

Section on Commercial Interests

Papers Presented at the Sixtieth Annual Convention

ARE YOU ALIVE?

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This query does not apply to your physical being; the snap of your eyes, the color in your cheeks and your vigorous appearance generally, makes it quite apparent that you are very much alive.

But as a business man and a pharmacist of this very live period in commercial activities, where are you at?

You would quickly resent any suggestion upon my part that you are a dead one when it comes to sorting out the live wires in pharmacy, yet, singularly enough, in my experience in organization work it has been a noteworthy fact that the druggist who will always hollow *sure* the loudest when asked to go on a hunting trip, or is always the first fellow to dig for bait when someone suggests let us go fishing, is, in almost every instance, prompt in declaring that he hasn't time to spare when the appeal comes to lend a hand in any movement that has for its purpose the upbuilding of his business. Funny stunt, isn't it? Yet absurd as it appears, it is true, and I do not think that it is so in my experience alone, either.

We oftentimes hear men engaged in pharmacy talk of the drug business in a manner that reminds us of the old song in which we are informed that

"The old home ain't what it used to be,
The change makes me sad and forlorn,"

when the change so dolefully complained of is all to the good.

The "old home" used to consist of one story and a lean-to, facing a dirt road with ruts in it a half-foot deep, and the getting into town once a week for the mail and the country newspaper (?) meant torture for both you and the old mare. One never knew what was going on in the world until the news was so stale that other folk had forgotten all about it. Now, why should the change make one "sad and forlorn" when going back to the old home means to a neat two-story house, with porches on every side, a nice lawn in front, a garage in the rear, a well-kept state road over which to run the auto into town and back in a half-hour's pleasant spin? With the daily paper in one's hands before noon, and the postman delivering mail at the front gate every day.

And the drug business has advanced in the same happy manner, galvanized dead ones in the ranks to the contrary notwithstanding.

If your recollection of pharmacy carries back to the decade or two immediately succeeding the war of the rebellion, and it is to the conditions that surrounded pharmacy at that time for the return of which you yearn—well, if it is, all I can say in the premises was once aptly expressed by our morose friend Hamlet, "Get thee to a nunnery," or perhaps I might suggest as an amendment, to Matteawan—but, pardon me, not being much stuck on things modern, our complainant may prefer the nunnery for a place of retirement from the alleged ills that have driven pharmacy to the "demnition bow-wows."

Personally, I am not allowing any sleep to get away from me through worrying over the fact that old-time pharmacy, as I knew it, has gone glimmering down oblivion way. My prayers do not ascend, nor my tears descend, for a return of those aches that were mine for days after having turned the crank on the old drug mill in an effort to reduce obstreperous roots to a proper degree of fineness. With but a slight effort of memory there comes back recollections of many periods of a singing in the ears, somewhat after the sensation one experiences after having taken a big dose of quinine, succeeding several hours spent in pounding with a ponderous pestle, some three feet long and built in proportion, in an iron mortar, valerian root that persistently refused to respond to the treatment. And then there comes back to me the ill-will manifest toward me from all the ladies in the whole building who were sniffing their pretty noses over the nasty smell for a week after. Sometimes, I admit, my mind does sort of casually wander back to the old home pharmacy of my youth, and I recall the joy that thrilled my bosom after a whole week spent in the pursuit of such happiness as was mine to extract from such labors, when the boss, sans even the phantom of a smile of appreciation for the—to my mind—excellence of its results, placed in my eager hands the six dollars per that represented my share of the seven days' business activity.

Am I one of those disgruntled souls who sigh for the return of the old home pharmacy? Well, not so loud that the noise would wake the baby.

And even in those semi-barbarous times in pharmacy the American Pharmaceutical Association was actively engaged in fostering advancement, and most of the good that has come about is due to its earnest efforts to enthuse the pharmacist to a due sense of his importance and the necessity for him to wake up and shake off his lethargy.

At the Boston meeting I presented before the Commercial Section a paper under the title, "Business Hints from the Department Stores," in which I endeavored to make it plain to the densest mind how pharmacy could be made a better and more productive calling were we to adopt some of the methods that obtain in establishments where real live interest is centered upon making the business pay a profit.

It was not in my mind in the writing of that paper that any one pharmacist could adopt all the suggestions contained therein and apply them to his own business. I did think, however, that there could not possibly fail to be found some one or more of the many ideas advanced that could with profit be adopted by every man who owned a drug store and who wanted to make it pay better. It affords me great satisfaction to be able to state that many men have taken the time and trouble to tell me personally, others to write me, that they were grateful

for the story told in that paper from which they had received much that was of lasting benefit in the conduct of their drug stores.

We do not all see things in the same perspective, however, and all the comments have not been of the appreciative order—some fellows thought that the writer of that paper in expecting them to adopt its suggestions must be sadly in need of an injection of brain culture serum. In fact, one man hailing from the Pacific coast made use of these cynical words in quite a long article written to one of the drug journals, commenting upon my business hints:

“Is it logical to assume that a druggist with only \$2,000 investment can adopt the same business methods as one with \$25,000 investment? Because the latter can use a \$280 cash register to advantage, is that a reason why the former should invest part of his \$2000 in a \$280 cash register? He may do it and succeed, but—emphatically—there is neither sense nor science in it. It is merely a bluff and he won out.”

Now, that view of the situation is surely about as narrow as one can conceive of—and simply goes to show how very badly some pharmacists stand in need of an awakening. But there is more to follow, and of a character that makes one whose outlook upon business has not had the effect of convincing him that honesty and fair dealing among business men is a lost art, which to assume as a condition that really exists seems to be the attitude of the writer whose utterances is here being quoted, when as a matter of fact it is merely a reflex of his own narrow, jaundiced and extremely unfortunate frame of mind. Think of any right minded business man being willing to sign his name to such a resume of modern business methods as this:

“The fact that large established houses do a strictly honest and honorable business means only this: that they have arrived at that stage of their business career when honesty is the best policy. Those who adopt that policy in the beginning of their career may never hope to do a large business, for business and ethics are incompatible—one may eke out a living by strictly adhering to the Golden Rule, but—that isn't business.”

I do not know whether the man who deliberately penned such a dangerous statement for the eyes of young men to read, their brains to absorb and in their yet to come business life adopt as a guide, is a member of the American Pharmaceutical Association or not, but I earnestly trust that he is not.

But there was only one such man in all this good country of ours that gave expression to such an anarchistic utterance, for which glad consummation let us all join in a prayer of gratitude to Him who rules over the destinies of men.

Most comments were more appreciative of the objects and purposes that prompted the writing of “Business Hints.” The less jaundiced view of the paper and the results hoped for in the spreading of its doctrines will be found in this message from one whose position of Instructor in Commercial Training in one of the oldest Colleges of Pharmacy in the United States is a fair type of many expressions from men who know what is needed to make those who follow after

us better business men and more pronounced successes, both commercially, professionally and ethically, in pharmacy:

"I have just read your Business Hints. They are dandies. It is the best thing I have ever read along that line. A lot of the 'old timers' will never wake up, but such preaching will help convert many."

While pharmacy is and always will be a profession, yet the conducting of a modern drug store is and always will be a business. The fact that men of large capital are ready and willing to invest their money in corporations having for their object the placing of drug stores in prosperous communities, is surely prima facia evidence that the business is not looked upon by any means as a decaying industry. When men with a keen sense of what constitutes a good investment, willingly sign a long lease for a store room in which to engage in the drug business, the annual rental for which is \$100,000, would scarcely seem to indicate that there is no money in the business when conducted along live lines. No line of business that is regarded as a decaying industry ever attracts capital.

When I made the statement that the drug business is not what it used to be, it can only be based upon what my knowledge of the business consists of, and I can only have definite knowledge of the conditions surrounding my own store, hence when I reach the conclusion that the drug business is going back and is no longer worth while bothering with, I simply voice what my own drug business has taught me. The cause, therefore, is not far to seek. Look it up.

It is not the old home, meaning the pharmacy, that has lost its attractiveness; the changes there are all to the good; conditions under which the modern druggist labors are far and away better in every respect than they used to be. It is much less laborious than in those "good old times," for the return of which some men yearn, but to which were they suddenly transported, they would be scared blue.

No, glory be, the old home is not what it used to be.

Now listen to the conclusion of the whole matter as summed up before the Massachusetts State Pharmaceutical Association by E. O. Engstrom, whom many of you know, and who does not claim to be anything but a plain, hard-headed man who does not bother about what the other fellows are doing, but simply keeps his wits centered upon his own pharmacy and makes it a success by doing so:

"I believe if we watch our business, and take care of it, and see that our profits come sufficiently to cover our expenses and a little besides, we will find that pharmacy will come to its own, and I think it is already coming, and we will be able to take care of all conditions that may arise. If you own your own store, you do not need to worry over any of the syndicate stores."