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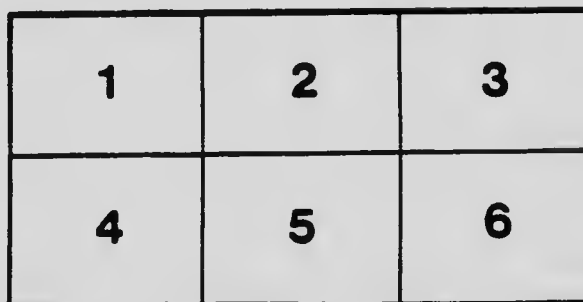
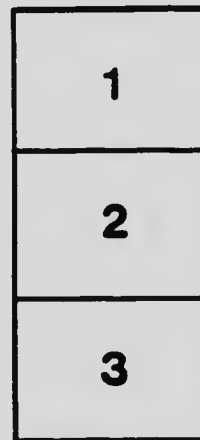
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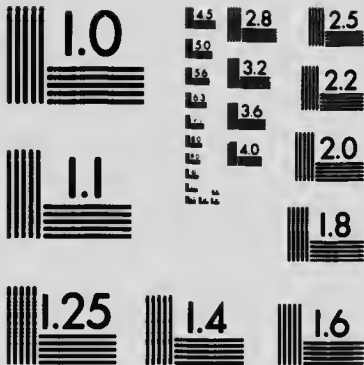
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# The Botanic Family Physician



BY

WILLIAM RENWICK RIDDELL, LL.D., F. B. S. (Edin.), Etc.  
TORONTO, ONTARIO



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September 13, 1913.*



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THE BOTANIC FAMILY PHYSICIAN.  
BY WILLIAM RENWICK RIDDELL, LL.D., F. B. S.  
(EDIN.), ETC.,

Toronto, Ontario,

Justice, Appellate Division of the High Court of Ontario.

In 1832 there was published at Hamilton, Upper Canada, a little volume which had considerable vogue in its day; but it is now rarely met with, and has passed into the limbo of forgetfulness.

At that time, with a few exceptions, no one could practise medicine—"physic" it was called—or surgery in Upper Canada without a license from the Governor, after an examination before a medical board appointed for that purpose. And this was not merely a prohibition on paper. Canadians have always had an awkward way of insisting upon obedience to their statutes; and in those days they were wont to hang horse thieves and burglars, and banish, flog, and pillory ordinary thieves and those guilty of less heinous crimes. So violators of the Medical Act did not escape. I have before me the proceedings in court in April, 1831, at York (now Toronto), when, before Chief Justice Robinson and a jury, Jackson Harrington was found guilty of a misdemeanor for "practising physic without a license."

There was nothing, however, to prevent anyone practising on himself and his own family, or advising neighbors about their health, so long as he did not practise for reward. Accordingly, the little book I have mentioned made its way into many a home and was the *vade mecum* of many a man who was charitably interested in the health of the community. *The New Guide to Health or Botanic Family Physician, Containing a Complete System of Practice upon a Plan Entirely New, &c., &c.* by

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*Riddell: Botanic Family Physician.*

Samuel Thomson. Hamilton, Printed by Smith & Hackstaff, MDCCCXXXII," is the title. My copy was once the property of the Rev. Henry Wilkinson, a well known Methodist minister and once president of the conference.

Samuel Thomson is claimed as a son by both Massachusetts and New Hampshire. He was born in 1769, in territory now within the latter State; but at that time and till six years later the Provinces were under the same governor. The country was, as he tells us, "almost an howling wilderness," so that his "advantages for an education were very small." His mind, then, was "unhindered by the visionary theories and opinions of others," and "was entirely free to follow his inclinations by enquiring into the meaning of the great variety of objects around" him. He found man to be composed of the four elements--earth, water, air, and fire. The earth and water were the solids, the air and fire were the fluids; the two first the component parts, the last two kept him in motion; and fire producing heat, Thomson came to the conclusion that heat is life and cold, death.

The theory upon which he based his practice of medicine is that the inside of the body should have ample heat, more heat than the outside. If the inside be allowed to become cold, "canker" is formed, which is the occasion and cause of disease. He nowhere defines "canker," but from many hints throughout the volume, he seems to have regarded it as a coating deleterious in its effects, which forms on the inside of the stomach and intestines when the inside is allowed to get colder than the outside, the "fountain lower than the stream."

"Heat is life and its extinction death, a diminution of the vital flame in every instance constitutes disease, and is an approximation to death. All, then, that medicine can do in the expulsion of disorder is to kindle up the decaying spark and restore its energy." Accordingly, if a medicine is good in any case, it must be absolutely so in all; if its ad-

ministration can produce the required effect in one case, it must in all, and "it is evidently immaterial what is the name or color of the disease, whether bilious, yellow, scarlet, or spotted, whether it is simple or complicated, or whether nature has one enemy or more." Extensive study and great erudition are not necessary to form the eminent physician. Knowledge of the origin of a malady and its antidote make the genuine physician; all without it is real quackery. In the "Preface written by a Friend," Thomson is made to repudiate the denomination "quack," but to accept that of "empiric," one who is governed in his practice by his own experimental knowledge. Thomson says he studied nature, made experiments for thirty years, and now can confidently recommend his system as salutary and efficacious.

He entirely disapproved of "bleeding and blistering and administering mercury, arsenic, antimony, opium, &c." But he also warns against vegetable poisons which grow common in his country, garden hemlock, nightshade, mandrake, poppy, henbane, poke root, garget root, wild parsnip, indigo weed, ivy, dogwood, tobacco, and laurel.

Six, and only six, medicines he has in his system of practice—"the first three are used to remove disease, and the others as restoratives."

"No. 1. To cleanse the stomach, overpower cold and promote a free perspiration—emetic herb," i. e. *Lobelia inflata* of Linnæus. This taken by the mouth is to "puke the patient," and may be prepared for use in three different ways: The powdered leaves and pods, a tincture made of the green herb, and the seeds powdered. Thomson does not say very much in the book about the use of lobelia as an enema. I have more than once heard my old preceptor, Dr. Richard Hare Clarke, of Cobourg, Ontario, one of the most successful of eclectics, describe the marvelous effects of an enema of hot lobelia seeds; but even he gave

up its use as early as the sixties. Thomson says No. 1 "not only acts as an emetic and throws off the stomach everything that nature does not require for support of the system, but extends its effects to all parts of the body. It is searching, enlivening, quickening, and has great power in removing all obstructions." But it is not a complete cure in itself, "it soon exhausts itself, and if not followed by some other medicine to hold the vital heat till nature is able to support itself by digesting the food, it will not be sufficient to remove a disease that has become seated." What he means by "seated" or "settled" he explains in another place. Premising by saying that fever is not a disease, but the effect of disease, the struggle of nature to throw off disease, he goes on: "Support the fever and it will turn inside, the cold which is the cause of disease will be driven out, and health will be restored. In all cases called fever the cause is the same in a greater or less degree, and may be relieved by one general remedy. The cold causes canker, and before the canker is seated the strife will take place between cold and heat, and while the hot flashes and cold chills remain, it is evidence that the canker is not settled, but as the contest ceases and the heat is steady on the outside, then canker assumes the power on the inside; this is called a settled fever."

After many experiments, he discovered "the best and only medicine" so to hold the vital heat; and this he calls "No. 2. To retain the internal vital heat of the system and cause a free perspiration." This is made of cayenne. He had tried ginger, mustard, horseradish, peppermint, butternut bark, and many other hot things, but settled down finally on cayenne, powdered and administered, half to a teaspoonful in hot water. He adds "a teaspoonful of Cayenne may be taken in a tumbler of Cider and is much better than ardent spirits." (Of course, *de gustibus non est disputandum.*) If cayenne cannot be obtained, red peppers, ginger, or even black pepper, may be employed as a substitute.

The next is "No. 3. To scour the Stomach and Bowels, and remove the Canker," i. e., "for removing the thrush from the throat, stomach, and bowels caused by cold; and there will be more or less of it in all cases or diseases, for when cold gets the power over the inward heat, the stomach and bowels become coated with can' er which prevents the numerous little vessels calculated to nourish the system from performing their duty." He has adopted a rule by which to determine what is good for canker "to chew some of the article, and if it causes the saliva to flow freely and leaves the mouth clean and moist, it is good; but, on the other hand, if it dries up the juices and leaves the mouth rough and dry, it is bad and should be avoided." The root of the bayberry or candleberry, the root of the white pond lily, the inner bark of the hemlock, the root of the marsh rosemary, the leaves of the "witchhazel," of the red raspberry, both root and top of the squaw weed, are all recommended, but the preference given to the first; the last, it may be mentioned, "makes a very good bitter, tintured with hot water and spirit, and is good for dizziness and cold hands and feet." This "bitter," if the squaw weed is left out, is, it is understood, good for dizziness in another sense of the word "good." This fact Thomson does not mention.

"No. 4. Bitters to correct the Bile and restore Digestion." Thomson warns us against supposing that the bile or gall is an enemy in case of sickness. There is no such thing as too much gall. "The difficulty is caused by the stomach being cold and foul, so that the food is not properly digested, and the bile, not being appropriated to its natural use, is diffused through the pores of the skin, which becomes of a yellow color . . . the only way to effect a cure is to promote perspiration, cleanse the stomach, and restore the digestive powers; which will cause the bile to be used for the purpose nature intended." He recommends bitter herb or balmony, poplar bark (either of the white or the stinking

poplar), barberry bark, butter root or wandering milkweed, and the root of the golden seal—poplar bark rather preferred. We are told that "this is a very important part of the system of practice, for unless the food is digested it is impossible to keep up that heat upon which life depends."

Then comes "No. 5. Syrup for the Dysentery, to strengthen the Stomach and Bowels, and restore weak patients." The articles used in the preparation are, the bark of bayberry, peachmeats or meats of cherry stones, sugar, and brandy. Peachmeats are preferred, but still the meats of wild cherry-stones are almost as good—and a "tea made of the cherries pounded with the stones and steeped in hot water, sweetened with loaf sugar, to which add a little brandy, is good to restore the digestive powers and create an appetite."

The most celebrated of Thomson's preparations, and one which is not yet quite forgotten, was his "No. 6. Rheumatic Drops to remove pain, prevent mortification, and promote a natural heat." The most approved method of making this was "to take one gallon of good 4th proof brandy, or any kind of light wines, one pound of gum myrrh pounded fine, one ounce of cayenne; put them in a stone jug and boil for a few minutes in a kettle of water, leaving the jug unstopped." "For external application, spirits of turpentine is added, and sometimes gum camphor."

The stock of medicine which will be "sufficient for a family one year, and with such articles as they can easily procure themselves when wanted, will enable them to cure any disease which a family of common size may be affected with during that time," is thus tabulated:

- 1 ounce of the emetic herb (lobelia).
- 2 ounces of cayenne.
- ½ pound of bayberry root bark in powder.
- 1 pound of poplar bark.
- 1 pound of ginger.
- 1 pint of the rheumatic drops (No. 6).

Thomson strongly approved of steaming, indeed,

even his "system would in many cases without it be insufficient to effect a cure." His method was to take two or three stones and put them in the fire till red hot, then put them into a pan or kettle of hot water; the patient, undressed, with a blanket around him, is placed over the steam, preferably on an "open worked chair." The stones are renewed when cool.

The medicines are not to be given indiscriminately. "A regular course of medicine" is as follows: "First give Nos. 2 and 3, or composition, adding a teaspoonful of No. 6, then steam, and when in bed repeat it; adding No. 1, which will clean the stomach . . . when this has done operating, give an injection made with the same articles . . . in violent cases where immediate relief is needed Nos. 1, 2, 3, and 6 may be given together." No. 4 and No. 5 are for special cases.

Although these six medicines are all that are needed, Thomson gives the qualities of a large number of native plants—valerian, a nerve powder, spearmint to stop vomiting, peppermint and pennyroyal to promote perspiration, summersavory for toothache, hoarhound and elecampane for coughs, mayweed for a cold, tanzy and featherfew for hysterics, chamomile for bowel complaints, bitter-sweet, mullein, and burdock for plasters, skunk-cabbage for asthma, wakerobin for colic, slippery elm bark for sore throat, ginseng for nervous affection, chivers, snakeroot, mustard, &c., &c., &c. Many of these are still popular remedies.

Not all his science is to be found in this handbook; he had a system of midwifery and surgery. But all who wished to understand these "must purchase the right" which sometimes, at least, cost "twenty silver dollars," and "all who purchase the right may receive the necessary verbal instruction to enable them to do all that is required in the practice of midwifery, as well as to be able to become their own physician and surgeon at a trifling expense." That some in Upper Canada purchased

the right is certain, that some of these passed the medical board is equally certain, that the results in many cases of the Thomsonian system were as good as those of the regular profession is also certain. Nor is this to be wondered at. There is extant the report of a case in which one physician in Upper Canada sued another for libel. At the trial, in 1827, it was proved that the plaintiff had bled a young girl several times within a few days, taking five quarts of blood from her; and had physicked a young man, who had a "touch of fever," with calomel till "his mouth got raw and sore, his teeth loose, and his breath bad."

The Botanic Thomsonian School or Physiomedical School, though at first antagonistic to, gradually merged into, the Eclectic School. The opposition of these to the practice of bleeding had much to do with its comparatively early disappearance.

They were not invariably successful in their practice; indeed, Thomson himself had the misfortune to run up against the criminal law in Massachusetts. In January, 1809, he was called to attend Ezra Lovett, Jr. at Beverley, Mass. He had come to that town the preceding month; and it is said had much vaunted the virtues of his medicines, which he called by such extraordinary names as "coffee," "well-my-gristle" and "ramcats." Lovett had a cold; Thomson ordered a large fire lit in his room, wrapped the patient up and gave him a powder in water, of course, lobelia, No. 1; this "puked him." Three minutes afterward he gave him another dose, which operated two minutes later; he repeated the dose with the same effect, all three doses within half an hour, the patient meanwhile drinking copiously of the "coffee," which was proved to be an infusion of marsh rosemary mixed with bayberry bark, i. e. No. 3. The next day and next he was dosed with the same medicines, and on the following day he was sweated. The next two days the doctor did not appear, but on the following day he administered No. 1 and No. 3 again,

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and also the next day. The patient was now in great distress, and when the doctor asked him how far down the medicine had got, and he replied down to the breast. the doctor assured him that it would soon get down and unscrew his navel. The following day the patient became delirious and violent, but the doctor got one or two doses of lobelia down his throat, telling the patient's father that his son had got the "hyps like the devil," but that his medicines would fetch him down. The next morning the regular physicians were called in, but could do nothing for the unfortunate who died shortly afterward. Thomson was indicted for murder, and tried on December 20 at Boston, before Chief Justice Parsons and Justices Sewall and Parker, and a jury. It was proved that the death was due to the treatment which Lovett had received, and the prosecuting counsel stated that the prisoner had administered like medicines to others who had died in his hands. The only witness, however, who appeared, swore that he had taken the emetic medicines as the prisoner's patient several times in two or three days, and was relieved permanently of his complaint, "an oppression at his stomach"; and there was no evidence that in the course of his very novel practice the prisoner had experienced any fatal accident among his patients. He was accordingly acquitted. The curious will find a fairly full account of the case in No. 6. Massachusetts Reports, p 134. The followers of Thomson boast that he was acquitted without being called on for his defence. The fact, however, is that he owed his safety to the charge of the chief justice, that if the medicine was administered with an honest intention to cure, however ignorant the prisoner might be of medical science, he should not be found guilty.

Thomson continued to practise in Massachusetts for many years, and died in 1843. I cannot find that he ever came in person to Canada.

There is no trace in this volume of some extraordinary views attributed to him by some medical



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writers, e. g., that as minerals lie in the earth, minerals given as medicine must tend to bring the patients down to the earth, while as plants grow up and away from the earth, medicines from the vegetable kingdom must raise up the patient and keep him from the grave.

OSGOODE HALL.

