

Notices to Correspondents.

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The Lancet, Nos. XI. to XIII of Vol. II. of 1880; The British Medical Journal, Nos. 1028 to 1031; The Medical Times and Gazette, Nos. 1576 to 1578; The Philadelphia Medical Times, Nos. 333, 334; The Glasgow Medical Journal, August and September; St. Petersburg Medicinische Wochenschrift, Nos. 334 to 337; Index Medicus, Vol. II. No. 8; The Journal of Mental Science, October; Lucknow Times; On Guard, Vol. VIII. No. V.; The Specialist, Nos. 1 and 2; The Medical Press and Circular, Nos. 2161 to 2163; The Medical Herald, Vol. II. No. 17; Perthshire Constitutional and Journal, No. 2889.

The Anatomy of the Joints of Man. By Henry Morris, M. A., M. B., London, F. R. C. S., &c.

Minutes of Proceedings of the Sanitary Commissioner for Madras for the months of March and April 1880.

Annual Report of the Royal Botanic Garden, Calcutta, for the year 1879-80.

Administration Report of the Public Works Department, General and Building and Roads Branch, Madras.

Punjab Trade Report, 1879-80.

Report on the Administration of the Persian Gulf Political Residency, 1879-80.

Dynamics of Racial Diet in British India. By Surgeon-Major J. W. Johnston, M. D., F. R. S., Edin.

The Indian Medical Gazette.

NOVEMBER 1, 1880.

THE SALE OF DRUGS IN CALCUTTA.

A VERY painful case has recently occurred in Calcutta which has given rise to three separate criminal proceedings. Although one, and the most important of these, has not yet been concluded, enough has transpired in the Court of the Presidency Magistrate to indicate how necessary it is for the public safety that the sale of drugs in Calcutta should be brought under better control than at present.

The circumstances which have led to these police inquiries are very simple. A qualified native medical practitioner of standing, respectability and well-earned reputation was called to see a child suffering for dysentery. He prescribed a "specific" which could only

be obtained from the dispensary of which he is proprietor. This specific was duly procured from the doctor's dispensary and administered to the child with the result that soon after he took it he got pale, sick, blue and convulsed, and shortly died. A post-mortem examination was held, and *brucia*, the alkaloid of nux vomica, was found in the stomach. The mixture was also found to contain the same alkaloid; one mark or dose of it being in the additional chemical examiner's opinion sufficient to kill a child. The child was undoubtedly poisoned by nux vomica, and this is how the mistake appears to have arisen. The specific prescribed was composed mainly of the bark of *koorch*i (*Wrightia antidysenterica*.) There was none of the specific ready made in the dispensary when the prescription arrived, nor any of the *koorch*i bark in stock. The compounder got a new supply of *koorch*i from the shop of a *bunniah* or native drug vendor. The bark supplied by this individual was *kootchla* (*Strychnos nux vomica*.) The compounder not knowing, according to his own admission, the difference between the two barks—*koorch*i and *kootchla*—made up the prescription with the latter: the result was as above stated. The *bunniahs* who sold the *kootchla* in place of *koorch*i, were very properly prosecuted for selling a poisonous drug in place of a harmless one. They were convicted of knowingly selling one drug in place of another, but being ignorant of the properties of the drugs sold, they were punished more lightly than if the substitution had been made with a knowledge of the poisonous nature of the drug substituted. It appears from the Magistrate's judgment that when these worthies had run out of *koorch*i, they began to sell *kootchla* in place of it, and when their stock of this bark had been expended they then substituted the bark *chattim* "which strikingly differ from both *koorch*i and *kootchla*." The Magistrate arrived at the conclusion that "the defendants not having *koorch*i in their possession, were prepared to sell any other kind of bark at their disposal for *koorch*i." The defendants are further pronounced to be "entirely ignorant of the properties of the barks, and utterly reckless of the consequences which might result from the substitution of one bark for another." The question of the responsibility for the issue from the "Oriental Apothecaries' Hall" of the *kootchla* which poisoned the child in place of the *koorch*i which was intended to cure it, has not yet been determined; but the following admissions extracted from the evidence of the compounder who made up the medicine are very important in relation to the general question relating to the dispensing and sale of drugs in Calcutta.

"I know a little English, not sufficient to give any evidence in it. I have no diploma. I have no

certificate of qualification. I know the *koorchi* bark ; but I have never seen the *kootchla* bark."

It is obvious that for the public safety it is necessary that an individual entrusted with the duty of dispensing medicines ought to be able to distinguish a poisonous from a harmless bark, and that the substitution of one for the other *through ignorance* should be rendered by public law or regulation next to impossible. Accidents will happen in the best regulated establishments, and accidental poisoning through the mistake of the druggist is by no means uncommon even in England. There are in Calcutta 79 shops where English drugs are sold, 69 shops for the sale of native drugs and 85 where both English and native medicines are retailed—233 in all.

If these *bunniahs* and this compounder are not exceptions in point of ignorance of the physical appearances and properties of the drugs which are sold and dispensed in these establishments, there is no saying how much suffering and death may arise from such ignorance. "The defendants not having *koorchi* in their shop, and having run through in about four months their stock of *kootchla* which had been sold as *koorchi* (!), began to sell quite a different kind of bark (*chattim*) as *koorchi*." If this was not an extremely serious matter, the statement just quoted from the Magistrate's judgment might be taken for a good joke. The *Englishman* affirms that "the Chemical Examiner to Government is said to have made an official report on the general question of the unlicensed sale of deleterious drugs and medicines in the bazars and native shops, and the general expectation seems to be that the vendors of poisonous drugs as well as the numberless native Apothecaries' shops that have sprung up like mushrooms all over the town, will now be brought under proper regulation." Legislation is certainly urgently needed, for at present there is practically no restriction on the sale of poisons, nor any evidence or guarantee of qualification required of those who take upon themselves to vend and dispense drugs to the public.

The Municipal Act of 1866 certainly requires drug-shops to be registered, and imposes a penalty on persons opening and keeping open such shops without being registered. But no conditions of registration are specified, and the clause is perfectly powerless to restrain ignorant unqualified persons from establishing such shops. Conditions entitling to registration should be laid down by means of bylaws, and among such conditions the possession of some kind of certificate of qualification, obtained after careful examination by a competent and responsible agent, should be required of all compounders, who should be registered, and no person not in possession of such a certificate should be permitted to vend or compound drugs.

The Municipal Act also contains provisions for inspecting drug shops and seizing and confiscating adulterated drugs, but the term "adulterated" applies only to articles adulterated with intent. The Penal Code renders both adulteration of drugs and knowing substitution of one drug for another punishable ; but neither Act provides for drugs which have become inert or noxious through deterioration or accident.

This is a matter of great importance. Drugs in this country are very apt to undergo deterioration from climatic influences, and there is reason to fear that many of the "Europe medicines" sold in native drug-shops are either useless or poisonous through decay and change caused by age, damp and heat. The law ought to give the power of seizing and confiscating articles of this kind as well as adulterated drugs, and punishing those who knowingly use them for dispensing prescriptions or vend them. In short, two Acts are required—a Poisons Act and a Pharmacy Act, and we trust that the painful case to which we have referred will lead to the framing and enacting of statutes embodying the objects and remedying the defects to which we have now drawn attention.

CURRENT MEDICAL TOPICS.

The "Indian Medical Gazette Defence Fund" grows, thanks to sympathizing and generous brethren. The appeal against the judgment of the Allahabad Rhadamanthus will be lodged as soon as the Courts reopen, and we hope that an early day will be fixed for the hearing of it. The case has naturally excited the interest of the press and public, and the questions of liberty and privilege involved in it, which the Magistrate's judgment has vitally touched, are such that an early and authoritative decision of them is eminently desirable.

We regret much that we were obliged to insert such a meagre report of the evidence of Drs. Cooper and MacConaghey in the report of the trial. A full copy of the replies to interrogatories of these gentlemen will be found on another page.

Medical advertizing, pure, simple and direct, is rampant in Calcutta. The first page of one of our daily contemporaries presents habitually no less than three advertisements,—two of them parading the names and hours of business of English medical practitioners with, we presume, English qualifications. One of these gentlemen sets so small value on his professional advice as to advertise that it is to be had for nothing, and moreover makes it known that he is a vendor of drugs. The third advertiser is, if we are not mistaken, a graduate of the Calcutta Medical College. This sort of thing reduces the medical profession to the level of a trade. The *Lancet*, in a recent issue, declares that "All advertisers are to be avoided as men outside the pale of professional intercourse," a deliverance in which we heartily concur. A medical man should prefer to starve rather than degrade his calling, but fortunately there is not the slightest necessity for either alternative.

We are glad to observe that the rule has been revived requiring all officers of the Indian Medical Service to serve for two years with a native corps. This service must, as a rule, be completed at the commencement of their Indian career. This also is a good rule. Practical familiarity with the duties of a regimental medical officer and with the manners and customs of the army is absolutely necessary for an officer who may at any moment be called upon to perform military duty, and it was often found, under the old rule permitting a man to complete his military duty at any time