

HOW TO CASH IN ON A PHARMACY COURSE.*

BY J. A. POOL.

This query to a group of college professors and research men may seem trivial and inappropriate. To the prospective pharmacy student it is vital. To the young man who has only a few years to devote to special education and only a limited amount of money this problem is one of the most important he will ever be called on to solve. Many do not give it careful consideration because they have a vague idea that the business of conducting a pharmacy is always pleasant and profitable. Pharmacy schools are full of students who have never had a day of actual store work, who have no business ability and never will. Hence the financial wrecks and disappointments in the business. It is equally true that many young men after a few years of practical store work lose all interest in the business and drop it without ever taking the college training. Therefore it is most important to the student, to the college and to the public that every person who contemplates the acquiring of a practical store experience should carefully search for the correct answer to this pertinent question, "Can you cash in on a college course?"

Incidentally and personally it may be said that the writer of this article was graduated from the Philadelphia College of Pharmacy at the age of 19½ years and since 1887 has been the owner and operator of a drug store and is at the present time. The observations herewith submitted are not the result of theory or of hearsay, but of experience and observation in towns and cities of all sizes from Chicago down to the one-drug-store town.

PURPOSE OF HIS EDUCATION.

It is safe to assume several things in this connection—one is that every student who enters a school of pharmacy does so with the intention of using his education ultimately as a means of making his living, whether it be as a pharmacist, a special chemist, a college professor or research man.

Another certainty is that no one, or few, at least, ever become wealthy in the vocation no matter how well they are satisfied with their work.

Another and very encouraging feature is that so many fields are offered which have as their starting point the education which may be acquired at a pharmacy college. Of these the only one which the writer will attempt to discuss is the retail drug business, for the very apparent reason that is it the only one he knows anything about.

A casual investigation will show that there are several distinct varieties of institutions now doing business which are all classed as drug stores. At Rochester, Minn., is a store which handles the prescription work from the Mayo Brothers Hospital. They employ a large force of registered pharmacists and do not depend to any great extent on the merchandising feature. In the Columbus Memorial Building in Chicago is another store which does practically no retail business except compounding the prescriptions of the physicians whose offices are in the building.

VARIOUS KINDS OF STORES.

In one of the best towns in South Dakota is a store which is operating as nearly as possible along these lines—at the same time doing analytical work for

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the physicians. Stores like these are not very numerous but must be intensely interesting and profitable.

Another class of stores is represented by the big stores in prosperous cities in the west, conducted by careful business men who are good pharmacists—not necessarily college men—men who are good merchandisers. These stores have their prescription department segregated—generally in the rear of the store—and the prescription work is handled by registered pharmacists who are nearly all college graduates. The front of the store contains the usual line-up of cigars—soda fountain—sundries—books—stationery, etc. The proprietor has learned by this time that it is not necessary to employ registered pharmacists to sell these goods and can use less expensive help. He has also found out that about the only person in his store who knows or cares anything about the wall-paper or paint stock is himself—therefore he is gradually dropping that line. He sells anything that is fair and honest and shows a reasonable profit. His town is so far from a city that he can realize a fair profit on his goods and as a general rule is making money on them.

This kind of a store is ideal for a man who combines the qualifications of being a good pharmacist and of being naturally a good business man; possessing the merchandising instinct of knowing what goods will sell and how to sell them. A man who may possess the best and most complete scientific education in pharmacy but who does not have the business instinct would lose money in this kind of a store. The lure of the laboratory would keep his attention away from the merchandising of his store—which he does not really care for and is not interested in as he should be, and what money he makes in the back of his store will be lost in the front.

Next come the stores in the countless small towns throughout the country which are large enough to support only one or two drug stores. These stores sell a varied line of goods—often in large quantities to country trade. There is not enough business in regular drugs and medicines to make these stores pay without the help from the side lines. Often the owner gets into various enterprises outside of his drug store and many of them make more money thereby than the city stores, but they must be especially adapted to country store ways and people. A druggist who does not like life in a small town and who does not intend to become part of the social and political organization of the town and really become one of the people had better stay away from a small town for he will not succeed.

Coming back to the city drug store, once more, as found on almost any business corner, we have one of the greatest problems of all. The overhead is high, the hours are long, these stores are in direct contact and competition with cut-rate stores of all kinds, and the variety of goods sold outside of drugs and medicines do not run into much money. A Chicago druggist, this summer, told me the highest priced article in his stock was a hot water bottle. Very few of the goods carried, known as nationally advertised goods, allow a margin of profit sufficient to pay their share of the overhead expenses. Where, then, does a store of this kind produce a satisfactory profit? The only apparent answer is that the prescription department carries the load with strong help from the soda-water side of the business.

The only hope for these stores is a large volume of business which few of them realize. If you are interested in this feature some time get chummy with the bookkeeper in your jobbing house and get him to tell you how many of these stores

are covered with chattel mortgages in favor of the jobbers. On the other hand, many city stores fortunately located and rightly conducted do an immense business and the small profits on the merchandise are more than overcome by the large volume of sales.

If you are a city man—or if you prefer living in a city rather than a small town—and if you have some financial backing to start on, you have a right to aspire to the ownership of one of these profitable city stores. If you are not a good man for a city store and if your means are limited—think it over very carefully—otherwise you may spend most of your life working for your jobbers.

YOU CAN CASH IN.

Certainly it is possible and not very difficult to cash in on a college course provided the young man will first satisfy himself as to what his qualifications and inclinations are, and then go ahead. If his ability is all scientific he will probably make more money working on a salary than in going into business himself, remembering also that a man will do better work and achieve a greater degree of success in following an occupation that he likes and enjoys than he will in working at something with which he is not contented. In my town are five former druggists who are all still active as business men. Two of them are graduates of pharmacy colleges and both of them were out of the business before they were 30 years old. Of these five former druggists, two are bankers, two are insurance men, and one is a farmer, and all are successful in their present lines. These men all dropped the vocation in which they started and bettered their condition, yet any one of them could have stayed in the business and made a success. Why did they quit? My idea is that after a few years in the store work they concluded they did not like the business. What a waste of time and money would have been avoided if they could have realized this before they started.

If the young men who contemplate entering the drug business would only give as much time and thought to its various phases as they should, if they would work as clerks a few years before determining, if they would only think ahead—the druggists of the future would be happier and more successful than many of to-day, for the drug business to those who like it and work for it, brings a reward. Its changes, its prospects and its possibilities are never-ending, and it is more business-like than any other profession and more professional than any other business.

ANTHRAX.

Dr. Douglas Symmers, Director of Laboratories, Bellevue and Allied Hospitals, and Dr. D. W. Cady, pathologic interne, Bellevue Hospital, recently contributed an article on the subject to the *Journal A. M. A.* They purchased shaving brushes from street vendors, which they submitted to bacteriologic examination. They state:

“Out of a total of forty-one brushes thus investigated virulent anthrax bacilli were isolated in three instances, or 7.3 percent. In thirty-two brushes, or 78 percent, bacilli were grown that presented morphologic and cultural features closely resembling those of

the anthrax bacillus, but guinea pig inoculation was attended by uniformly negative results—so-called anthracoid bacilli. From the remaining six brushes no suspicious colonies developed.

“These results show that shaving brushes of the sort that we examined are all too often harbingers of anthrax bacilli of exalted virulence, and the wonder is, not that so high a percentage of cheap brushes is infested, but that cutaneous anthrax following their use is not more common. No doubt man's relatively high degree of immunity to anthrax and the possession of an unbroken skin by the users of contaminated brushes serve as protection in many cases.”