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 THE EDUCATIONAL VALUE OF DRUG STORE EXPERIENCE.\*

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Modern pharmaceutical education, like other living things, has come to its present condition by the process of evolution and still bears the vestigial remnants of earlier stages of development, the present utility of which is, at least, questionable. Originally the art was acquired by personal association with some master of its mysteries, but with the growing complexity of civilization this apprenticeship method of training became inadequate; consequently there were started colleges for the purpose of supplementing the practical knowledge received from the tutelage of the practicing apothecary by instruction in the underlying principles.

There has been for many years a manifest tendency to emphasize more and more strongly the importance of the academic education as a prerequisite for pharmaceutical licensure but the advantage of actual experience in the drug store has never been entirely forgotten. To-day nearly every state board of pharmacy requires, in addition to graduation from a recognized college, a specified number of years of employment in a drug store.

We must not lose sight of the fact that the ostensible purpose of the latter requirement is its educational value. I ask you, however, is the professional skill derived from the mixing of soda-water or the sale of cigarettes of sufficient value to justify the loss of three years from a man's producing span of life?

Of course there are pharmacies, here and there, through this fair land of the free in which the proprietor feels an educational responsibility towards his student clerks, but I fear that they do not constitute a majority of our drug stores, especially in the large cities. There are hundreds of our present pharmacy students tediously toiling to fulfill the letter of the law in stores where there is scarcely the remotest possibility of their learning anything even vaguely akin to professional skill.

The other evening I met one of my students in the street not far from my home and said to him casually, "What are you doing around here?" "Oh," said he, "I work at X's." Now I lived near enough to know the kind of shop that X is

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conducting, so I said to the boy, "You don't get much useful experience there, do you?" "Why you would be surprised," he returned, "some days we have as many as four or five prescriptions in a single day!"

In the sister profession of medicine we have an analogous mixture of academic and practical training required of the neophyte, but with this striking difference that the embryo doctor receives his practical experience in a hospital *after* he has completed his college education. In my own state, the Board of Medical Licensure has become so impressed with the wide variance in educational value of different hospitals that of recent years they have required that the candidate must have a year's experience in an "approved" hospital. This approval of a hospital is not merely a perfunctory one: inadequately equipped hospitals are refused recognition just as quickly—in fact I am inclined to believe more freely—as inadequately equipped colleges. The graduate who goes to a hospital which is not on the published list of acceptable institutions simply wastes his time, as far as the State Board is concerned.

It seems to me the time has arrived when we, who are interested in pharmaceutical education should awaken to a realization of things as they are, not dream of them as they were 50 years ago. No man who walks around a big city with his eyes open can be entirely ignorant that many of the so-called drug stores of to-day bear little resemblance, either in their business or their ethics, to the apothecary shop of his boyhood days.

The most precious years of a professional man's life are those of the educational period. With what sophistry are we, who are entrusted with the training of pharmacists, going to salve our consciences if we allow this wanton waste of our student's time to go on without protest?

In closing I wish to say that I am not advocating the abolition of the requirement of drug store experience, but its modification. What I should like to see is the reduction of the compulsory time to one year and that this be a year of real pharmaceutical practice, not merely twelve months' employment in a drug store. This would involve two innovations, neither of which seems to me impracticable. In the first place it would necessitate that State Boards discriminate between the pharmacy and lunch-counter types of drug stores, recognizing as educational adjuncts only those which meet certain specified conditions. Secondly it would mean that the candidate must present a certificate from his employer setting forth not merely the duration of his employment but also that for at least a year the major part of the clerk's occupation has been at some sort of work which gave him an opportunity to come in contact with medicinal agents. Through the courtesy of A. L. I. Winne I have received the type of certificate used in Virginia. This state does not require drug store experience but for purposes of reciprocity employs a form which sets forth that the candidate has worked under the supervision of a pharmacist "in the compounding of drugs, dispensing of medicines and preparing pharmaceutical products and in the handling and selling of such drugs and poisons as are dispensed in a pharmacy, and that such experience is exclusive of experience or time served in a drug store in the capacity of soda dispenser, cigar selling, general merchandise selling or other specialized work not involving pharmaceutical experience." This certificate would seem to cover satisfactorily the second of my recommendations.