

EDITORIAL

E. G. EBERLE, EDITOR

10 West Chase St., BALTIMORE, MD.

ANTISEPTICS AND GERMICIDES.

THE term "germicide" defines itself, but the meaning of "antiseptic" is not so easily interpreted—the effect of a germicide, deodorant, or disinfectant may be implied by the term, but many infer that the action of an antiseptic is also that of a palliative—preparations that may be applied without doing injury to mucous membranes, inflamed surfaces, etc.

It is not the intention to discuss the use and abuse of drugs in this comment, nor whether it is wise or unwise to give the people a general understanding of the action of medicine, but it will, probably, be accepted as a fact that the public is better informed on the subject than in the past and that medical names, properties and uses are known to some extent in every family. Merit of some preparations, for which antiseptic properties are claimed, may not be established, but to make a change in definitions without an actual necessity for it is inadvisable because of accompanying dangers, costly and creative of endless trouble. It is easy to construct definitions, interesting perhaps, but the application is quite a different matter.

There has been more than intimation that a definition for "antiseptic" is contemplated that would fix the requirements for such a preparation the same as that of a germicide. The change would not only be costly, but a source of grave danger, for in this country it is not an easy matter to accustom people to changes of this kind. More than 100 years ago the metric system was recognized as being far simpler than the units of our present weights and measures; for 50 years or more the former has been taught in schools and still we have the old system with us; most doctors prescribe in its terms, and of the minority, the greater number base their dosage on its units. This applies to the subject under discussion only in that it speaks for the slowness with which changes become established. If there were no other terms available for the contemplated definition there might be reason for the standard, but if germicidal properties are intended why not apply the term "germicide" and let the term "antiseptic" stand; the former name sounds a warning the latter does not. Many physicians would readily recognize the danger of invariably prescribing germicidal doses of all antiseptics, and such a definition would disqualify many preparations that have been daily prescribed for years.

Pepper in "Theory and Practice of Medicine" says:

"Antiseptics are substances which prevent the growth and development of micro-organisms, and especially of those which cause fermentation or putrefaction or which produce suppuration. *They may or may not be* disinfectants or germicides. A universal germicide—that is, an agent which effects complete sterilization—is necessarily an antiseptic for the time being, but if meat broth be heated until it is sterilized and is then left in an open vessel, it is not thereby made antiseptic. An antiseptic is something which remains, and prevents the development not only of the bacteria present but of those which may be added afterward, although it does not necessarily kill them. A deodorant is an agent which de-

stroys or mitigates foul and unpleasant odors, but many of these agents have little or no disinfectant powers."

Hare in "Practical Therapeutics" writes:

"The term 'antiseptic,' as generally used, does not necessarily imply the power to destroy pathogenic germs. Any substance which inhibits the growth of micro-organisms, which destroys or renders innocuous the poisonous products of their action upon the tissues of the body, or which retards or prevents absorption of such products is properly termed antiseptic. Since germicides necessarily possess antiseptic attributes, they should, strictly speaking, be classed with antiseptics; in this portion of the work, however, only such drugs as are *sufficiently innocuous* to allow of their use in the human body or upon its surface will be considered."

Dictionary definitions:

Antiseptic.—Having power to prevent growth of the bacteria upon which putrefaction depends. 2. An agent that prevents development of bacteria.

Antisepsis.—Exclusion of the germs that cause putrefaction.

Antiseptics are substances which *without killing* organisms, lower their vitality so as to arrest their power of propagation, thereby restraining or preventing the decomposition of organic matters.

Deodorants merely oxidize the products of decomposition, and thereby correct or destroy offensive odors without any direct effect upon the causal organisms.

Dr. Valery Havard, President of the Army Medical School in "Manual of Military Hygiene" (Medical Department U. S. Army Military Hygiene), gives the following definitions:

"The lines separating disinfectants, antiseptics and deodorants are not strictly drawn, most substances in either class sharing also, more or less, the properties of the other classes; thus disinfectants, when used in small doses, lose their power to destroy germs and become simply antiseptics; for instance, formalin which is an efficient germicide in a strength of 5 per cent, is only an antiseptic and deodorant in a strength of 1 per 3000."

The changing of a definition is often a serious matter; it might be in this connection—it may mean injury and loss of life; it may involve damage and large costs; it would certainly create confusion if the standard for "antiseptic," as intimated, would become effective. Pharmacists and physicians are deeply concerned in changes of this kind, and therefore this comment.—E. G. E.

PROGRAMS OF AMERICAN PHARMACEUTICAL ASSOCIATION BRANCHES.

THE programs of the Branches for this year have been of much interest and the officers deserve the encouragement of members and non-members. There is no intention of making comparisons but to commend all of them—the subjects constituting the programs have varied and all of the papers and discussions have touched some division of pharmacy or of the drug trade.

Several evenings of the season can very profitably be given over to business or legislative matters and in the latter connection the New York Branch devoted the

November meeting to a debate on "Shall We Limit the Number of Pharmacies That May Be Operated by Pharmacists or Others within the State?" The intensely interesting and profitable discussion was participated in by fellow-members Jacob Diner and Peter Diamond on the affirmative side, and the negative of the question was advocated by Arthur S. Wardle and Augustus C. Taylor, the latter of Washington, D. C.

The signal value of such a discussion is not in the contest but in the research of the problem, the enlightenment on all phases of it, and the debater earned the praise and thanks, not only of those in attendance, but of pharmacists everywhere who are seeking information along the lines of the topic of the debate. There are other questions of related importance which can be studied in a similar way and thereby profit all concerned in the inquiry. The papers, discussions, reports, etc., which make up the programs of the Branches evidence the general interest of the AMERICAN PHARMACEUTICAL ASSOCIATION in all matters that affect the retail, wholesale and manufacturing pharmacist; the research worker, teacher, board member, student, and all engaged in any of the drug activities. The Branches, therefore, have a wide field of action wherein much can be accomplished for pharmacy and it is a pleasure to note the instructive programs which have marked the meetings of the A. PH. A. Branches this year and to express appreciation for the work of all of them and, in particular, commend the officers and committees and contributors to the programs for their successful efforts.

The presiding officers or other officials of many national organizations visit the constituent bodies; thereby the latter are brought into closer touch with the former and the officials are made better acquainted with viewpoints on matters that concern all of the membership. The National Association of Boards of Pharmacy recognized this and put the plan into practice very soon after its organization and has continued it. In December, on invitation of the Baltimore Branch, Secretary H. C. Christensen, of the N. A. B. P. and Council member of the A. PH. A., spoke before that body on the work of State Boards and the National Association of Boards of Pharmacy. During the present month, President Theodore J. Bradley, of the AMERICAN PHARMACEUTICAL ASSOCIATION, addressed several of its Branches. Aside from the pleasures of these visitations Secretary Christensen and President Bradley, as well as the membership, will profit in some way, if only by a better understanding of the aims, purposes and activities of the organizations represented and of the progress being made in the respective activities.

The AMERICAN PHARMACEUTICAL ASSOCIATION is concerned with all promotions of the drug trade and of pharmacy; contact with the public, of those so engaged, and good publicity, are influential in establishing confidence and promoting the drug business and pharmacy.

E. G. E.

Section Officers and others whose duty is to prepare programs for the St. Louis Convention should begin preparations now for this Diamond Anniversary Meeting.