

SOME NOTES ON PHARMACOGNOSY.<sup>1</sup>

BY RALPH BIENFANG.

"Probably the term 'Pharmacognosy' will never be interpreted exactly the same in all colleges of pharmacy. Your Editor believes that we are coming nearer a uniform interpretation of this term, and the following notes on Pharmacognosy by Professor Ralph Bienfang will aid in arriving at that desired uniform interpretation."—C. B. JORDAN, *Editor*.

I present for your consideration certain problems that have confronted me during my teaching, and after telling you how I met them, see whether you agree or disagree.

One time, while in our Botany library completing my notes on certain plants, I asked a graduate student whether the department had a book on synonyms. He said, "Surely, we have the 'Index Kewensis.'" I told him that I probably didn't mean synonyms, but common names instead, because what I wanted was a book of the type of Lyons. So I decided I had been rather careless in using the two terms and now have this understanding of them. A synonym is an incorrect or incorrectly applied scientific name, as a new name applied to a species or genus already properly named, or a specific name pre-occupied by that of another species of the same genus; so used in the system of nomenclature in which the correct names of certain natural orders are regarded as determined priority. A common name is a popular term used to designate any of the members of a group of similar organisms or objects.

Another thing that has troubled me is the term "medicinal-plant." Few of our plants to-day are used directly in medicine, so I wonder if they should still be called medicinal plants. What most of them actually do, is furnish a drug. Is not then "drug plant" more appropriate? Whereas one might have a difficult time to define a medicinal plant, the term "drug" has been defined by law in this country, and a "drug plant" would then be a plant which may furnish one or more drugs.

A term which seems rather ambiguous is—"vegetable drug;" literally, a drug from a vegetable. Vegetables are specific things to-day, so I wonder if "plant drug" wouldn't be more proper.

With these remarks for an introduction, I now enter into a subject which has commanded my interest for a long time—the interpretation of the word "pharmacognosy." Such an interpretation might be attempted through an etymological analysis. However, "a knowledge of drugs" is not very specific in the face of another word, "pharmacology," whose rendering etymologically is "discourse of drugs." Let us look to the past for an explanation.

The word pharmacognosy entered the literature in 1815 presumably as a synonym for materia medica, which was at that time a study of crude drugs from the animal, vegetable and mineral kingdoms. However, in the middle of the 19th century, exclusion of the drugs from the mineral kingdom was brought about through the advances made by chemistry. This exclusion can well be approved since it left pharmacognosy a biological science instead of a mixed one. Still were this precedent to be followed with regard to plant and animal drugs, there might soon be no such subject as pharmacognosy.

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<sup>1</sup> Delivered before the Teachers' Conference on Materia Medica, Toronto meeting, 1932.

Looking at the past, it might be concluded that pharmacognosy was a study of crude drugs of plant and animal origin. I would like, however, to suggest that in the past, though crude drugs were studied in pharmacy schools, it was not because they were crude drugs but because they were the simple drugs of that time. An interpretation of this sort welcomes the advances made in chemistry in isolating definite chemical compounds from crude animal and plant drugs.

I propose a definition for pharmacognosy based on the needs of students of pharmacy. I feel that there has always been, and is now, a definite need for a subject which will acquaint and familiarize the pharmacy student with the simple drugs used in medical practice. It then becomes a fundamental subject which besides other things fortifies the man behind the prescription counter against possible error in handling simple drugs.

The interpretation I propose is—"pharmacognosy is the history of simple drugs derived from contemporary plants and animals."

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#### CAPPER-KELLY FAIR TRADE BILL.

Senate bill 497 and H. R. 3677 define the intent of anti-trust laws as to certain agreements. Indications are for enactment of this legislation which provides "that nothing in the Clayton Act shall be deemed to prevent a grocer, producer or dealer selling goods identified by a special brand name or trade-mark of which he is the owner from specifying by agreement with distributors the re-sale price of such identified merchandise, which prices stipulated in any such agreement shall be uniform to all distributors in like circumstances, differing only as to the quantity of such merchandise sold, the point of delivery and the manner of settlement."

The Supreme Court of the United States recently handed down an opinion in which it is held that a coöperative enterprise otherwise free from objection, which carries with it no monopolistic menace is not to be condemned as an undue restraint merely because it may affect a change in market conditions where the change would be in mitigation of recognized evils and would not impair but rather foster fair competitive prices. The opinion stresses that there must not be unreasonable restraint of trade or an attempt to monopolize.

There seems to be a growing approval of removing trade restrictions and at the same time establishing uniformity in prices.

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Along with a special "150th Anniversary Supplement" (1783-1933), the *Glasgow Herald* has issued a reproduction of the first issue on January 27, 1783, of its precursor, the *Glasgow Advertiser*. Among its eleven advertisements there are two of pharmaceutical interest. One of them is by the widow of a gardener to the College, who offers medicinal herbs of all kinds and distilled waters of cinnamon, peppermint, pennyroyal, mint and hyssop, with an N. B. that she has already begun to sell herb ale as formerly during the season, and J. Gillies, bookseller, above the Cross, announces that he is sole agent for Essence of Peppermint, by His Majesty's Royal Letters Patent, prepared by J. Juniper, Nottingham, an "elegant preparation" for the "immediate" relief of "gouty and cholicky pains in the stomach and bowels, low headache and all disorders arising from wind." It is said to "recommend itself to all families and travellers by land and sea," and the public are warned against "base counterfeits." We learn from other sources that at this period nearly all proprietary medicines were sold in Glasgow by booksellers and stationers. From—*Pharmaceutical Journal & Pharmacist*.