

PHARMACY AND THE ARMY.*

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The demand for commissions in the British army by pharmacists appears on the face of it to be reasonable, and the ambition a perfectly legitimate one; it is only when we examine the matter from the army man's point of view that both the reasonableness of the demand and of the ambition become more than doubtful. It is an axiom that the dispensing of medicines should be undertaken by men with the necessary qualifications, and, paradoxical as it may seem, most of the army dispensing is so controlled, being done by the manufacturers of pills, tablets, and readily-measured compound galenicals before the army compounder (really the M.O.'s orderly) ever sees them; although in certain hospitals and depots there may be a doubtful reliance occasionally placed upon a particularly smart man of this type, where a pharmacist should be employed, generally speaking there is no room in any one regiment for a pharmacist-officer as such. It is only by making these facts clear that pharmacists can proceed if they are not to delude themselves with the idea of their importance to the Army Council. For dispensing only there is no room for them except in very special cases.

If, however, we turn to their personal as well as pharmaceutical qualifications, we can make out a case not nearly so easily to be refuted. As a man used to purchasing and taking charge of a very various stock of most diverse bulk, the pharmacist should, especially with training in sanitation, ambulance, bacteriology, X-ray work, etc., make for each regiment a most efficient quartermaster or his commissioned assistant; the medical stores, apparatus, and dispensing becoming his particular charge under the direction of the M.O.; general stores, etc., under the direction of his superior quartermaster, and himself the responsible officer (as the quartermaster at present is) for the general arrangement of camps or billets, the food and water supply and the sanitary arrangements, in addition to the supervision of the distribution of medicaments and the possible introduction of a more varied dispensing of medicines. Although readily capable of assimilating the theoretical knowledge, it has in the past been almost impossible for the pharmacist to acquire the necessary practical experience which would alone justify his demand for recognition. With the establishment of special training centers, the institution of classes for drill and technical subjects, together with the field experience to be gained with the regiment to which he is attached, the pharmacist's claim will be greatly strengthened for further training by a department of the R.A.M.C., which could, by a suitable subdivision, be made available for the purpose; both freeing medical men for more legitimate advisory and diagnostic work, and providing the Army with a service which nearly all Continental armies are glad to make use of.

There can be no doubt in the minds of thoughtful men that Britain will never go back to the ante-war Army conditions. The mere fact of the increased stamina of the young recruits of the first days of the war, as compared with that of their companions who did not join so soon, is quite sufficient to prove the necessity of the universal training of the youth of the nation on similar lines in

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the future, even if it is not necessary for military purposes; and in the new condition pharmacy must take its place in the forefront, instead of waiting on the offer of a back seat.

On the suggestion of eminent authorities connected with the Army Medical Service, the Pharmacists' Volunteer Training Corps, at first independently, afterwards as a unit of the Central London Regiment (soon to have its sphere of action still further widened), has worked tentatively in the various directions above indicated, and has attracted considerable attention from responsible officials connected with the War Office. As its members are precluded by their business engagements from joining the regular forces, only a few of those who have passed through its earlier courses of training are engaged in active service, but the experience gained will be a valuable asset when it comes to training the young man of the future, making a fine stepping-off place for his work as a commissioned pharmacist.

A warning note must be struck when we speak of ambulance work, sanitation, bacteriology, X-ray work, etc. It should never be suggested that a pharmacist would become merely a stretcher bearer or first-aider, although he should have full knowledge of the requirements in these directions. Nor is it essential that he should be a practical plumber, an analytical chemist or a fully-fledged meat or sanitary inspector. Yet less would it be expected of him to carry his work in bacteriology beyond the micro-biological stage, or his X-ray work beyond facility in handling the apparatus for taking photographs or administering indicated doses from the medical officers' directions. It would be no part of his business to offer any opinion on a case because he was able to recognize the bacillus of tuberculosis, or to make any statement as to a particular fracture, because he happened to have X-rayed a similar one, any more than it would be to attempt to correct the physiological conditions leading up to an attack of neuralgia or to supply medicaments to an undiagnosed case, on the strength of a patient's assertion as to his particular complaint. In short, his sphere in these services would be preparatory as the assistant of the medical man, so that from his work a diagnosis, which he could not undertake, might be made by those trained for the purpose. Diagnosis and the subsequent prescribing are, and must remain, outside his province.

Rules of professional conduct, embracing these, must be rigidly adhered to by a commissioned pharmacist if he would gain and retain the respect and good will of the Army Council and its medical advisers.

On some such lines as these it appears possible that the pharmaceutical demand for commissioned rank can be met, and would possibly be welcomed. The time is ripe for immediate action. The "wait until after the war" crank will doubtless raise his voice, but we are at present in a little backwater of time. Our active young men are at the front. They will not wish to come back to old conditions. Our preparations must be well forward, our plan of campaign elaborated, the spade work of a secure foundation for our superstructure put in, *now, by us*, if we are to prove our worth, not only to the Government, but to the nation at large.
