

Book Reviews

DIGEST OF COMMENTS ON THE PHARMACOPOEIA OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA (Eighth Decennial Revision) and on the NATIONAL FORMULARY (Third Edition) for the calendar year ending December 31, 1909. By Murray Galt Motter and Martin I. Wilbert, Washington, Government Printing Office, 1910. Published as Bulletin 79, Hygienic Laboratory of the U. S. Public Health and Marine Hospital Service.

Beyond a doubt this is one of the most valuable publications in existence for the busy chemist who wishes to keep reasonably in touch with the work that is being done along pharmaceutical, medical, and chemical lines of work, in all parts of the world. This is the fifth volume to appear, and like the previous ones, is very complete, containing articles abstracted from 237 publications and 23 pharmacopœias.

From the standpoint of a State Food and Drug Chemist, this is an exceedingly valuable reference book, as one can see at a glance the work that has been done along drug lines, for any year, since the beginning of the Digests, and which covers a much wider scope of scientific literature than the average chemist has at his disposal.

The general plan of the book remains very much the same as in previous ones, the scope, if anything, being slightly enlarged, the present volume containing 730 pages of abstracts, and containing between 7000 and 8000 abstracts and tables, covering a very wide range of subjects, and giving in each case the name of the author, the reference to the original publication, and a concise, unbiased abstract of the contents.

Bulletin 79 of the Hygienic Laboratory is free to any one interested in such a publication, and no scientific library is complete without one on its shelves.

LINWOOD A. BROWN.

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It was certainly a bit of good fortune that, when the work on the former "Digest of Criticism" was to be resumed, the Hygienic Laboratory offered its coöperation. Valuable as was the "Digest of Criticism," inaugurated by the late Dr. Charles Rice, to the active members of the Revision Committee of the U. S. Pharmacopœia, it was valuable primarily to those who were content with a partial review of the subject. To those who were content with nothing but complete information on a given subject, it served but as a partial check on their own bibliography.

To the pharmaceutical scientist, the "Digest of Comments" is not a working collection of abstracts, it is a catalogue somewhat after the supplemental volumes to the "Beilstein" of the organic chemist. Hence its principal merit lies in its completeness as such a catalogue of references.

No doubt, some believe that this desire for completeness is carried too far when mere opinions are recorded as well as observations and results of experiments.

The writer cannot share this belief, though he may have his own ideas about the mere opinions of others.

Thus e. g. one author is quoted as having stated "that the oil of chenopodium must be judged entirely by its physical characters, as the constants and tests have been entirely omitted in the corrected editions." Another author "points out that as this is an American product, no difficulty should exist that would prevent the preparation of authentic samples and the establishment of correct descriptions and tests." These two opinions are followed up by a record "of physical characters" conspicuous by the absence of chemical "constants" and "tests." Yet even such opinions, the expression of which demands less time and labor than the determination even of specific gravities, angles of rotation, and solubility, though made by persons ignorant of the specific problems involved, may do some good, and hence should be recorded. They will not cover the defects, but by calling attention to them they may emphasize the necessity of trying again. If, in addition, they had but brought out the fact that this "American product" has been studied principally by foreigners, to whom we are almost exclusively indebted for the little we know about it, then possibly the stigma resting upon us as American scientists who are after the dollar and professional glory more than after the discovery of truth might have been brought home with more effect. Even the undergraduate student who prepares a bibliography of a pharmacopœial item is struck with the amount of rubbish that he has to record from American pharmaceutical journals in order to make his bibliography complete.

However, the true scientist will welcome any and all suggestions and criticisms and will try to meet them as best he can. The above selections are quoted at random simply because the book seemed to open at the particular page and because they illustrate as well as any others the care taken by the editors to present all points of view on a given subject. That they have not reserved to themselves the editorial prerogative of quasi critical selection should be mentioned to their credit. All that the scientist asks for is that he find practically everything and that he thus be relieved of the necessity to search for himself.

As to the teacher's point of view, this the writer can best explain by stating that in the University Dispensary and affiliated laboratories the "Digest of Criticisms" has a place side by side with the dispensatories next to the U. S. Pharmacopœia and National Formulary. If the dispensatories are commentaries on the U. S. P. and N. F. then the "Digest of Comments" is the latest annual commentary which often throws light on a pharmacopœial problem where the large tomes fail to do so. Hence, in a way at least, the "Digest" is even more valuable to the student working at pharmacopœial problems than the more pretentious dispensatories. While the information in the established text is more or less crystallized, that of the "Digest" imparts life as it were, even though the information imparted be merely that of a personal opinion. This is a very important factor in the training of a student especially in a country like ours where the authoritative text book is doing so much harm.

EDWARD KREMER.



When Motter and Wilbert, men well known to the pharmaceutical and medical professions, began the compilation of Comments on the U. S. P., VIII,

during the year 1905 and published same in March, 1909, as Bulletin No. 49 of the Hygienic Laboratory it consisted of 295 pages. The second volume also included the comments on the National Formulary during 1906 and contained 523 pages. How thorough and careful the literature of the entire civilized world has been reviewed is shown by the size of the present volume, the fifth of the series of "Digests," which contains 735 pages. The list of the literature reviewed occupies seven pages printed in small type.

The work is arranged in three parts:

I. General Comments, embracing legal status, scope, nonpharmacopœial standards, analytical data, biologic products, vegetable drugs and pharmaceutical preparations. As diagnostical tests are to be included in U. S. P. IX, therefore the compilers of the present bulletin have also added a chapter on "Clinical Tests," containing the most important references as to their nature and uses, in the literature during 1909. How complete this part of the bulletin is can be judged from the size of the chapter, namely nine pages, four of which are devoted to urine analysis. This information should prove very useful to the officers of the U. S. Public Health and Marine Hospital Service, to the members of the U. S. P. and N. F. Revision Committees, to laboratory workers, to medical men and also to pharmacists.

II. International Standards, containing references to the Brussels Conference and Protocol and to the foreign pharmacopœias. We take notice that among these the British Pharmaceutical Codex, published by the Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain, is also included, although not a pharmacopœia. We would therefore make the suggestion that the "Ergänzungsbuch," the supplement to the Deutsche Arzneibuch, the third edition of which has been published in 1906 by the Deutsche Apotheker-Verein, be also included in this list. This part contains many very useful tables, f. i., degree of compliance with provisions of Brussels Conference, survey of compliance with these provisions and official medicinal and potent wines.

III. Comments on Official Articles. This most important part of the book occupies 550 pages, and it should quite especially appeal to the practical retail pharmacist who is interested in the U. S. P. and N. F. and their galenical preparations. The latter are commented on, as far as possible, under the official name of the drug or chemical, but groups of galenicals are properly given under their respective titles as Aqua, Elixir, Liquor, Tinctura, Unguentum, etc. As a reference work the practical pharmacist will find this part of the book very valuable indeed, as it will acquaint him with the improvements made in the galenical preparations. It is also a pleasure to notice that the many references on almost every page show that they were abstracted from *Proc. Am. Pharm. Ass.*, 1909, v. 57, thus proving what a mint of pharmaceutical knowledge our proceedings contain. Let us hope that in the "Digest of Comments" for 1912 the JOURNAL A. PH. A. will also occupy such a prominent place.

Pharmacists and others interested in the "Digest of Comments" can secure a copy of Bulletin No. 79 up to the limit of free distribution by applying to the Surgeon-General of the Public Health and Marine Hospital Service, Washington, D. C., or for a nominal sum the Bulletin can also be obtained from the

Superintendent of Documents, Government Printing Office, Washington, D. C. It should also be remembered that the receipt of the Bulletin should be acknowledged, which is taken as an indication of interest and the continuing of his name on the mailing list.

OTTO RAUBENHEIMER.

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OLD-TIME MAKERS OF MEDICINE. The story of the students and teachers of the science related to medicine during the middle ages. By Dr. James J. Walsh, Professor of Nervous Diseases and of the History of Medicine at Fordham University, School of Medicine. One vol., pp. VIII, 446. Fordham University Press; New York; 1911.

The appearance of the above title in a pharmaceutical journal might suggest that the "Old-time Makers of Medicine" is a history of early pharmacists. But such is not the case. Again, it might be supposed that reference is had in the volume to the early physicians as the compounders of their own medicaments. But such, too, is not the case. The "makers of medicine" referred to are not the makers of medicaments, but the founders of the science and profession of medicine. Yet there is sufficient pharmaceutical material between the two covers to justify a brief review in a pharmaceutical journal.

To begin with, the outward appearance of the volume and the printed page are attractive. When one begins to read, the style is likewise found attractive. The author disclaims originality, giving credit to German and French medical historians as the sources of his information. The style is rather that of the popular essayist than that of the erudite student of medical history. One might well quote Hoefer's "Avant-propos" to his "La chimie enseignée par la biographie de ses fondateurs," with which Welsh's tome is comparable in other respect as well, viz: "Instruire, plaire et donner à penser, tel est le problème que nous sommes proposé de résoudre en érivant ce volume."

While it cannot be said that the author has made any special effort to please, it becomes apparent from almost every page that he desires his readers to think. The themes to which he directs their thoughts most are these: that the scientific spirit is not a psychological development of the nineteenth century, that much of what is supposed to be new in medicine is not original, but rediscovered, and that even the dark ages were not as dark as they are often thought to have been. He points to a sufficient number of isolated instances of enlightenment that go back far enough so as not to come in conflict with any stereotype notion of when the dark ages ended and the renaissance began.

From what has been said the pharmacist cannot go amiss expecting to find pharmaceutical history in this volume. Yet the "story" of the old-time makers of medicine is told in so non-technical a style that the pharmacist as well as the general reader may find much of interest between the two covers. However, here and there one gets glimpses even of pharmaceutical history. Inasmuch as Italy was the home of the modern European apothecary shop, the following paragraph from the chapter on "Mondina and the Medical School at Bologna" may here be quoted: