

Lente (Fr. D.)

THE
MINERAL WATERS OF SARATOGA.

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THE country seems suddenly to have become alive to the importance of *mineral waters* in the treatment of almost every form of disease. There is scarcely a week which does not usher into public notice, by handbills, newspaper advertisements, certificates, medical and clerical, curbstone and drug store posters in large letters, some new liquid wonder of the earth, either native or foreign, or some artificial representative of one. It is, in fact, a medical mania, like so many of its predecessors, which have swept over the land for a brief period, and, after making the fortunes of a few lucky individuals, have passed out of use and out of mind. Many of these waters may be pronounced at least harmless; since, notwithstanding the remarkable *analysis* accompanying the bottles or barrels, they have been pronounced by competent chemical and clinical authorities examples only of remarkably pure water. Others, purporting to be *natural* waters, are "doctored," as it is termed—that is, have been tampered with by adding various saline matters, to give what Nature has denied them. These are positively injurious in some cases. Others, possessing a certain degree of merit, are contaminated by the corrosion of the metallic lining of the vessels in which they are sold, in order to cheapen them, to enable the "trade" to realize larger profits, and thereby to *interest* each dealer in recommending them as superior to their competitors.

One injurious effect of this freshet—this multiplication of waters—is to confuse the public, and even the professional mind, on the subject, and to divert invalids from the proper use of the really valuable remedies of this class. Worse than all, in order to break down, if possible, the well-earned reputation of these, and thus increase the demand for the neophytes, the proprietors of the latter have resorted to misrepresenta-


tions. To one particular instance of this I have thought it proper to direct the attention of the profession. I refer to the "Congress Spring," of Saratoga Springs. This far-famed water, which has given celebrity to the equally noted watering place in which it is situated, and which has been under trial for nearly three quarters of a century, has come to be regarded, for a long period, not only as a luxury but a necessity to thousands of our citizens in all parts of the country, many of whom annually visit Saratoga for the purpose of drinking it at the fountain-head. A great many of our most distinguished physicians have been in the habit of prescribing this water extensively in their practice, either in the bottled form or by sending their patients to headquarters. To all these any circumstance affecting the reputation of the remedy is of importance, as would be the case with any other valuable remedy in the *materia medica*. To all of these the failure of their old favorite, or a serious deterioration of its remedial virtue, or even of its sensible qualities, would, no doubt, be a source of real regret. For many years reports have gone abroad, from time to time, of the failure of the spring, of a diminution of its gaseous constituent, etc. ; but it has been always found, on inquiry, to present its usual quota, except when some accident has temporarily deranged the tubing. Latterly, it has become important to parties interested in other waters, at Saratoga and elsewhere, to impair the reputation of the "Congress;" more systematic efforts have been made toward effecting this; reports have been spread far and wide of a deterioration of its previously admitted excellence. To those who are well acquainted with this water, and especially to those who are in the habit of annually visiting Saratoga, it is not necessary to say that these reports are as utterly devoid of foundation as those previously circulated. But even these may be deceived in one way, and that is by having water palmed off on them by the word "Congress" on the label, or even blown in the glass, which is either Saratoga water from an inferior spring or an *imitation* of the "Congress." But to others the writer would say that, from having been an annual visitor at Saratoga for a number of years, and having a portion of his family constantly resident there, and from a thorough acquaintance with every manipulation and repair which this particular spring has undergone for some years, he can most positively affirm that the Congress Spring water is as excellent in its effects and in its sensible qualities now as it has ever been.

With regard to other waters of Saratoga, to which general allusion has been made in this paper, I do not wish to be understood as denying their valuable properties, when they can be had in such a shape as to be uncontaminated by their mode of packing and transportation. Among the scores of valuable springs for which the valley of Saratoga is so justly celebrated the world over, and which, indeed, render it unequalled by any known locality for *general* adaptability to the cure or preven-

tion of disease, other waters *may* be equal to the "Congress," indeed may be better for *certain conditions* of the system. But for general safety and efficiency in the various idiosyncrasies of the thousands who have regularly used the various waters, in the course of the last half century, so as to give them a *comparative* trial, no one has stood the test like the "Congress." When those which, we may say in comparison, have only just commenced their career, have stood the same test, or even a fair portion of it, we may venture to pass judgment.

It is not necessarily the waters which have the most saline taste, or the greatest proportion of saline ingredients, that operate most satisfactorily, even on the alimentary canal; nor will we be apt to get a proper effect on the bowels by taking an over-dose of a saline water. An inordinate dose of Congress water, for instance, or a moderate dose at an inappropriate hour of the day, sometimes produces no cathartic effect at all, but, on the contrary, constipates, and induces *malaise*; whereas, a dose of a pint before breakfast, and aided by a slight amount of exercise, will produce on the same patient a pleasant and sufficiently cathartic effect. Many persons imagine that a slight difference in the analysis or chemical constitution of mineral waters make but a slight difference, if any, in their effect on the human organism; but those who have had an extended experience among the Springs of Saratoga know the contrary. One water, having but an apparently trivial per centage of one or two of their numerous ingredients more than another, will not only have no beneficial effect on certain patients, but one positively injurious. All medical men know how slight an addition to some particular combination of remedies, especially such as are designed to act on the liver and alimentary canal, will cause it to develop an unexpected and perhaps injurious power. Another very prevalent and more dangerous error among the public is, that, because remedies are taken in the form of a clear water, gushing from the bowels of Mother Earth, pleasant to the eye, and often to the palate, they can do no harm. Any remedy which can do good, can, as may be generally affirmed, do proportional harm, if inappropriately or improperly taken. The amount of solid matter taken in a few glasses of most of our mineral waters seems undoubtedly very insignificant, as compared with our doses of ordinary drugs. But we must remember that the peculiar manner in which they are combined in Nature's laboratory, which no *human* skill has yet equalled, and their very dilution, render them rapidly and completely absorbable, comparing somewhat in effect with the hypodermic injection. These considerations, and many more which might be adduced, if space permitted, indicate that we should be slow to abandon a remedy already thoroughly tested and approved, for all but exceptional cases, in favor of those which only time and patient investigation by a multitude of observers can place on as a safe basis.

This paper might be lengthened by a long list of certificates in corroboration of its statements regarding the "Congress Spring," both from medical and lay authorities, who have had a more or less considerable acquaintance with the different springs, but it was thought to be amply sufficient to refer to those only of the writer's acquaintance who have visited the springs year after year, or who have been in the regular habit of using the waters, and especially that of the "Congress Spring," as such persons are only capable of giving a fair verdict. The only interest which these gentlemen have in the spring is that which we all feel for the welfare of an old and valued friend. The venerable N. F. Moore, of Garrison's, formerly President of Columbia College, is probably the oldest visitor of the springs out of Saratoga, having commenced in 1805, and from his scientific knowledge, and the interest which he has always felt in the geological formations, mineral products, and other natural features of Saratoga, is well qualified to judge of the past and present condition of the waters which he has been in the habit of using; he authorizes the writer to say that he can perceive no difference in the effects or sensible properties of the "Congress Spring," his latest visit having been in July last. The other references are Professors William H. Van Buren, M. D., and George T. Elliot, M. D., of New York City, and Professor A. E. Church, of the West Point Military Academy, all of whom have used the waters of Saratoga, both from bottles and at the springs, for many years.

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