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CORRESPONDENCE

STERILIZATION.

THE EDITOR:

DEAR SIR: On Wednesday of last week I read the contribution of A. W. Linton on "Sterilization," published in the June issue. That article is timely and to the point. I doubt whether anything written for publication in pharmaceutical journals for the past fifty years is of equal importance. There is not one single assertion made by the writer that cannot be substantiated a hundred times a day in any large city, or at least a hundred times each year in any fairly busy drug store, either city or town. The warnings which he sounds are so real and the need to heed those warnings so urgent, that I for one feel keen regret that the author, did not fight for instant recognition, in the form of a committee empowered to work on the matter at once.

After a day given to thought on the subject, the writer of this letter decided to make an excursion into the ranks of our retail trade in Philadelphia, for the purpose of attempting to

discover as nearly as possible the proportion of active daily working druggists who knew anything about the subject of sterilization, and about how much care they exercised in an attempt to get results, if any.

The program was arranged thus: A prominent locality, noted for the beauty of its stores and the apparent care given the matter of merchandise displays, was selected for examination. Ten stores were visited, and to each the following questions and orders were given:

- 1st. An ounce of sterile distilled water, U. S. P.
- 2nd. (Question). When was this water sterilized?
- 3rd. An ounce of sterile normal salt solution.
- 4th. (Question). How was this sterilized?

It is shameful to be compelled to admit that not one of these ten stores passed the test submitted to them. Imagine the feelings of this writer, when, after entering store after store, accompanied by a medical friend, the same ignorance of the subject of sterilization was encountered.

In stores Nos. 1, 2, 3, 5, 9 and 10 the Pharmacopoeial material sterile distilled water was manifestly unknown, and in each of 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10 the article was not on hand or at least had not been reboiled within six to ten days, and no one of them had used any precaution whatever to prevent contamination. Mind you, this in spite of the fact that the U. S. P. gives specific directions for both the preparation and storing of sterile distilled water.

In a visit to another store in a section of the city much given to offices for doctors, an order was submitted for a half ounce of 1 percent sterile solution mercuric cyanide, and a request was made for permission to see the work room of this drug store and to witness the making of the solution. The clerk to whom the order was given put some distilled water into a flask and heated the water over an open flame to an estimated temperature of 150°, and then made a solution of the salt in a graduated measuring glass which looked as though it had been in regular prescription department use. A few questions, rather clumsily put to the worker, placed him on his guard, but also developed the fact that he did not know how to prepare sterile distilled water, and he also did not know that the Pharmacopoeia embodied an article and all necessary information referring to it. He (the worker) has had eleven years' experience in retail drug stores, and had been employed the better part of a year in the place in which this occurred.

It is a singular fact that there has been no improvement whatever in the equipment of the ordinary drug store, with a view to placing that equipment abreast of the times. A more or less indifferent array of mortars and pestles, graduates and stirring rods, and there the matter ends. How much could be said for modern equipment, and what ugly, disagreeable comparisons could be made? Why be like a farmer who deprives himself and family of the use and comfort of a bathtub for the sole reason that his father before him did not have one?

Insist on improvement in this matter, and do it so everlastingly as to compel an improvement. The subject should be taught in our colleges and schools by practical every-day-in-the-harness retail druggists, and not by the professor in charge of that branch of science only. There is a reason for this.

F. W. E. STEDEM.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

REPORT OF THE GENERAL SECRETARY—1920.*

To the President and Members of the American Pharmaceutical Association:

The past year has witnessed a marked growth of membership in the Association. At the present time we are carrying on our list approximately 3,300 active members and 2,000 soldier and sailor members. Over 500 new members have been elected since the last convention, although a period of only eight months has intervened and several months were spent in organizing the membership committee and getting the work started. It is hoped that this steady growth in the membership of the Association will be maintained. It would appear that a large proportion of our S & S members should be converted to active members at the end of the present calendar year and, with the accession of new members which may be counted upon during the remainder of the calendar year, our active membership should soon reach the five-thousand mark.

* Presented at City of Washington meeting, A. Ph. A., 1920.