

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCIAL INTERESTS

Conducted by DR. ROBERT P. FISCHELIS.

James F. Kane, the proprietor of a prosperous pharmacy at Pittston, Pa., hits the nail on the head in the following paragraphs taken from a letter received by the writer in which Mr. Kane voices his approval of the Department of Commercial Interests of this JOURNAL. He writes: "I yield the palm to no man in our ranks when it comes to upholding the dignity and high standard that ought to be maintained in the Prescription or Professional Department of our business, but I know, after thirty years of experience, that the merchandising department must not be neglected if the druggist has a vision of a brighter day to come.

"Service, not self, should be the motto in every drug store, and it can as easily be applied to the commercial department as to the professional, and if we will all practice that motto, there will be fewer failures and less temptation to do the things that we should not do, either as pharmacists or merchants.

"A druggist, because of his long hours, exacting duties, and educational requirements, should be well paid for his effort in serving the public, and as merchandising is the easiest means to that end I consider it a duty that we owe to all young men entering our ranks, to teach them high ideals and practices in that department also."

The foregoing statements summarize admirably the need for what the Pharmaceutical Syllabus designates as Commercial Training or education in Commercial Pharmacy. Whereas in former years pharmacists collected some of their drugs or purchased them direct from collectors and made them into the recognized preparations, to-day no retail druggist does any collecting of drugs, and few manufacture pharmaceuticals requiring complicated apparatus and time-consuming procedures. It is not our place here to either condemn or condone this change in conditions. We simply recognize conditions as they are and advocate training men to fit the requirements of the times. However, we do not advocate shutting the door to the purely professional teaching of pharmacy, for in any given group of pharmacists there will always be a few who make professional practice their source of income. The number is limited, because no community can support more than a very few such pharmacists. The balance must take on merchandise of various kinds to supply the public demands, or starve. Every pharmacist should be equipped to carry on both kinds of drug stores, and the responsibility of training young men and women accordingly must be shared equally by the Colleges of Pharmacy and the proprietors of drug stores or preceptors.

In times gone by the apprentices or their guardians were as particular in selecting the men with whom they served their time as the preceptors were in selecting apprentices. Each recognized that, once the agreement was made, the other party was entitled to service or instruction, as the case might be. The system was good, and if we were called upon to-day to advise some youngster who contemplated embarking on a pharmaceutical career we would urge him most earnestly to apprentice himself—as near as that is possible to-day—to one of the retail druggists of recognized standing in his community and to begin at the beginning.

learning the names of preparations by giving their containers the weekly bath, etc.

The well-trained and successful retail druggist can be a wonderful teacher of his clerks because the opportunities for imparting instruction are so frequent and varied. There is, for example, the buying of drugs. How many retail druggists teach their clerks anything about buying? How many are willing to let clerks profit by the mistakes they have made, and how many have sufficient system about their buying to make it worth teaching? Several years ago Charles Holzhauer, of Newark, N. J., gave an outline of his system of keeping track of prices and quantities purchased through a simple card index record. The main features of this system are embodied in the following comment:

For every item handled there is a separate card. On this card there is a record of the date of purchase, the quantity, the price and the name of the firm from which the goods are bought, with such other reference notes as may be of value as a guide in making future purchases. What is the result of keeping such records? Facts, actual information, on which an intelligent procedure can be based, rather than guesswork which results from attempting to carry everything in the head. The advantage of having records on hand on which to base one's judgment in buying can be measured in dollars. Such records must be kept up to date and, needless to say, they are worthless while in the filing case. Constant use gives them a real value.

Let us assume that Mr. Chemical Salesman is paying his periodical visit to the store. He offers us a certain U. S. P. chemical at an attractive figure. Without records we would look at the stock bottle and perhaps walk to the store room to see what stocks are on hand and, finding none, we would conclude that a quantity of the stuff should be laid in, as long as the price is right. The salesman gets the order, and the chances are we have a five years' supply, at the end of which time the market price may be one-half the figure at which the chemical was bought. Never mind if the loss can be covered somehow—it remains a loss nevertheless, and all because we did not have facts. With our records at hand we would look up the chemical offered and confirm the salesman's statement that the price quoted is lower than that of the last lot we bought, but, we ordered it two years ago in half the quantity that is now being offered at the low figure, and there is still several months' supply on hand. Furthermore, the purchase previous to the last on record was less than the last, and it lasted two years. We therefore decide that inasmuch as this chemical is not consumed in great quantities it would not pay to tie up the money required to buy the amount necessary to get the low price. Records, just a few figures, taken in at a glance, have enabled us to make a decision quickly and have dismissed any doubt in our minds as to the wisdom of the course pursued.

Big corporations to-day are successful because they make no random shots. They hit the bull's eye nine times out of ten because their aim is supported by facts and figures, which leave no room for doubt or indecision. The principles that make for success in large enterprises can be applied with equal force to smaller ones.

We often wondered whether the study of materia medica and botany had any practical application in retail pharmacy of to-day, outside of the general knowledge that was gained in poring over the text-books that described the sources, uses,

dosage, etc., of the many drugs enumerated. One day we were charged with the buying of supplies, and in glancing over the daily news we read of sporadic cases of a disease which was assuming epidemic proportions in the surrounding country. Later in the day we received a number of prescriptions calling for a certain drug that was considered a specific in the treatment of the epidemic disease. The evening papers told of floods and devastating storms in the Far East which had destroyed crops of a number of medicinal plants. Separately these news items were interesting, but meant nothing. Coupled collectively with our knowledge of the habitat of drugs it meant that there would later on be a shortage of the specific drug prescribed for the epidemic disease because it came from the Far Eastern lands where drug crops had been injured. Anticipated shortages of drugs, based on real causes, have an influence on the current prices as soon as handlers of these drugs become aware of the conditions. Knowing this we immediately stocked up on the drug in question, and as a result were able to supply the demands when these became heavy, while others were breaking their necks to make purchases at any price.

Watching the drug market and learning the conditions which influence it are a large part of the buyer's education. Teachers in pharmacy schools should draw attention to the commercial value of the information they impart. It will not lower their dignity, and may often turn a highly theoretical course loathed by the student into something practical that is doubly appreciated.

BIBLIOGRAPHIES.

The purpose of this comment is to express satisfaction at the results of the establishment of the Bibliography of Pharmaceutical Research conducted by the Reporter on the Progress of Pharmacy, Dr. H. V. Army. It is also intended to point to this work by the American Pharmaceutical Association as valuable and important to pharmacy and for pharmacists, for scientists in related lines of endeavor, and for the public. Work of this kind is conducted by organizations, by libraries, and very often conducted at an expense, but is of immense assistance to research workers and ultimately brings valuable results. The work undertaken by members of the Association, and under its guidance, has been so valuable that a brief comment does not give due credit. In the April issue mention was

made of the investigations of one of our members which laid the foundation for what is to-day known as colloidal chemistry.

Information is the beginning and the goal of research, and the researcher must have reference to the literature on work that is engaging him; bibliographies, therefore, are important sources of information. The preparation of bibliographies requires time, and represents much investigation and reading. The department established in the JOURNAL, will prove of great value. Those who presented this timely thought, and others who are contributing their services, are entitled to more than these few words of appreciation, but in seeing the fruitful results of their efforts they have a measure of satisfaction.
