

Papers Presented to Local Branches

"PATENT MEDICINES"—THE PHARMACIST'S DUTY IN REGARD TO THEM.*

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Doctors and druggists exist for the good of the people. If the services of doctors are no longer needed, if "patent medicines" can cure the ills of mankind more efficiently or merely more economically than doctors can, then the medical profession is a useless parasite upon the body politic and ought to be abolished. And if "patent medicines" are all that is needed to cure the people's ills, then the pharmacist is not required either, for any \$6-a-week clerk or any illiterate peddler can sell them just as well as a learned pharmacist, and pharmacy will have to go the way of the spinning wheel and of the stage coach. Let us face the question fairly and squarely: is the ready-made medicine the next step in the evolution of the treatment of the sick? This is an important and a practical question; for, if this is the case, then let us all get into the "patent medicine" business, before it is, too late.

Unfortunately, the "patent medicine" is not the goal toward which modern medicine is tending. For, in the first place, our highest aim as physicians is the prevention of disease. Both public and profession are becoming more and more conscious of this, as is evidenced by the great public health movements that are afoot. In the second place, we have learned, and the people are commencing to realize it, too, that, with very few exceptions, medicines do not cure disease. If there were "specifics" in the homeopathic sense, if for each symptom or symptom group there existed an appropriate medicine, then a booklet containing symptoms arranged in alphabetical order and numbered medicines, like "Humphrey's Specifics" would become the ultimate result of all medical and pharmaceutical learning. But medicines do not act in that way.

Ever since the days of Hippocrates, the scientific physician has known that it is "nature" that does the healing. When a surgeon sets a fracture, all he does is to place the ends of the broken bone in the position they occupied before, and keep them there, while the mysterious forces of nature cause the bone to knit. When a physician administers iron to an anemic patient and the patient gets well, the doctor really cured the anemia no more than a hod carrier builds an edifice. The doctor merely supplied a material that was deficient in the economy. All the learning of the ages has not yet enabled us to make a single red blood corpuscle. The aim of all medical treatment is to aid "nature" in accomplishing the cure; for, while "nature" unaided will do much, "nature" aided by art can do much

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more. In most cases of illness, the physician's role is like that of an experienced guide, while the patient must do his own traveling.

I do not deny that often an appropriate medicine just "touches the spot" and gives relief; but relief is not cure; and the devising of "spot-touching" medicine is about as easy or as difficult as shooting a bird on the wing. Would a blind man have a better chance to hit the mark than a trained sharpshooter?

We have a few, unfortunately, very few, true specifics, that is medicines which in a special and unmistakable manner favor the cure of disease. One of these, for instance, is iron in certain forms of anemia. But giving iron in anemia is not the physician's highest function. The iron in "Williams' Pink Pills for Pale People" will do as much. The physician's business is to find the cause of the anemia; and, when the cause is removed, the anemia is soon at an end. In quinine we have an agency that has a special destructive influence upon the malaria organism. Yet, even here it requires skillful use of the medicine; or, else by excessive dosage, we may harm our patient, or by insufficient dosage develop in our patient a breed of malaria parasites that are immune to quinine, thus rendering our patient incurable by that drug. Similar are the relations of mercury to syphilis and of salicylate to acute articular rheumatism. It requires training and skill to assist most efficiently in the extermination of the invisible foes that infest the body. Diphtheria antitoxin converts this dreadful disease into a mild malady. But many a patient misses his chance for recovery by temporizing with patent medicines, such as "Tonsiline," which latter, though it might cure the sore throat in a giraffe, often fails to do so in the short neck of a child. Because any sore throat may be diphtheria, when a person comes to a druggist asking for something for a child's sore throat, the druggist ought to advise to have a doctor see the case. Newspapers instead of advertising "Tonsiline," or, at least, underneath each such ad., should caution their readers not to neglect a sore throat, especially not in a child, but to have it examined by a reliable physician.

From a therapeutic standpoint, "patent medicines" may be classified under the following headings: (1) Inert materials; (2) poisonous agents; (3) good enough medicines for the right case.

Inert materials owe their efficiency to the faith with which the patient takes them. One of the business tricks of the quack and of the nostrum maker is to get the victim to think that he has a disease that he does not have, and then to cure him of that idea by a placebo.

"Munyon's Kidney Cure," claimed to "cure Bright's disease, gravel, all urinary troubles, and pain in the back or groin from kidney disease," is said to be nothing more or less than pills weighing 0.6 grain and composed of 100% white sugar. No trace of any medication could be detected.

"Plantoxine," which is advertised as a "corrective for abnormal conditions of the system which create undue susceptibility to miasmatic diseases, plant pollen, lagrippe, etc., chronic malarial diseases, hay fever, hay asthma, rose cold, etc., influenza and lagrippe," has been alleged to consist entirely of milk sugar. Selling sugar of milk, worth wholesale about 10 cents per pound for about \$6 retail apparently converts it into a most potent remedy, provided a sufficiently strong claim is made about its potency. (From "Nostrums and Quackery," published by the American Medical Association.)

Fraudulent as are such preparations, they are superior to the next class of "patent medicines" to which I wish to call your attention, namely those that contain poison. Most nostrum makers want to put a really good medicine upon the market, one that gives immediate relief. To produce such effect a potent drug is required. Now it is unfortunately true that all potent drugs are capable of acting as poisons. It is really only a narrow line that divides the medicine that helps from the poison that harms.

The tar barrel has yielded to medicine a series of most remarkable pain relieving agents in acetanilide, acetphenetidin, and antipyrine; and now these substances are used to an enormous extent for the relief of the aches and pains of mankind. Nearly every druggist has his own headache cure, nearly every one of the headache nostrums contains one of these drugs, and doctors prescribe them very extensively. Now why should we condemn their use without a physician's prescription? Let me cite to you their death and poisoning record, up to July 31, 1909, as published in the Journal of the American Medical Association of that date. Doubtlessly there are many more cases that have not been reported:

	Poisoning	Death	Habitual Use
Acetanilide	911	29	144
Antipyrine	593	15	7
Acetphenetidin	165	10	18

These agents are poisons to the blood and to the circulatory system, and certain people have a strong idiosyncrasy against them. When a doctor prescribes them, they are safer, because he can usually detect signs that would warn him of the presence of idiosyncrasy; and then, if he is a doctor worthy of the title, he will do everything in his power to determine the cause of the pain, so as to free the patient from the necessity of taking the drug. Pain is a danger signal. We must not remove the pain, without, at the same time, removing the danger.

Opium is king over all pains and distresses. The Easterners print upon their cakes of opium: "Mash Allah" (the gift of God). And so it is, one of the choicest gifts of God, if properly controlled. But when it escapes that control, it becomes a gift of the devil. Not only is there the danger of the opium habit, but the very power of the drug to give relief is one of its greatest dangers. Nothing is easier than to temporarily stop a cough with an opiate or to check a diarrhoea. But cough and diarrhoea are usually salutary natural reactions. They exist for the purpose of removing irritating material from the body. Lock up that material, and you aggravate the irritation of the diseased membrane. Druggists, if you must put up your own cough cure or diarrhoea drops, leave out the opiate from your formula! What should we say of the fiend, who beguiles the tired mother into narcotizing her babe with opiate "soothing syrups," thereby slowly but none the less surely undermining life at its very foundation? Would it be too much of a sacrifice to professionalism, for you pharmacists to refuse to carry in stock any "patent medicine" containing opiate?

As the law of Illinois now prohibits the sale of cocaine-containing nostrums, it is not necessary for me to say much about these here. Am wondering whether this law caused any appreciable diminution in the income of the drug trade. It surely must have caused a diminution in the number of cocaine fiends.

I am unable to tell from experience to what extent the liquor habit is induced,

aided or abetted by alcoholic nostrums from Hostetter's down to Peruna and Lydia Pinkham's. Perhaps not to any great extent in this town, where people have no difficulty in obtaining liquor in pure form. But I am assured that in temperance towns these things have quite a sale and that useful lives are wrecked by them that would not have succumbed to liquor because of prejudice against the latter, and the prevalence of the idea that "medicine" is good for a person; and if a little is good, more ought to be better.

A third class of nostrums may be recognized, good enough for the right case, but liable to do harm by getting to the wrong case. In the treatment of coughs, for instance, several stages must be recognized. There is the stage of dry cough that needs loosening up; later the secretion may become excessive and need drying up. And, what is still more important, many a case of consumption starts with a simple cough; and, by temporizing with various cough medicines, these patients lose valuable time, converting a curable case into an incurable one. In diarrhoea, there is a stage when evacuant treatment is indicated, and a later stage when astringency may be needed. Throughout, the proper dietetic treatment is of first importance. Constipation is caused rather than cured by cathartics. To the layman, a good cathartic means one that will produce profuse evacuation of the bowel. Such an action sweeps out of the alimentary tract in one day an amount of fecal matter that usually requires two days for removal. Thus there can be no bowel movement on the second day. And because he had no evacuation this day, the patient takes a cathartic; and this repeats itself indefinitely, the patient becoming a slave to the cathartic pill. The treatment of constipation needs change of habits and change of diet, in first place; and the mildest possible cathartic in progressively reduced dosage, in second place; and, if the dose of the cathartic cannot finally be discontinued, recourse to massage, gymnastics and electric treatment. A skin disease or an affection of mucous membrane may need soothing treatment or stimulation, mild or severe. There is no possibility of a single remedy suiting all cases of even the same kind of disease.

"Patent medicines" then are erroneous in principle and often disastrous in their results; though, of course, occasionally they are beneficial. They have the same advantage over the physician that the quack has: namely, that the physician is expected to cure; if he fails, everybody is told of it; when, on the other hand, "patent medicines" fail, no one hears of it, because the patient is ashamed of having been foolish enough to resort to them; if, however, he gets well, no matter whether because of or in spite of the "patent medicine," it is such a wonderful thing, that he tells everybody of it and cheerfully writes a testimonial. In their claims all "patent medicines" are fraudulent; for, if the nostrum makers confined themselves strictly to the truth in regard to the efficiency of their preparations, they could not get great results from their advertising.

I admit that the "patent medicine" fills a want, or else it would not exist. I can see how a poor person taken with what seems to be a minor ailment would seek relief in a 25-cent bottle of "patent medicine" rather than pay \$1.00 for a doctor's consultation and 50 cents to the pharmacist for the medicine. And as long as conditions are such, the "patent medicine" will continue to exist; and druggists will have to sell them. However, it seems to me that pharmacists can do a good

deal to mitigate the evils arising from their use by adhering to the following principles, which I herewith respectfully submit to your consideration :

1. By resolutely refusing to carry in stock any nostrum containing poisons, especially habit producing poisons. The requirements of the "pure food and drugs act" make it easy to decide which nostrum would come under this heading.

2. By refusing to permit himself to become a nostrum manufacturer or to enter into partnership with one. For, knowing as he does, that it is impossible to be successful in this business without practicing fraud or foisting poisons upon the people, and doing them an untold amount of harm, the pharmacist as an honest partner of the physician in efforts to alleviate suffering and prevent disease, will not soil his hands with money obtained by dishonesty or at the expense of human suffering.

3. By not pushing the sale of "patent medicines" or advertising them in his store windows or upon his fixtures. For, recognizing the fact that "patent medicines" are at best makeshifts, often dangerous ones, it is derogatory to the dignity of the pharmacist as a scientific man to give them his endorsement, which advertising the article certainly means. Indeed, it is not a high compliment even to the business ability of the druggist to have him use his valuable window space to push the sale of articles upon which he makes a minimum profit, instead of using it for the promotion of the sale of goods that yield better returns.

4. By not joining the ranks of "price cutters." For, as I see it, price cutting on "patent medicines" merely means that, as there is very little profit in them anyway, a dealer sacrifices all the profit in order to make more on other goods he hopes to sell to the same customer. What matters it, if the price cutter sells more "patent medicines" than you do, if the people come to appreciate you as a professional pharmacist? For professional services people always pay well and pay it gladly.

Ladies and gentlemen, the motto of this great association, of which I am proud to be a member, is not a mere dream: "*Pharmacia vera prevalebit*," True pharmacy will prevail.

THE NECESSITY FOR A PHARMACOPŒIAL SUPPLEMENT.*

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The ideal of all professions is to achieve for every member ethical and scientific excellence. Volumes might be written in defining these professional goals; but after all the spirit of the ethical is merely the "golden rule," while science is essentially the "knowledge of why"—the former satisfies the conscience; the latter, the reason. If within any profession some elected or self-constituted group of members should assert the right of a star-chamber censorship over the consciences and reasons of the members, such right would be promptly repudiated—royal prerogatives having no place in democratic science.

Yet it might be quite possible that unconsciously and by insensible degrees a

* Read before the Scientific Section of the Philadelphia Branch.