

been heard to say that he would sweep the town (alluding to his business), and that he would stick B. and his wife. There is no doubt the deliberate object was to kill with the appearance of death resulting from a common blow, and thus to save himself, forgetting that the appearance of the wound would explain its nature to any medical man. The man persists with the boldest effrontery that he used nothing but his fist. Had the knife entered but half an inch lower, it is needless to say that death must in all probability have occurred from penetration of the brain through the orbital plate. The chief injury is delusive, because subcutaneous, and if I had not ordered the unbinding of the wound, and inspected it with great care, and had fascial inflammation set in with erysipelas, and terminated fatally, I should not have then perhaps discovered the origin of so much mischief. It seems, therefore, that in these days of stabbing we ought to examine all blows attributed to the more orthodox source of pugilism, lest the dagger of the assassin may have been artfully substituted for the hasty blow of anger.

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## PROVINCIAL MEDICAL JOURNAL

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In a late Number we inserted a letter from "A Subscriber," suggesting to those members of the profession, who are connected with the health of towns' commission, the propriety of inquiring to what extent the excessive mortality, which occurs in large towns among children under five years of age, may be ascribed to the injudicious interference of druggists and other ignorant persons. The suggestion is an important one, and well worthy of attention. There would be, however, much difficulty in arriving at results worthy of confidence, since, from the operation of prejudice—from the wish for concealment of practices of which even those who have recourse to them are not unfrequently ashamed—from an undefined sense of moral accountability on the part of the friends, and from other causes—little dependance could be placed on any direct inquiries instituted for this purpose.

There is, however, a method by which some valuable information bearing on the question might be obtained, and one which is entirely within the power of the Registrar-General, aided by medical practitioners, to carry out. It will be recollected by many of our readers that, some time back, a correspondence took place between Mr. Bree, of Stowmarket, and Mr. Farr, respecting the advantages which would arise were medical practitioners to give some form of certificate to the registers of deaths, whereby in all instances the presumed cause of death might be more accurately and definitively stated than is at present done. It is evident that were this plan fully carried

out in any one place, there would be the collateral information derived of the number of deaths occurring among those who had, from some cause or other, been unable or unwilling to obtain medical assistance. We are inclined to believe that amongst children, especially those belonging to the poorer classes, very many deaths would be found to occur without any remedial measures having been adopted, under the direction of a competent medical adviser, to stay the progress of the disease. Such instances of death must, of course, be unaccompanied by a medical certificate, and the number of entries on the register's book without this certificate would at once show the number of those dying without any apparent attempt having been made for the relief of the sufferer.

But, although instances of entire and unnatural neglect do occasionally occur, so as to lead to the abandonment of a sick child or relative to the ravages of disease, without an effort to stop them, or an attempt to avert the fatal termination, cases of this description must be viewed as exceptional; and there can be no material fallacy in assuming, on the other hand, that, unless where the death is so immediate as to become the subject of inquiry before the coroner, advice of some description has been sought. Were the registration of deaths, therefore, conducted so as to obtain in all instances a certificate of the cause of death from the medical practitioner in attendance, it would be fair to presume that in every case, or at least in the great majority of cases, where the regular certificate was wanting, the treatment had been committed, from some cause or other, to ignorant and unqualified persons, such as druggists and their apprentices, empirics of various descriptions, nurses and midwives, amateur practitioners, busy neighbours, or some old female relation, deeply imbued with the love of Buchan.

Were this plan duly carried out, we feel assured that a fearful sacrifice, both of adult and infant lives, but especially of the latter, would be revealed. Still this information, valuable as it would be, would afford only partial evidence of the mischiefs arising from the dabbling with drugs by the ignorant and the ill-informed. The extent to which counter-practice is carried on by the second-rate druggists and their apprentices in some of our large towns, and the mischiefs resulting from it, must be witnessed to be fully appreciated. The applications for medicine for various complaints by the poorer classes, and, we are ashamed to say, by some of those who ought to know better, and to discourage by advice, instead of encouraging by example, such practices, are so numerous as in many instances to form the chief source of profit of these establishments. In fact, the druggist has in many places become the substitute for the apothecary, and, without either education or responsibility, undertakes, upon the strength of a few hasty inquiries into

symptoms, of the nature and import of which he is profoundly ignorant, to give powerful drugs, in nine cases out of ten neither suitable in dose, in their application to the disease itself, nor to the constitution of the patient.

Opium, mercury, and iodine, and some drastic cathartic pills, are the most frequent and favorite medicines dispensed to all applicants; and we scarcely know whether more mischief is done by the indiscriminate administration of these purging pills to adult dyspeptics, of soothing syrups and other forms of opiates to infants and young children, or of calomel and blue pill, in the midst of the scrofulous and squalid population, from the ranks of which their customers are chiefly derived.

It is especially from the indiscriminate use of mercurials and opiates not only that a great sacrifice of infant life takes place in towns, but also a very material deterioration of the powers of the system and of the constitution in after life. Medicines of the former class—mercurials—are administered to a great extent in the families of both rich and poor—in the one case by domestic prescription, in the other by the direction of the druggist or his shop-boy. The latter are the great resource of indolent nurses and careless or imprudent mothers, to quiet what are termed fretful infants; and in like manner, and with the same views, are dispensed by the druggist, who takes his cue from the desire for rest expressed by the mother; and regardless of the well-being of the infant, as well as ignorant of the methods of providing for it, all parties conspire to mask the disease under which it is laboring, by stupifying its sensibility, until the foundation for incurable organic change is laid, and it either dies or grows up weakly, and a burden to itself and all connected with it.

We fear that there is little probability of reaching mischiefs such as these either by statistical inquiries or legal enactments. Still the attempt should be made; and while, by the attainment of that measure of information which we can come at, we may be able to instruct the public mind, now deeply in ignorance upon these matters, and to warn parents and friends of the manifold evils and dangers of the practices now so extensively followed, by proper legal provision making druggists and others responsible for their homicidal acts, a preventive check might to some extent be placed upon the evil. Were a sufficient case also made out, through the Registrar-General's office, there would be a clear and decided call for legislative interference, which neither Parliament nor the Government could well refrain to attend to. It is, therefore, much to be wished that all those engaged in the practice of medicine should comply with the expressed wishes of the Registrar-General, by forwarding, in every instance, a faithful record of the fatal cases occurring in their practice.

The information thus collected would be available, in many ways, as a valuable contribution to statistics, as tending to define our views on the causes of disease in general, and to suggest practical rules for the prevention of many diseases which now press heavily on different classes of the manufacturing population, or materially interfere with the comfort and prosperity of the inhabitants of some districts of the country; while, by showing the effect of the too frequent neglect of proper medical treatment among the children of the poor, it will indirectly afford that evidence of the mischiefs resulting from the exhibition of powerful medicines by illegal and unqualified persons, which is required to compel the attention of those in authority to the reiterated representations made to them on this subject.

#### CONTAGIOUSNESS OF PUERPERAL FEVER.

The readers of this Journal no doubt recollect a most important letter from Mr. Storrs (*Provincial Journal*, April 23, 1842), showing the close connection between erysipelas and puerperal fever, and the great risk there is of producing the latter disease by infection or contagion from erysipelatous patients. The subject is one of such extreme importance, not only as regards the lives of the patients, but also the character and prospects of the medical attendant, that it cannot be investigated too frequently or too searchingly; and we are glad to find a paper by Dr. O. W. Holmes, in an American contemporary, in which the contagiousness of puerperal fever is fully borne out.

#### THE WATER-CURE AT MALVERN.

TO THE EDITORS OF THE PROVINCIAL MEDICAL JOURNAL.

GENTLEMEN,—In one of your late Journals there is a lengthened paper inserted, which purports to be the correct account of a case of disease treated by myself in the first instance, and subsequently by Dr. Hastings, of Worcester, whose comments are appended to it. As it contains statements and remarks that are libellous, and highly defamatory of my professional character, and, moreover, are utterly devoid of truth, I claim the right of reply in the journal which gave them publicity.

The subject of the case, Probart, was a carrier between this place and Worcester, and notoriously addicted for a great many years past to hard drinking, which had, indeed, reduced him to poverty. He was sixty-four years old, and had suffered from gout for above thirty years; he had also other complaints, with great difficulty of breathing, and considerable disease of the heart, of which there was every symptom. He applied to me twelve months ago, and I treated him without any remuneration. He was only a fortnight under my care, and his improvement in every respect was so great that it made a sensation in the village and neighbourhood. He remained well for three months, attending to his ordinary occupation, and, as his son has told me, to the day of his death spoke