

SECTION ON PRACTICAL PHARMACY AND DISPENSING, AMERICAN PHARMACEUTICAL ASSOCIATION

JEOPARDIZING THE PHARMACIST'S REPUTATION FOR FAIR DEALING.*

BY ROBERT P. FISCHÉLIS.

In every walk of life there are men who, because of ignorance or lack of scruples, are continually jeopardizing the good name of their fellow craftsmen.

Pharmacists, perhaps more than any other group of men, have been made to suffer inconveniences of all sorts because of a few evil doers within their ranks, and it is only very recently that pharmaceutical organizations have taken up the matter of educating the public to the realization that the profession as a whole should not be judged by the acts of a few weak brothers.

Campaigns of publicity such as have been inaugurated by several state associations will redound to the good of the rank and file of retailers, provided the public actually receives the kind of treatment which it is led to expect from the press bulletins issued.

The object of this paper is to sound a warning note to those who are taking unfair advantage of war conditions and favorable publicity regarding the high prices of drugs, to impose on the public and thereby cast a blot upon their fellow craftsmen.

Two instances have recently come to the attention of the writer, which demonstrate either an intense ignorance of prevailing market prices of drugs or a desire to "bleed" the customer, on the part of the pharmacist. One druggist received a prescription calling for $1\frac{1}{2}$ grains of powdered opium, and $\frac{3}{4}$ grain of powdered belladonna to be mixed and made up into three rectal suppositories. Claiming that the Roman numeral III looked like XII on the prescription, he made up 12 suppositories in place of 3, although the quantities of the drugs should have suggested that fewer than 12 suppositories were prescribed.

The customer was charged \$1.30 for this prescription. Let us analyze the cost. The opium at prices then prevailing cost .4 cent, the belladonna .02 cent, the cacao butter for twelve 30-grain suppositories 3 cents, making a total of 3.42 cents. Doubling this would give us roughly 7 cents. Adding 5 cents for cost of container and a liberal compounding fee of 75 cents, we arrive at a total of 87 cents.

Without taking into consideration that the wrong number of suppositories was put up in the first place, it can readily be seen that a fee of \$1.30 was exorbitant.

A veterinarian of high standing and one who has a warm spot in his heart for the pharmacist, having been an apothecary at one time, told the writer of an experience which is even more striking than the above.

He sent two prescriptions to a druggist, one calling for 2 fluid ounces of fluid-extract of ergot and $\frac{1}{2}$ fluid ounce of fluidextract of nux vomica, and the other

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calling for 2 ounces of potassium bromide. A lumped charge of \$4.25 was made for the two prescriptions.

Taking them up individually, we find that 2 ounces of potassium bromide at that time cost 82 cents; doubling this cost, adding 5 cents for container and 15 cents as a compounding fee, we have \$1.84.

Two fluid ounces of fluidextract of ergot cost 56 cents, half an ounce of fluidextract of nux vomica cost 7 cents, making a total of 63 cents; doubling this and adding 5 cents for container and 30 cents as compounding fee we have \$1.61; adding this to the charge for the bromide prescription we get \$3.45. Thus it will be seen that the customer was asked to hand over nearly \$1 more than a most liberal accounting would make the prescriptions worth.

The customer protested to the veterinarian about the high price asked for these prescriptions and the latter promptly took up the matter with the druggist who maintained that the charge was just. But the best part of the story is still to come. Two days after these prescriptions had been filled, the pharmacist notified the customer that he had made a mistake in looking up prices and that the two prescriptions would cost \$1.65, which is just 15 cents above the actual cost of ingredients and containers, according to our calculations.

The latter case therefore seems to be one of gross ignorance of how to compute the price of a prescription as well as a lack of acquaintance with market prices of drugs. In the former case it seems to be a question of "getting as much as possible while the getting is good."

It would be a pity if the organized effort that is being expended in placing the pharmacist in the proper light before the public should be made ineffective by the acts of a few greedy blunderers, just when this effort is beginning to bear fruit.

ABSTRACT OF DISCUSSIONS.

EMIL ROLLER.—We can not adopt any uniform rule of pricing prescriptions because of the different locations and the different clientele we have, and the peculiar conditions of these people will necessitate a moderation of prices in some neighborhoods, while in other neighborhoods where rents are in the thousands and the people have an income that is ten, twelve or twenty-five thousand, to charge them prices that we would charge to our customers in a neighborhood where the men earn twelve, fifteen or twenty dollars a week would be unjust in the one case to the customer, and in the second case unjust to the druggist because his expenses in the conduct of business is so much larger and those have to be added. Once in a while I have an argument with customers, "Why, I paid Jones only so much, why should I pay you more?" I always answer them, "If you eat a steak in a little restaurant you pay fifty cents, and if you go to the Waldorf Astoria you pay a dollar and a half and you wouldn't kick about it. Why do you kick here? You get better service in this neighborhood, adapted to your means and conditions." So I think the fixing of uniform prices must be invariably looked upon according to the position or location where you have your store.

OTTO RAUBENHEIMER.—I don't see anything wrong with the charge of one dollar and thirty cents for twelve suppositories, and if it was a good hot day I would charge a dollar and a half.

H. A. B. DUNNING.—One point I want to make with reference to the price of prescriptions; referring to the twelve suppository prescription particularly, I don't think that we should give much consideration to the cost of the prescription. More consideration should be given to the time and thought and care of finishing that prescription. The cost should be based rather on the knowledge required and the time than the cost of it. As a matter of fact we often tell our customers that we don't calculate costs. We calculate overhead expenses particularly, and the knowledge and other necessary requirements such as one of the gentlemen mentioned, of locality and the ability of the customer to pay.

P. HENRY UTECH.—I believe the average drug store puts too little valuation on the professional knowledge. For instance, if you are located on a corner, rather than to add five or ten cents more the tendency is to make it five, ten or twenty cents less and in doing so in a large measure depreciate your own ability as a pharmacist. I think that is one of the things we ought to take home as a lesson, as Mr. Roller says, stand on your own feet and don't be afraid to charge what the trade will bear, of course within reason.

R. P. FISCHELIS.—I might say my prices were computed according to the N. A. R. D. schedule of pricing prescriptions, and I hope every one of you are getting a dollar and a half an hour for your work. You must not lose sight of the fact that this prescription was written for three suppositories.

I note that no one took exception to the prescription which did not take any time at all to compound, and for which an exorbitant fee was charged. I might say in the one case, it was the transaction of a country store and the people who brought the prescription were poor people, and the latter fact holds true in the city store, for the other prescription. It may be true that in different localities we need to charge different prices, but we can't lose sight of the fact that there must be a maximum in things. If we are getting the business of pharmacy down to a system, we ought not to have one system for one customer and another system for another customer.

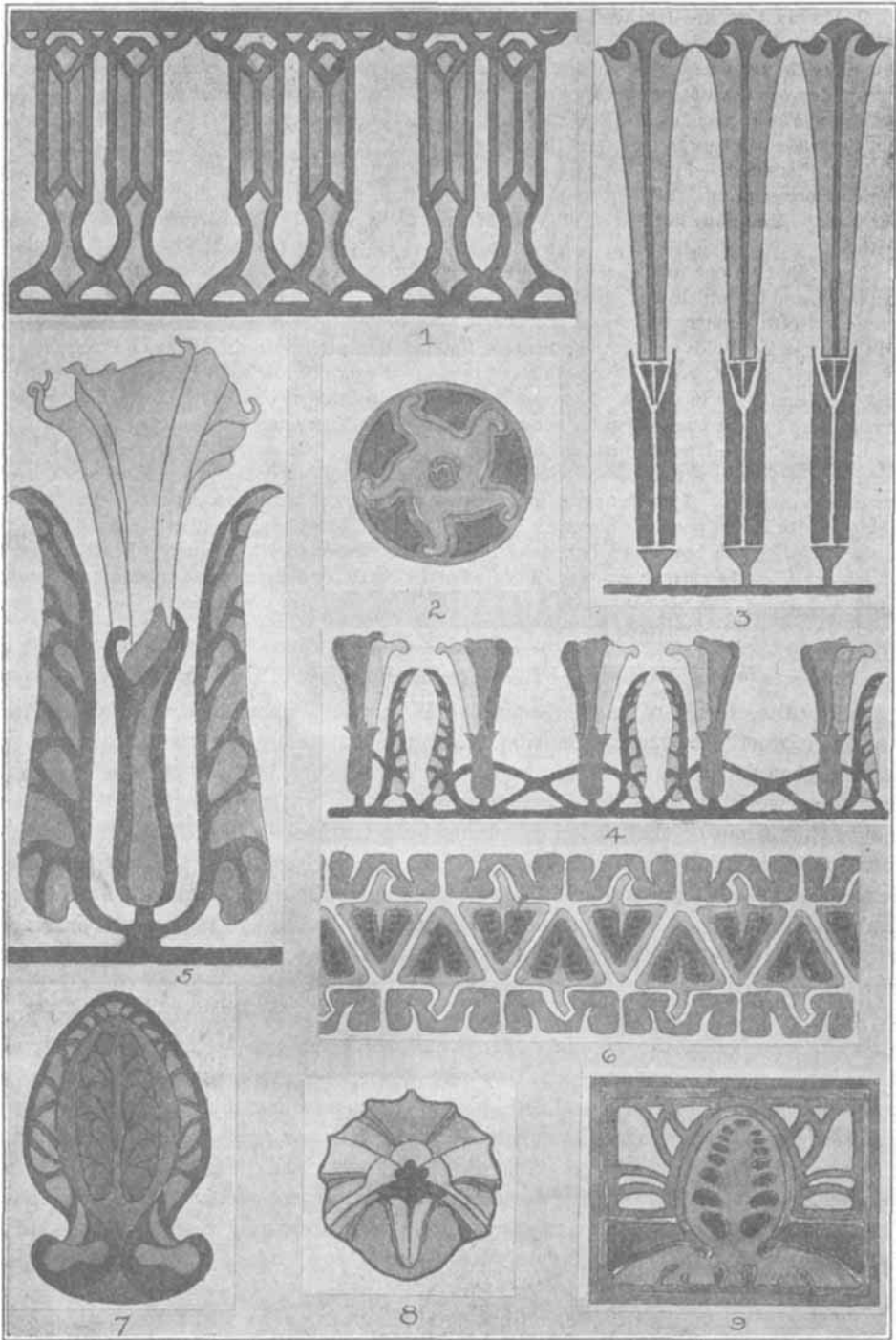
EMIL ROLLER.—I would just like to make one remark. One day one of those "very smart young men" came in with a prescription for a grain and a half of potassium permanganate and four ounces of water. I made up the prescription and charged him forty cents. Well, after he paid, and with lots of people in the store he said, "Suppose I had bought ten cent's worth of permanganate of potash how many bottles of this could I have made?" I answered: "I charged you ten cents for the permanganate, five cents for the bottle, and twenty-five cents for my labor. If you had bought the permanganate and I mixed it for you, you would gladly have given me, wouldn't you, twenty-five cents for the labor?"

MEDICINAL PLANTS IN DECORATIVE ART.*

One other result of garden activity (Wisconsin Pharmaceutical Experiment Station) is worthy of special mention. Though remote and unexpected, it proved interesting none the less. If the average American drug store of the past was not much of a work of art, its decoration was even less such. Yet it has long been known that some of the medicinal plants lend themselves admirably to conventionalized decoration of a higher order and are peculiarly adapted to the drug store. Hence, in the late summer of 1914, Miss Bernice Oehler, teacher of art at the Madison High School, was induced to visit the garden and to look over the available material. At that time a large number of species and varieties of *Datura* were in blossom and had already produced fruit. Leaf and stem, flower bud, full blown flower, and capsule, all lent themselves admirably to the problem. For each member of the art class there was a different species or variety, yet all of the forms were of similar type. The result was most striking. The water-color drawings and the conventionalized designs proved universally attractive when exhibited at the University Exposition the following spring. If juniors in a high school can produce such results what may be expected of the mature artist? The possibilities in this direction for drug store decorative art are well-nigh unlimited. The adoption of such designs in planning new stores would result in something distinctive, and would tend, as much as any one thing, to lend a more professional aspect to the pharmacist's place of business.

Of these illustrations The School-Arts Magazine says that they exhibited unusually fine coloring, all lost in the half-tone reproduction. See illustrations on following page.

* From Report of Pharmaceutical Experiment Station, University of Wisconsin, December 1916.



DRUG STORE DECORATIONS

Decorations derived from several species of *Datura*, raised in the Wisconsin Pharmaceutical Experiment Station garden, by pupils of the Madison High School under the direction of Miss Bernice Oehler. (The cut was kindly loaned by *The School-Arts Magazine* of Boston.)