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THE PROBLEMS OF MAINTAINING PHARMACEUTICAL
RESPECTABILITY.*

BY L. E. SAYRE.

If one would take time to read and re-read Dr. H. V. Army's address on the occasion of his acceptance of the Remington Honor Medal for 1922, which is to be found in the JOURNAL OF THE AMERICAN PHARMACEUTICAL ASSOCIATION, Vol. XI, No. 6, June 1922, with the title "The Place of Pharmacy in the World," he would be impressed with the inherent historic wealth of pharmacy in its contributions to science and would, if endowed with fervor, be inspired to militantly maintain its hard-earned reputation—earned, worthily, in the face of no little opposition and handicap. It is that sort of a feeling that prompts the writer to eye with misgivings the many interferences thrown in the pathway of pharmaceutical progress—barriers often erected by the enemy, but as often permitted to arise by the mental inactivity and indifference of the profession itself. In that sense the problem of maintaining pharmaceutical respectability assumes a real importance, and should enlist sympathetic activity on the part of scholarly pharmacists—

* Section on Practical Pharmacy and Dispensing, A. Ph. A., Asheville meeting, 1923.

meaning those concerned mainly in making a living by conducting a retail business respectably and successfully.

Quoting one phrase of Dr. Arny's excellent address: "I have tried to emphasize that pharmacy has a distinct place in the world of science as well as in the world of service and that it is the duty of every true pharmacist to maintain pharmacy's proper place in the world."

That word "service" which in its purity of meaning signifies so much has been so debased by the merely mercantile drug establishments' misapplication of it, that the public is investing it with less exalted applications. Real service as construed by the real pharmacist is the helping and promoting of customers' interests from a sense of duty, especially in such cases where the patron is unversed and needs help. What the chain store glossary of terms dubs as "service" should read "ingratiating servitude; a truckling for favors to come; the invitation of business by undignified submission to conditions, which are repugnant as being a sort of self-sought slavery." The delivery of a tooth brush or a five cent package of epsom salt, five miles, in response to a telephone call is not "service" in any pharmaceutical sense, but such trifling deliveries are known to be made with a trumpet flourish to that magical word.

Dr. Arny elsewhere in his address calls attention to the fact that the keynote of the century is publicity and he accuses the modern pharmacist of being too plainly unobtrusive and allowing other callings to get the credit of his achievements. It is very true that many pharmaceutical achievements have been allowed to be credited to the mother and sister sciences of medicine and chemistry without murmur of resistance. Unfortunately the publicity that the profession of pharmacy meets is too often second hand; mere overheard comments "caught on the fly"—incorrect, unjust or even libelous.

Heard *somewhere*. Perhaps on the street. Or, on the street cars. Just a chance utterance or so. What the bystander thinks about the merchant. What the merchant thinks about the druggist. What the public thinks about the mere merchandising druggist. There is always a sting lurking in overheard casual pow-wows. Somebody is being criticized. Others' opinions *do* count. Prejudice for or against reflects. It cannot be ignored. It must be thwarted or capitalized. There are no minutes of the conference and therefore the greater chance for the play of reckless assertions. Somewhere in the informal arena a bit of truth may be manifest—the bug under the chip. It is forced into consideration and we cannot help being influenced by it hurtfully or beneficially.

In other words public opinion is a power and must be counted with. It does not pay to be a mercantile weathercock. Every store must have a policy and the one with a repute for stable honesty is more apt to win than one that is known to reshape its course with every wind that blows. There is no doubt but that the mere merchandising drug store is a cancerous growth upon pharmacy. People who deal with such stores evidence an air of protest as they enter and leave, attracted by window displays and cut-rates. An unvoiced apology is on their lips and they would give much to be able to give vent to it. As one person said to another "I hate to be caught there, but. . . .": lots of comprehensiveness in the "but." Human nature is susceptible to blandishments. A "cute" business idea may be really contemptuous but its cuteness is the sugar coat that gives it currency.

The real druggist may have gradually and imperceptibly lost some of the external showings of a profession, but he has never knowingly or deliberately stooped to relinquish any portion of its dignity. Modern conditions have robbed pharmacy of honored traditions, lessened the mystery which once surrounded it, but there is no good reason why, even to-day, the drug business should not be regarded as being on a higher plane than merchandising and earn for itself a respect not bestowed on the sellers of cheese and onions and lemons and vinegar and starch if only for the reason that the druggist knows that vinegar and starch may be antidotes in time of trouble and because he knows when and where and how to use them.

But there are men renegades whose store fronts are emblazoned with gold pharmacy signs who use them as cheese is used to bait the mouse trap, to allure and assuredly sell scores of outside things to every chance sale of one drug item. There is not one professional soul-thrill in their many carcasses. They deliberately adopt piracy, and whatever will bring in a dollar is a ware for their shelves or cases. Yet if one were to suggest to them that they were not druggists and pharmacists at all—that they had apostatized the business in principle and fact—they would be indignant.

The real pharmacist will regretfully assume duties foreign to his business when they are forced upon him, but he will never seek for them. It is astonishing to note how the younger element of the business lightly regards such traditions of pharmacy which still are practicable things and lend themselves to perpetuation. They are prone to cast overboard the things which are aids to navigation because they are old fashioned.

The lack of scrutiny with which new proprietary nostrums are accepted is one of the things that some druggists should be ashamed of. There are many things of a vicious order that could be refused admission, to the good of customers and themselves. But it seems as if the advertised thing must be welcomed, however bizarre and unpleasantly or suggestively repugnant it is. In this connection it is to be recorded that a *bona fide* effort was undertaken by a person interested, to find out what the present-day status of so-called patent medicine was in a prominent store. The queries were "Which are the most called for and why? What were the medicaments in the favored things? Did they live up to their advertised description of contents?" The answer was astounding—"I don't care a damn what they contain. The more we sell of them, the more money we make. We simply supply demand. We are not *interested* in the contents." Yet this store and store-keeper would be loath to admit that the establishment he conducted was not a reputable pharmacy and that he was not well versed in his profession. He probably subscribes for drug journals and to associations—national and state, perhaps is a member of many societies; he is certainly among those who protest against indignity and clamor for professional status at the hands of the National Government. Such a position is astonishing. To maintain such an unprofessional attitude towards a subject so important to clients and patrons—to do what is evidently in conflict with the necessities of public health—is more than reprehensible. It was from the profession of pharmacy that the first overtures for the protection of the public by pharmacy laws and pure food laws came. The sentiment for these laws was fostered by the druggists.

A man who would make admissions of such indifference to the possible merit or demerit of the things he sold is not to be classed with representative professional pharmacists. If the public senses that he does not care a picayune for the quality and condition of the goods he sells, the public will soon be avoiding the store of such expressed indifference. There is a point beyond which even a rankly commercial drug store cannot venture. 'Brazenness and bluff offend in the last analysis.

If pharmacy has to suffer, by those who in many ways cast professional allegiance aside for the sake of gain, the more reason is there for its friends to maintain its proper place in the world by insisting that its every-day contact with the public shall be marked by decency and probity; that its necessary seeking of emolument for inherent professional service rendered shall not be offensively apparent.

While as a business man he cannot wholly disregard the demands of his customers he can circumspectly avoid stocking flagrantly palpable frauds. With watchful care his shelves will always show the respectable proprietaries; then, too, he will always see that undeteriorated goods go to the consumer. That is one of the ways in which the problem of maintaining pharmaceutical respectability may be furthered.

In dealing with such a subject as set forth in the title of this paper it is hard to keep rigidly to the task taken up; outside thoughts will intrude. The estimation of what constitutes respectability is not easily set down. The question of respect pure and simple is easier to arrive at. Occasionally it is borne in on to us that notwithstanding the attitude of indifference that the medical profession presents to the pharmacist, down deep in their consciousness they, nevertheless, feel that the drug man is "something more than a merchant" after all; but why he is held to be inferior, a merely tolerated being, negligible when under the thumb and mandate of that self-constituted superior body until he is found to be indispensable in the filling of a necessary niche, must be held due to a traditional prejudice brought down from the middle ages, when the pharomic lay-brother galled the medico because he was better informed relative to nature's medicinal products. Maybe it was because the recluse liked communion with the simples of nature and the investigation and application of their properties that gave the leech drug-handler such confidential relations with both the people and the nobility, that the consultations concerned in their intercourse assumed almost the secrecy of the confessional! That same sense of confidence, strange to say, persists even in this age and time. There are very few of the older practitioners of pharmacy but who can look back and remember uninvited, unbidden confidences on the part of two sides of a family which, if they had not been deemed sacred and unviolable, would have wrought terrible domestic trouble. It may be considered as certain that the "cut-rate store" never will experience a condition implying professional confidence while the respected if neglected pharmacist remains a member of the cloth embracing at least the trio of perpetuated antiquity—the clergy, the medico, and the apothecary.

The reference to the doctor's unwilling appreciation of the druggist brings us to a "testimonial" stage of the reminiscion—testimony by inference only but palpable testimony. The writer was recently requested to report as to the possibility of a recommendation of a candidate to fill a position a little later on. In

the first letter no specific mention of detailed accomplishments sought, were given. A second letter was quite specific. If the person sought for was presumably to be obtained from among the coming graduates of a pharmaceutical school it suggests "no end" of good opinion of the attainments of the drug person about to enter into the battle of drug life. No "looking down on" the pharmacist in the seeking for the right person in the right place! The plans and specifications call for a super-pharmacist; the first preference being for a lady assistant rather than a gentleman, and a person "younger in years than one older;" condensing slightly, the candidate will have to perform:

1. General office duties, meeting patients, arranging appointments, etc.
2. General clerical work, keeping accounts, collections. General correspondence, requiring short-hand and typewriting. Clerical work on business *outside of profession*.
3. Dispensing of his own medicines, the assistant filling the prescriptions.
4. Assisting in X-Ray work and developing X-Ray plates and films. Keeping record of same.
5. General laboratory work including urinalysis, sputum examinations, blood counts, general bacteriological work for clinical diagnosis, making autogenous vaccines.

The seeker after an eligible candidate admits that getting the combination of short-hand, typewriting, clerical work and special training in laboratory work in his experience has been hard to find, but he shows no fear that a graduate of pharmacy should not be able to accomplish the things desired. A suggestion that the assistant will be permitted to do most of the work exudes eloquently in somewhat callous summary of duties. The problem of maintaining pharmaceutical respectability by the successful candidate is not alluded to in this letter, but it is to be hoped that the emolument the employer has in mind exceeds in amount that of the average compensation of the calling, and if not fully commensurate with the all-embracing attainments specified will be sufficient to enable the assistant to dress the part, even if it does not admit boasting of affluence.

An article in the *Western Drug Record* of June 1923 headed "Slow by Degrees and Pitifully Less," draws attention to the lessening number of crude drugs in the U. S. Pharmacopœias VIII and IX. The tenth revision is to include less than 100. The writer says that it seems to be a fad to be continually dropping simple drugs, with a tendency to use active principles or chemical compounds in their place. The utilization of the simple virtues of a respectable drug is pooh-poohed by the alkaloid prescriber as unscientific, while the modern medical graduate hardly senses that most drugs have accompanying assisting tonic or aromatic bodies in their natural form. If the Pharmacopœia is to include less and less of them and fewer and fewer of pharmacy-made preparations it will ultimately become a pamphlet which containing so little, might be entirely done without. Giving the aim of the druggist as being the dispensing of drugs, he credits the medical man with an endeavor to dispense *with* drugs.

This serves to give point to a response to an order for crude assayed vegetable drugs given a highly regarded firm of pharmaceutical chemists, who for many years specialized in authentic first-quality botanical drugs. The answer came that the firm had ceased the milling of drugs and spices adding:

"We were very proud of the reputation established for the quality of our products and had hoped that the demand would increase to sufficient proportions to justify a continuance of the business, but owing to the adverse conditions under which retail pharmacists have been compelled to make their own preparations during the past ten or twelve years and the fact that the sale of our ground drugs was consequently dwindling to such small proportions as to make the loss greater every year, we found it absolutely imperative to drop the line."

It is to be regretted that some of the things which helped to make the standing of pharmacy one of high regard and put a seal of respectableness on it have been progressively filched from it. The correspondence quoted serves to show that it has been robbed of some of its birthrights. Outside of war-time restrictions and taxations it has been sacrificed without compunction by those who should have been its best friends—the active enforcers of the prohibitory amendment. In their devising of rules and regulations with an eye single to *their* one goal—success, the injustices that were imposed on the pharmacists were not even dreamed of. The purely manufacturing end of the drug-store was really pharmacy in action, calling for craftsmanship in manipulations and invention in processes. These things, in which, by excelling, it maintained an honored place over pretenders who usurped the mercantile end—frequently usurpation with bad intentions including dealings with drug habitues—are taken from it. The store individuality which marked every pharmacy—which singled it out from its equally respectable neighbors—is becoming a thing of the past. The real pharmacist feels this acutely, because oftentimes his new principle enemies had been his most intimate and respected friends. This anomaly will hardly be believed by those who have struck him the hardest, but it is so, and has added to the difficulties of maintaining pharmaceutical respectability.

In a nutshell, the correspondence shows that the demand for standardized authentic perfect botanical drugs, the supply of which for decades had been an important business undertaking, had gradually decreased until it was a losing rather than a lucrative undertaking. Why? Because the pharmacist has been progressively shackled in the obtaining of pure alcohol which is the one necessity in both the research and manufacturing of drug products. He at first tried to keep up with the imposed regulations, hoping that a practical way out would be devised and reached, to find in the end that he had become a worker without tools—a pharmaceutical chemist without his most important chemical. It shows that the little research corner that every pharmacist maintained somewhere in his establishment had been in effect taken from him. The newly discovered things of his business would have to come from capitalistic huge laboratories—he was no longer permitted to invent or plan syntheses. To speak of shackles is but a weak utterance, the drugman now has to do business figuratively in ball and chains.

So the "Problem of Maintaining Pharmaceutical Respectability" devolves on the pharmacist pure and simple. He must hold tenaciously to every vestige of the old-day honorable practice that is left to him; meet his customers as fellow beings, not as objects to be exploited; avoid the methods of the sharks in trade; be concerned even in proprietary righteousness and never allow himself to think that the man who openly says he "don't care a damn what he sells" has any advantage in the long run over the man who does care for his customers and will render "service" with a capital S when such a course is indicated.

ABSTRACT OF DISCUSSION.

The foregoing paper was discussed by Chairman Ruth, H. Lionel Meredith, D. F. Jones, B. O. Shiflett, John C. Krantz, Jr., and others. The author, Prof. L. E. Sayre, was unavoidably absent and, therefore, to that extent the discussion is incomplete.

Exception was taken by a number on the reflection cast on those who sell "patent medicines." It was contended that it is necessary within reason to supply the public with such preparations when they are demanded. They are advertised in magazines and papers and if one pharmacist does not sell them another will.

Mr. Ruth gave an experience—a customer had asked over the 'phone relative to a preparation which is largely sold and he discouraged the customer but, nevertheless, the preparation was bought at another store. A few weeks thereafter the same patron came into the store and asked advice relative to another preparation and this time he was a little more reserved in expressing his opinion. He pointed out that unless one is very careful and speaks from authentic information, a preparation may be unjustly spoken of, because among these preparations there are certainly some of value.

H. L. Meredith protested against some of the arguments in the paper—he stated that he conducted a pharmacy and did not sell any "patent medicines," that he went so far as to refer customers to other stores who came in and asked for medicines that were regularly prescribed by physicians, that he was engaged in dispensing prescriptions and laboratory work.

In his opinion much criticism of pharmacists did not come from the public but from those within the profession. While he was not engaged in selling general merchandise, pharmacists who did carry stock the sales of which increased the volume of their business did not lose their professional standing because of that so long as pharmacy received due attention. It is very unfortunate that remarks along the lines of the paper are made whereby certain conditions are exaggerated and rightful consideration is not given to the professional standing of the pharmacist. Such papers as the one by Professor Sayre do not reach the public and therefore cannot directly educate it.

The duty of the pharmacist is to serve the public and the medical profession and how this can best be done must be left to some extent to those engaged in the work. He said that every few days he visited some pharmacy in order to get the atmosphere of that pharmacy. In his opinion it did not matter how many side-lines were carried, it was a matter more of the respectability of the pharmacist; so long as he maintained pharmacy in the proper way in his store, there was no reason why he should be condemned for increasing the volume of his business by selling articles for which there was legitimate demand.

D. F. Jones supported the arguments presented by Mr. Meredith. He did not push the sale of patent medicines but he did not deny the right to others who did so. In his opinion there were other articles than those designated as side-lines which did injury to the drug business. It was the duty of the pharmacist to see that the professional standing was kept up and he advocated a strict adherence to the Code of Ethics of the American Pharmaceutical Association. The paper by Professor Sayre was in his opinion very good but not complete in some of its presentations.

B. O. Shiflett coincided with former speakers and said that the people came to the drug store to buy; the pharmacist does not go to them to sell his wares.

John C. Krantz, Jr., thought that the members would profit by the remarks of Mr. Meredith. The public must be served and can be educated. The dignity of the profession should be upheld. The public largely estimates the pharmacists according to what they say of themselves.

Chairman Ruth stated that discussions of this kind were enlightening, that there would probably always be differences of opinion relative to the subject discussed in the paper, not only from the viewpoints of pharmacists but also of the public.
