

CORRESPONDENCE

SAL ÆRATUS.

BY OTTO RAUBENHEIMER.

With much interest did I read the comments on this subject in the JOURNAL A. PH. A. for December and January. May I be permitted, as one especially interested in the History of Pharmacy, to add my "grain of salt?"

There is no question that the original Salæratum, anglicized in Saleratum, was an impure potassium sesquicarbonate, a mixture of potassium carbonate and bicarbonate. This was prepared by allowing "Pearlash," a pearly or granular form of K_2CO_3 to absorb additional CO_2 . This process of manufacture was usually carried on in the fermenting room of breweries, the old-fashioned breweries where beer was made by fermentation—the kind of beer which makes our, at least my, mouth water when we think of those bygone days. Just as the old-fashioned beer, so the old-fashioned "Potash Saleratum" is at present unobtainable. Consequently to-day it is the common practice in pharmacies, drug stores, grocery stores, etc., to dispense Sodium Bicarbonate when Saleratum is called for.

Then there is another reason, an economic reason. Potassium bicarbonate is generally kept in pharmacies in the crystalline form, although it can also be obtained as a powder, and costs at wholesale about 30 cents a pound, while sodium bicarbonate only costs about four cents a pound by the keg. I pity the drug clerk who sells one pound of "Potash Saleratum," $KHCO_3$ and charges the customer sixty cents a pound and I pity him still more if he dispenses the crystals instead of the powder. These are things which you will never learn in College, but only by practical experience in a real pharmacy. It is practice that makes perfect.

I cannot subscribe to the statement by Prof. Brown on page 60 of the January JOURNAL: "Sal æratus means literally an 'Ærating Salt.'" This is not quite right, my dear Professor. Ærating Salt—the present participle in Latin would be "Sal Ærans"—the salt for ærating. On the other hand Sal Æratus—the perfect passive participle—means "Aerated Salt"—the salt which has been ærated, namely, K_2CO_3 ærated with CO_2 . The name refers to the process by which the salt is manufactured, not to the purpose for which it is used!

Last of all this little discussion again proves the value of knowledge, even superficial knowledge, of History of Pharmacy. It was for the object of promoting, in fact, popularizing this knowledge that the writer helped to organize the Society for History of Pharmacy, during his recent European trip, as fully outlined in the notice in the different pharmaceutical journals, including the JOURNAL A. PH. A., December 1926, p. 1150.

History is clarified experience (Lowell).

ANOTHER LIFE MEMBER.

Indianapolis, February 22, 1927.

MR. E. F. KELLY, *Secretary*:

Yours of February 15th, followed by certificate of Life-long Membership in the A. PH. A. to hand. I am very proud to be known as a Life Member of an organization which I have always been proud of and to which, in my time of business activity, I was able in a small way to contribute to its success.

Many happy memories are brought to my mind and to Mrs. Carter's in looking back over past associations in the A. PH. A.

I have retired from active business but am in reasonably good health.

With kindest regards,

(Signed) FRANK H. CARTER.