS MACKINNON, ALVINSTON, ONT.

It is almost superfluous to tell an assembly of medical men that alcoholic stimulants hold a prominent place in Therapeutics. Notwithstanding much hostile criticism, both from within and without the ranks of the profession, these stimulants are still high in esteem, and stand well up in the front row of remedial agents. This perhaps is not wholly due to the force of science. The popular belief in the curative power of whisky and brandy is proverbial. There is an old proverb which runs, "like priest, like people." Should we parody this proverb, and say, like people, like doctor, might it not suggest the power of ulterior force in the matter of the importance attached to these stimulants? We must confess, whether priests or doctors, that we are all liable to be influenced by our environments. Be that as it may, the consensus of medical opinion the world over, is that alcohol is an agent of great value and power in the treatment of many diseased conditions. It is but fair to remark that a highly respectable minority firmly oppose this view, and demand the expurgation of alcohol from the Pharmacopœia, as not only worthless but absolutely injurious, under all conditions. The majority, however, although admitting certain

drawbacks, refuse to let go their hold until science discovers a substitute more innocent, but of equal virtue.

These being the views of the profession, it naturally follows that the quantity prescribed is enormous. Alcohol being a powerful agent, like a two-edged sword, is capable of cutting two ways. It is therefore clear that it should be ordered with the utmost definiteness as to dose, and frequency of repetition. Such is the rule in the case of opium, chloral and all powerful drugs. Why should alcohol be an exception? Moreover, we are usually particular about the quality of our remedies. If we have reason to believe a certain article is not up to the standard, or has been tampered with by a dishonest dealer, we reject it instantly. Why not apply the same tests to our whisky and brandy? Alcohol is good or bad according to the dose. It is quick and powerful in action, and demands the same accuracy of administration as other agents of potency. Why then, of all other drugs, should it be prescribed in the haphazard way that is too much the custom?

The readiest answer to these questions is, that accuracy of dose is impracticable, since we do not know the alcoholic strength of any of the articles used. We must admit, and emphasize, the correctness of the answer. We do not know how much alcohol is contained in any given sample of the various alcoholic stimulants in the market. The answer is full and complete, and to prove its absolute truth is the main object of this paper.