

THE NEW "BRITISH PHARMACOPŒIA."

The production of the *British Pharmacopæia* (revised, 1898) is necessarily interesting to all engaged in prescribing or dispensing, and there seem to be good reasons for hoping that the new volume, which has been so long anticipated, will shortly be in the hands of the profession, for it is now in the hands of the printer. Before its publication, it may perhaps be worth while to consider the scope and the object of the *Pharmacopæia*. These are authoritatively set forth in the Medical Act of 1858, which committed the preparation of the volume to the General Medical Council. It is there enacted that the book shall contain a list of medicines and compounds, and the manner of preparing them, together with the true weights and measures by which they are to be prepared and mixed. And in addition a certain discretionary latitude is provided for in the clause which permits the introduction of such other matter and things relating thereto as the General Medical Council shall think fit. In the preface to the *British Pharmacopæia* of 1867, it is stated that the Council endeavoured to include in it all such remedies as the existing state of medical practice seemed to require. To judge from previous editions of the volume, the Council desires to deal only with drugs of established reputation; in other words, it proposes only to reflect current practice, and to establish a standard of purity without assuming the task of instructing.

Each edition of the *Pharmacopæia* has, however, advanced further from the original limitations, and of late years, although the *Pharmacopæia* cannot be said to be a text-book for medical students, it has nevertheless very materially influenced the education of the medical profession. Even

in the present day, although older practitioners may often be heard to speak scornfully of the volume, since it does not touch upon many of the newest remedies which are occasionally employed, yet the influence of the *Pharmacopæia* upon the younger generation can hardly be over-estimated. It affords not only a standard for the purity of the drugs and preparations, but it also forms the basis of the textbooks of *materia medica* and therapeutics, and it establishes the standard up to which students are educated and examined.

The forthcoming edition will deserve very careful consideration, since there have been frequent indications in the reports of the Pharmacopæia Committee to the General Medical Council that a very great deal of care has been devoted to the perfection of the work. From these reports we learn that a large number of experts in chemistry, botany, pharmacology, and practical pharmacy have lent their aid to a committee which was already strong, both numerically and individually. When so many are concerned in the production of the volume, it may be anticipated that though it may gain in precision and accuracy, it must necessarily lose in individuality, and at best it becomes a compromise agreed upon by the majority.

Under such conditions, it is only to be expected that it will meet with a certain amount of adverse criticism from those whose recommendations have not been accepted in their entirety. Criticism of this nature is not, perhaps, likely to disturb the equanimity of those who have been actively engaged upon the production of the *Pharmacopæia*, since although to the general reader such criticisms might appear to indicate points which have been overlooked, yet to the initiated they may be only a restatement of views that have been fully discussed, considered, and, for various reasons, set aside.