

recognize as sheer absurdities, and which would be wholly unendurable but for two things—they enable us to appreciate our own greatness, and they afford such admirable material for satire.” The quoted lines show, of course, that the writer applies the measure of others. In this brief comment, without further reference to the foregoing, some of the beginnings of medicine will be referred to and a recently published book—“The Healing Gods of Ancient Civilization”—by Walter Addison Jayne, M.D., has suggested the writing.

In this interesting volume Dr. Jayne deals with the ancient methods of religious healing and the pagan gods of medicine. The author considers in sequence the healing gods of ancient Egypt up to those of more recent periods. He writes—“It should be noted that one of the most important features of the early history of medicine is the essential uniformity in principle of beliefs prompted by the human religious instinct as they relate to the healing customs of the peoples widely separated by space and time, differing only in details of racial and national coloring.” “The methods of healing disease, devised by the gods and communicated to their representatives, the priests, were not subject to improvement by man, hence they were jealously guarded, preserved and became traditional.” The superstition that sickness was the work of an evil spirit and every form of disease required a specific demon made it necessary to classify them in a way that has a relation, although very remote, to the *materia medica*.

Dr. H. H. Rusby has given us an interesting account of South American ceremonials; our Indians still go through certain forms for making their medicines more effective; the African witch doctor adds astrological readings and incantations to his administrations; the natives of Congo tempt the demon to come out of the body of a sick person by bright colors, etc. The point, however, in this comment is that, notwithstanding the traditional customs in connection with the administrations of some of the medicines, our *materia medica* is indebted to the poor old past and primitive people for a number of its most important drugs. The Malay acquainted us with *Nux Vomica*, the African gave us *Physostigma* and *Strophanthus*, we are indebted to our Indians for *Cascara*, and those of South America employed *Cinchona* long before it cured the Countess of Chinchon of the fever. Medicine has its romance and its history has acquainted us with remedial agents that have added to the value of our *materia medica* and are used daily in the treatment of the sick.

E. G. E.

IMPORTANCE OF A SENSE OF NUMBERS.

RECENTLY the head of a university department commented on the inability of many students to grasp the sense of numbers. They were adept in making calculations, but deficient in making comparisons with figures; a number meant just that to them, but did not enable them to discover errors by the application of judgment. The same problem, in which figures only were involved, did not evidence the difficulties of the very same students in making calculations wherein weights and measures or other factors of the transactions entered.

Reference was also made to the deficiency of what he termed the sense of numbers in the use of an adding machine that had not been cleared before making

the next calculation. A sense of numbers would have discovered the error. One operator turned in totals which another contestant challenged. Pulling the ribbons through his fingers, he said: "The first column is about 50,000 too little, the second 35,000—a page has been skipped."

Another point raised was that students do not grasp the value of percentages in actual practice. This was tried out in determining percentages of decrease and increase in crop reports, of two years, which were given to students for comparison.

The comment is made because of the importance of the application of figures in pharmaceutical manufacture and in dispensing prescriptions. Safe dispensing comprehends not only proper compounding but a determination of figures involved in formulas, prescriptions and dosage. The usual procedure as taught in schools of pharmacy instructs the coming pharmacist in all of these points, but mention is made because of the deficiencies cited in those engaged in other activities.

E. G. E.

THE COMING TRADE CONFLICT IN LATIN AMERICA.

THE American exporter cannot afford to regard his present success in overseas trade with complacency. Some of the advantages we have enjoyed through adequate working capital, superior technique and efficient labor are certain to be diminished in some degree as the stabilizing effects of recent European economic settlements are more fully realized. In great neutral markets like Latin America, the next few years will be critical years, not without discouragements and marked by competitive practices, many of which in our domestic markets we have outlawed by legislation, but the sales genius and staying power of the American exporter, his determination to cut out wasteful trade practices and to carry out a carefully planned, long-view policy will enable him to hold his own in the face of stiffening European competition."

This was the gist of an address delivered in Boston, December 28, at a meeting of the New England Export Club by Dr. Julius Klein, Director of the United States Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce, Department of Commerce. On several occasions mention has been made in these columns and under "News Items" to ambassadors of European industrial and professional activities, who were strengthening the bonds of friendship in this country and Latin America. Relative thereto, Dr. Klein said in part:

"Let us review some of the more general evidence of the competitive intent of Europe in Latin America, passing on subsequently to actual cases and characteristic practices. There is admittedly an intended commercial significance to the recent visits of European royal globe-trotters to that part of the world. Such tours of titled 'trade ambassadors' materially assist the ground-work of international relationships, especially when supplemented by dexterous publicity; but there is naturally some mild curiosity as to the permanence of any trade gains thus spectacularly attained. In meeting such efforts, while we cannot exhibit the royal pageantry, we have both distinguished public men and advertising genius with which we might well make our country better known in the Republics of the South.