

## MERCHANDISING U. S. P. PRODUCTS.\*

BY J. J. NICHOLS.

Before the physician can intelligently prescribe for a patient, it is necessary to make a diagnosis. To do this, he must examine the patient and learn something of the history of the case. In other words, the "whys" and the "wherefores" are essential.

In a similar sense, when we speak of merchandising pharmaceutical products, we must diagnose the situation; we must know the "whys" of conditions that have made necessary a discussion of this subject.

The retail drug store has shared conspicuously in the changes which have characterized the entire field of distribution in the United States in recent years. Particularly is this true in respect to the modern tendency to break down former rigid divisions among the various channels of distribution. The result is, that it is no longer to be held axiomatic for the shoemaker to stick to his last; the grocer to his groceries or the cigar store to its smokers' articles.

While the cigar stores have added to their line such things as candy, toiletries and cameras, the average American drug store has become a general merchandise mart, stocked with an amazing variety of articles formerly sold through other retail channels. As a consequence, the drug business has become increasingly competitive. The transformation began, I believe, with the advent of the soda fountain. At about the same time, in many places, cigars were being added to druggists' stocks, to aid smokers who could not purchase them at cigar stores on Sundays, because of the "Blue" laws. Soon the mortar and pestle, emblem of pharmacy, was removed from over the door, and a cigar sign with the word "drugs" on the lower border, was substituted. Soft drink, laxative, candy, hair net and razor blade manufacturers, in rapid succession, obtained the use of the druggist's windows for advertising purposes. The colored show bottles disappeared and the characteristic appearance of the drug store was changed.

Ready-made medicines soon took the place of those usually prepared in the drug store. The druggist gladly gave up his task of preparing syrup of white pine, insecticides, hand lotions and similar preparations, leaving this to manufacturers. Instead, he looked after the interests of the Post Office sub-station, and the sale of theatre tickets. I contend that, during the past thirty years druggists have given more thought to furthering other people's business than they have to pharmacy. They have entirely forgotten to keep in touch with the physician, and have allowed him to get into a rut nearly as deep as their own. While the doctor gives out patent or proprietary preparations in his office, the druggist sells them under definite trade names. The public is always the innocent victim.

Another field which has been neglected is that of cosmetics. Department stores enjoy most of the volume in this field; and well they should, as the heads of these stores, as well as most of the personnel, know far more than the average druggist does, concerning this line of drug store merchandise. This is a field which is most lucrative, and which, simultaneously, produces volume.

There is another aspect to conditions as we have them, and that is the number and type of pharmacy schools in the United States. Until we reduce the number

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of schools and improve teaching facilities, pharmacy will lag behind other professions. Until standards are raised and the number of graduates is limited, as in the medical profession, the promise of our schools of pharmacy will not be fulfilled.

Having diagnosed the ills of our profession, we now come to the remedy. We must give more attention to pharmacy, and less to sidelines. We must change the appearance of our stores so that they will command the respect of the passerby. To accomplish this, we must use displays in our windows and in the interior of our stores, that will restore the drug store appearance. This can easily be done, as there are numerous drug store products that will prove of interest. You can display such things as items for first aid, for the sick-room, for the baby and for other household needs. In most cases, you may be making such displays; but are you selecting merchandise that you control, or are you featuring advertised brands, the ghost of which will come back to you later in the form of the "cut price" bugaboo or the "sold in grocery or department stores" curse?

Interior displays can be made, featuring tincture of green soap as a harmless shampoo, and tincture of vanilla as a pure and unadulterated flavoring. Iodine, rose water and glycerin, cold cream, dental powder, Dobell's Solution and cascara, are a few of the hundreds of preparations that you can display, improving your standing in the community by so doing.

There are several important considerations in the successful merchandising of these preparations. In the first place, prepare them in your own store, giving every care to the fineness of ingredients. Secondly, be careful of the packaging: select attractive bottles and boxes; have your label manufacturer prepare a neat label that will be individual in your community; use the finest corks obtainable or the new bakelite caps which are now being featured. Screw tin caps were never intended for pharmaceutical purposes. Leave them to the grocer or varnish maker. Thirdly, set a price that is fair and not exorbitant, on such preparations.

Make calls on your physicians. Detail them on U. S. P. and N. F. preparations. Impress them with your honesty, without mentioning the word *honest*. Offset the detestable remarks of the physicians' supply house salesman. Invite the doctors to your store. Call their attention to the absence of patent medicine displays. Impress them further with your knowledge of biological products, and educate them to prescribe, without their knowing that you are teaching them. This pays big dividends. The department store cannot get such business from you.

Make a display of such chemical apparatus as test tubes, and pipettes; apparatus that will bring the youth of your neighborhood to your store. Help the young men and women with simple chemical problems and you will have them for customers, and, most important of all, as enthusiastic boosters.

The pharmacist must learn that his mission in life is to be the hygienist of his community. Until he has done this, pharmacy will fall short of the accomplishment of its object. Pathological chemistry is taught in most of our pharmacy schools, yet how many pharmacists use the knowledge acquired, after leaving college? Recently, a physician in New York, speaking before the New York City branch of this association, stated that druggists were not prepared for this work. On the whole, this is true; but there certainly are a number of druggists qualified. The fact is, they have not taken the trouble to so advise the physicians. Brush

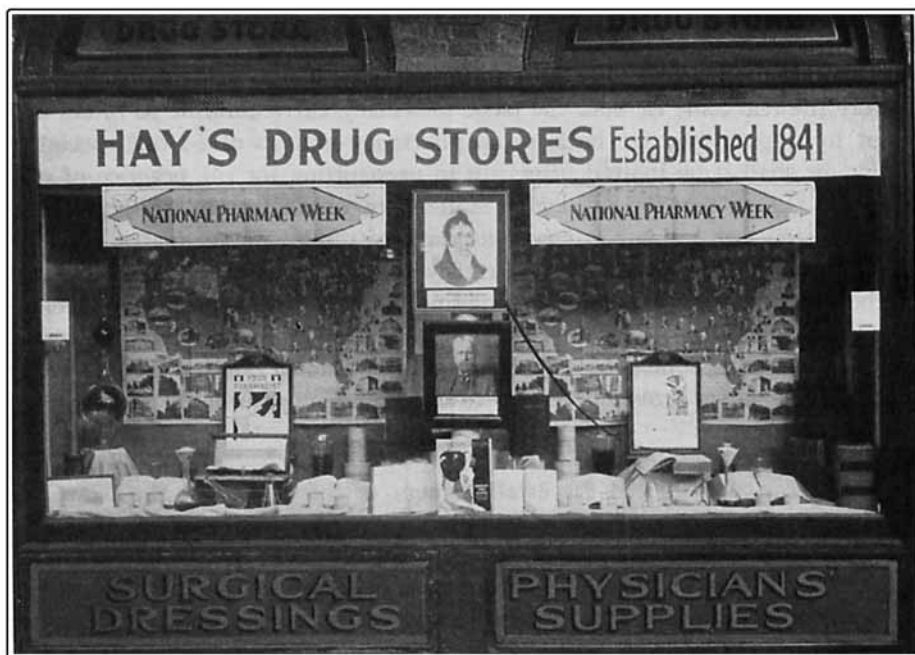
up on this subject; equip your store with the proper apparatus; and then let your physician and lay customers know that you are prepared to make urine analyses and blood tests. Don't continue to let this profitable part of your training go to technicians and office attendants who have, at the most, only a superficial knowledge of the subject. Supply your physician with reagents and stains for his microscopic use.

Dentists are now beginning to write prescriptions. They need your help. Call on them, and leave samples of liquor antiseptic and the alkaline solution. Train them to buy their pharmaceutical and chemical necessities at your store.

Veterinarians are likewise potential customers. See that the representatives of the better pharmaceutical and biological houses call on the veterinarians, and, you, too, show them samples of boluses and other preparations that you can supply. Thus, you can keep for yourself the business that is going to "fly by night" pharmaceutical houses, many of which have no pharmacists employed.

Hospitals are good prospects in rural and suburban localities. Get some of their business by getting acquainted with their superintendents.

In closing, may I add that the suggestions which have been made have all been tried with great success, and I have every reason to believe that, if we will be more concerned with the sale of legitimate drug store merchandise, we will have little need to worry about cut prices, chains and other bugaboos.



In the above window a picture of Dr. Lyman Spalding (Father U. S. Pharmacopœia) is shown; below this the oil painting of Dr. James A. Spalding, referred to in the October JOURNAL, page 1135; see also November JOURNAL for 1928, page 1144. We are indebted to Mr. Hay and Dr. Spalding for preparing this window.