

THE TEACHING OF COMMERCIAL PHARMACY.*

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The term "Commercial pharmacy," as generally understood, covers the business features of pharmacy, and, as a subject of the college curriculum, it may be defined as the study of the business problems of the present-day retail pharmacy.

The word "present-day" is used advisedly in this definition, for it must be admitted that the business problems of the retail pharmacy are constantly changing and what was good commercial practice a few years ago is now a fitter subject for discussion by the pharmaceutical historian than by the teacher of commercial pharmacy.

Present-day pharmacies are not all conducted on the same basis, and this fact complicates the teaching of commercial pharmacy. However, I believe that this handicap can be overcome by calling attention to the practice in our best stores as well as in the less desirable ones in such a manner as to create in the student a desire to approximate the best when he starts out on his business career.

It is to be supposed that some commercial training can be acquired by the student in the four years which he is required to spend in a retail pharmacy, by law, in most States. The training there acquired depends, first, upon the methods pursued by the proprietor of the pharmacy in which the student is employed; and, secondly, upon the student's ability and willingness to learn.

There are many features of business practice which cannot be taught except by experience, and usually this experience is not acquired until the pharmacist is in business for himself. In this connection I might refer particularly to buying goods. This is an important part of the business of pharmacy which is usually attended to by the proprietor himself, and the clerk is given little opportunity to learn it.

In many instances he does not lose much by being deprived of the proprietor's instruction, and, if he is wide awake, he will be able to judge for himself whether the "boss" is a successful buyer or not, and later govern his own buying policy accordingly.

Evidently business practice is not taught satisfactorily in most retail pharmacies, as the demand for teaching it in the colleges of pharmacy is constantly increasing.

The teacher of commercial pharmacy is confronted with a difficult task, for he has no time-worn footsteps in which to tread. He must break new ground, and it is essential that he approach his subject with a clear conception of the present-day problems of the pharmacy, an open mind, and a good supply of common sense.

The professor of pharmacy may teach all that is scientific about his subject, without regarding how much of his teaching is later applied, by the graduate, in actual practice; the professor of chemistry may draw beautiful pictures of organic formulas, and the professor of botany may dwell at length on the importance of schizogenous intercellular air-spaces in certain plant parts, but the teacher of commercial pharmacy is compelled to face conditions and set aside theories.

He must take cognizance of the fact that more thought is given nowadays to penny sales than to percolation; that more brain energy is used up in trying to undersell and otherwise compete with the other fellow than in writing organic formulas, and that the green color in the almighty dollar is much more attractive

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to the pharmacist of the present day than is the chlorophyll in our medicinal plants.

How best to reconcile the teaching of ideal pharmacy by the well-equipped and sincere major professors with the practice of pharmacy of to-day is no small problem, and it is the problem which confronts every man who teaches commercial pharmacy.

The greatest mistake that a teacher of commercial pharmacy can make is to ridicule the teaching of the theoretical subjects in the pharmaceutical curriculum and endeavor to impress upon the student that business practice is paramount in pharmaceutical education. However, the professor who can see nothing but chemical analysis as the life-work of the pharmacist makes the same type of error.

The following quotation is taken from an article by S. P. Sadtler in the *American Journal of Pharmacy* (1894), p. 227, and gives an excellent idea of the misconception of the practice of pharmacy in the minds of some eminent authorities, and indicates an absolute refusal to face the facts. It reads:

"If the pharmacist is known to his neighbors and to the medical profession with whom he comes in contact as a good chemical analyst, a thorough botanist and pharmacognosist, and, above all, a skilled compounder of all classes of official pharmaceutical preparations, he can rest assured that he will succeed, if he has, in addition, good common sense. Of course, all of these educational qualifications referred to may be thrown away on a visionary, rash, and unpractical person."

I fear that, according to this criterion of success in pharmacy, 99.5 percent of those now in the profession are failures.

How much more rational is the view expressed by Joseph Jacobs, in the *Proceedings of the American Pharmaceutical Association* (vol. 48, p. 97), in the following words:

"That pharmacist who best and most thoroughly knows the scientific side of his profession, and whose education has trained his intellect to quickly master in detail the facts of each business condition that confronts him, will be most likely to make a commercial success of his avocation. . . . Our noble professors, who have dedicated their talents and time to the training of youths, should be cheered by the thought that the theoretic side of their teaching is also implanting powers that will aid their charges more successfully to cope with the difficulties that lie across the pathway to commercial precedence."

This gentleman has, to my mind, grasped the situation fully.

All thinking men realize that when one spends some time in the study of any science, language, or other cultural subject, no matter how remote it may be, from one's vocation, the mind is benefited and the ability to solve the many intricate problems which arise in the day's work is aided and increased.

It is, therefore, ridiculous to minimize the value of the theoretical subjects in the curriculum of the pharmacy school, aside from any consideration of their absolute necessity to the proper practice of the profession.

It is my belief that we are teaching little more pharmacy, chemistry, materia medica and botany in our schools at present than is absolutely necessary for the intelligent practice of pharmacy, and any additional time to be devoted to teaching business practice should not replace hours now spent in teaching other subjects, but should be added to the present schedule.

The time allotted to the subject in the *Pharmaceutical Syllabus* is 75 hours, but I doubt whether many institutions are giving courses covering more than 60 hours. This leads to another problem of the teacher of commercial pharmacy, which is, to determine how best to utilize the time allotted to his subject.

The outline given in the Syllabus covers the subject quite well. It takes in bookkeeping, business correspondence, commercial and business law, property and business practice. The last-named heading includes such subjects as selection of location, financing, equipping, selling, advertising, and manufacturing. It is the most important topic and should take up from one-third to one-half of the time allotted to the course. Bookkeeping should take up about one-third of the time, and the balance can be used for the other subjects.

[The speaker then briefly outlined the course as given by him at the Medico-Chirurgical College of Philadelphia, and closed with the following remark:]

“The subjects in the curriculum of the pharmacy course may be likened to a series of colors which when blended in the proper proportion will produce a ‘neutral gray.’ When the subject of commercial pharmacy is added to the mixture of the other subjects of the course, in just the proper proportion, a perfect neutral gray results, but without it the blending is incomplete.”

BUSINESS.

Business is a Jealous Servant; it is sensitive; it demands undivided attention; if neglected, its disfavor is shown in reduced profits; it will boss the inefficient man—play with him—tangle him—finish him. For the constant, consistent efficient man—for the man who knows all the ills to which business is subject—who governs the big things from positive knowledge of the little things—for that kind of man it works overtime. Stretching the earning capacity of every dollar, it grows, expands, earns, knowing only one limitation—the measure of its boss.—*The New Idea*.

THE TRADE PAPER.

The following remarks on the value of the trade paper were written by that master in the art of publicity, the late Elbert Hubbard, a short time before leaving America on the ill-fated *Lusitania*: “I know hundreds of high, prosperous business men, manufacturers, dealers, jobbers, craftsmen, and I cannot recall a single instance in which the mentally successful man does not read his specialized paper. He subscribes for it and he pays for it promptly. When you subscribe for your trade paper and assimilate it, you are uplifted, inspired, given courage, pep, intellectual vim and vigor and enough trade information to make you free from the trials and tribulations which beset the man who ‘doesn’t know.’ These things all have a direct influence on the bank and mental balance. The trade paper binds everybody in the business into a fraternity, which spells length of days, because it ‘serves’ and its service is based on specific knowledge.”
