

WRITING PHARMACEUTICAL BIOGRAPHY AND HISTORY.*

BY EDWARD KREMERS.

As editor of the *Pharmaceutische Rundschau*, Dr. Frederick Hoffmann wielded a pen the influence of which is naturally not understood by the present generation of American pharmacists who no longer read German. Not only was he a forceful writer, but he wrote a style that was highly appreciated by those who could read his editorials and feuilletons. With a profound knowledge of pharmacy in his old fatherland as well as in the land of his adoption, he wrote without fear or favor. As a rule, however, he wrote *sine ira et studio* to use one of his favorite phrases. Indeed, in his high philosophic attitude he had a certain contempt for the study of detail or document. Appreciating, as he did, the importance of the historical background of pharmacy, yet such was at times his disregard for documentary material that, when he left this country to spend the last years of his life in the country of his birth and youth, he made an *auto-dafe*—to use his own words—of a lifelong correspondence with representative men of pharmacy the world over. Had some one else committed the deed, it would have been referred to as vandalism by the future historian of American pharmacy. Yet the man, who destroyed this invaluable biographical and historical material, donated to the Historical Section of the A. Ph. A. a small cabinet for blow pipe analysis which he had received as a prize for his first literary effort while still an apprentice.

When in 1902 the AMERICAN PHARMACEUTICAL ASSOCIATION was about to celebrate its fiftieth anniversary, no one was thought of as better fitted to write the jubilee address than Dr. Hoffmann. It was then that he appealed to the writer, asking for documentary material, the collection of which he had mildly ridiculed only a few years before.

Since then others have endeavored to write pharmaceutical history. In 1923 the then Chairman of the Historical Section recommended the writing of the History of Pharmacy in the U. S. by a special committee. His plan was adopted by the Section and the Committee appointed. At the next annual meeting the thirteen manuscripts were to be handed in. That they were not, need scarcely be stated. At the end of the second year a few manuscripts were reported ready. The author of one of these informed the writer that his report consisted very largely of a paper published by the writer in one of the pharmaceutical journals some years earlier. This, at least, was honest, but it can scarcely be looked upon as writing history. Rehashing what has been written in a preliminary manner a decade ago is scarcely such. Another member of the committee complained that he had sent out questionnaires to all secretaries of state associations and that he had received but few replies. The tabulation of data thus collected may do as a report from a sectional chairman or secretary, but, again, this is not writing history. Even if all of the reports are handed in, the collected papers will never constitute a "History of American Pharmacy."

At the Portland meeting Professor Wulling read a paper on "Historical Mindedness" and advocated the collection of historical material. The writer feels confident that the future historian will appreciate much more the collection of historical material by his colleague in a neighboring state than his urging others

* Section on Historical Pharmacy, A. Ph. A., Rapid City meeting, 1929.

to do so. His example as collector will be much more effective than his written plea. In discussing the paper, Professor Raubenheimer pointed out the advantage of the collection of autobiographies by the Veteran Druggists' clubs. He illustrated his point by adding that, when Mr. Caswell A. Mayo died, he, the speaker, was able to get material for a journal notice or article from the autobiography supplied to the N.Y.V.D.C. Then, in a spasm of momentary doubt he added: "But if such an autobiography is not correct?" All he could suggest was to shrug his shoulder and throw up his hands.

All kinds of documents may prove valuable to the future historian, but he should approach them critically and not act as mere copyist. As to biographies, the writer has had occasion more than once to correct misstatements. Thus a German apothecary of Milwaukee who had a deserved reputation as one of the best of his profession was no "Apotheker" at all in the German sense. He had never passed the "Staatsexamen" that would have entitled him to call himself "Apotheker." When he died, the local paper stated that he had attended the University at Koenigsberg. Yet a more recent examination of all of his certificates and testimonials did not reveal anything of the sort. As a matter of fact, he had left school so early in life to become an apothecary's apprentice, that no German university would have admitted him later as a young man. If there was anything to the family tradition, it may possibly have occurred that he was admitted to a series of lectures on chemistry as auditor, but never as matriculated student. All in all, he was an autodidact who had made the most of such circumstances as favored his keen desire to learn.

Recently the writer has had occasion to investigate the civil war record of two prominent Wisconsin druggists. The one had commonly been addressed as Colonel as long as the writer has known him. Because of his pride in his military rank he was not beloved by most of his fellow druggists. It was by mere accident that the writer learned from the son of another druggist, who also had been a civil war veteran, that Col. ——— had never been a commissioned officer in the regular army. For several years he had been a private and toward the close of the war he had his desire for rank gratified by being made Corporal in a colored regiment. His rank as colonel he received later when the governors of his state, Democratic as well as Republican, appointed him on their staff. It was then that he could display his striking person as well as his gilt trappings. Not being content with hearsay for or against the man's record, the exact situation was documented by a letter from the Adjutant-General of the War Department at Washington.

In the second instance, the person in question was appointed a few years ago to a high state office in the Grand Army. A request for specific information from Washington brought the reply that the name of the person could not be found in the records of the Adjutant-General's office. A draft of a biography submitted to him was returned, with all references to the army stricken out. This seemed suspicious indeed. However, by digging deeper into the matter and by writing a personal appeal to the Adjutant-General himself, the facts were ascertained. As a boy, Mr. ——— had secured admission to the army toward the very end of the war by overstating his age. His parents, however, had him released before he had seen any real war service.

These three illustrations may suffice to show how careful the historian must be in accepting both oral tradition and printed word. Unfortunately, much biography is being written in just this way, perpetuating half truths and even positively misleading statements. Unfortunately, much history is also being written in like manner.

Many years ago, the writer became interested in ascertaining the facts as to early pharmaceutical legislation in the city of Milwaukee several years before Wisconsin had a state law. Practically all of the Milwaukee druggists involved were living at the time, yet it seemed impossible to secure anything like the history of the movement. True, certain statements were made, but when the writer went to the newspaper files, the reporter's account more than once contradicted the reminiscences of the participants. When confronted with the printed statement, they invariably admitted that they had been mistaken and corrected their original accounts accordingly. Many an hour of the writer's vacations in those early years was spent in newspaper offices going through the files page for page, column for column. The copied newspaper records became the authentic documents on which the final story was based. With the discovery of each new document, the writer visited the individuals concerned and thus secured much additional information. But the reminiscences without these documents would have been misleading, hence incorrect history.

Thanks to the publication of this documented history,¹ the writer was placed in possession of newspaper clippings and other documents pertaining to the enactment of a state law in New York. This material, together with such information as was supplied by Dr. Hoffmann, whose courageous opposition to the Tammany tax exacted from the druggists of New York City had started the movement, was also published.² Yet, in all the papers that have since been written about state legislation, the writer does not recall having seen a word about the affair that led to the New York law in 1871. Dates are serviceable as historical mile stones, but they do not supply the flesh and blood of history, if you will pardon mixed metaphors.

The pharmacist is not the only one who has been guilty of dabbling in the history of his calling. Not long ago the writer attended a large gathering of the American Chemical Society. One of the older members of that organization, who had used chemical journals for a long lifetime, had discovered that these journals have an interest quite distinct from being mere repositories of chemical information that may be needed for a certain investigation. He began to browse about in the departmental library of his university because of the interest he had found in the series as such. So enthused had he become at the end of a year or two, that he felt the missionary's zeal to impart his enthusiasm to others. This was all very well and his address was admirably delivered and well received. But the mere recounting of when a given chemical journal was born, who were its editors and what were the changes in the nature of its contents in the course of years, while valuable in its way, is not all that there is to the history of a journal, much less of

¹ A reprint of articles published in the *Pharmaceutical Review*, during the years 1897 and 1898 was exhibited.

² A collection of these papers published in the *Pharmaceutical Review*, during 1903 and 1904 was also exhibited.

chemical journalism. Not a word did the speaker have to say about the precursors to these journals, the academy transactions and proceedings of other learned societies of the second half of the 17th and the greater part of the 18th centuries. Not a word about the pharmaceutical precursors, *e. g.*, of *Liebig's Annalen*, much less how it came about that Liebig became one of the editors of the pharmaceutical journal that gradually developed into a strictly chemical journal which now bears his name on the title page.

Only too often has the history of a science been regarded as a fit occupation for one who is no longer productive experimentally, but whose vision is directed backward rather than forward. In other words, it has been regarded as a fit hobby for those who have lagged behind in the race. Fortunately, this is no longer true. The study of the history of a science is no longer confined to the old who are about to enter their second childhood. The proper study of the history of a science is slowly being regarded as on a par with the best experimental research. This attitude is not general, but the appreciation of the necessity of humanizing our sciences by the study of the history of these sciences is gaining ground more and more.

In closing these admonitory remarks, the writer may be pardoned for saying a few words concerning the welfare of this Section. In 1902, at the fiftieth anniversary meeting, the writer asked for the establishment of an Historical Section. Doubtful of the advisability of adding another section, the Council appointed an Historical Committee with the writer as Chairman.¹ After two years of successful programs, the Council permitted the organization of a Section.² The writer refused to act as Chairman but accepted the office of Historian, which he held for eight years, when he resigned. Albert E. Ebert, who had taken a keen interest in the work of the Historical Committee, was elected the first Chairman of the new section, and C. A. Mayo,³ Secretary. These two officers, with the Historian have since constituted the Section Committee.

We have had some worthy chairmen and our present Historian has rendered excellent service since 1916. Yet I fear we have frequently been as careless about the election of our officers as some of the other sections, or even more so. The Scientific Section would not think of electing a member of the A. Ph. A. as its chairman unless he had made some contribution to the section. Yet more than once we have elected a person as chairman simply because he had been sitting in the room during one of our sessions. I fear that not a few chairmen of the sub-committees to write the "History of Pharmacy in the United States" were appointed for the reason that they were good fellows and not at all because they had ever shown even a taste for historic research.

It has become a fad to talk and write about scientific research. Large sums of money are being spent on research and no small amount is being spent on research organizations that could possibly be spent to greater advantage on research rather than discussing the constitution and by-laws of organizations to talk about research that ought to be done or might be done. So, I fear, that with the growing popularity of the history of the sciences, we are in danger of having our organi-

¹ "Proc. A. Ph. A.," 50, V.

² *Ibid.*, 53, 86.

³ *Ibid.*, 90.

zations for this purpose used for the gratification of personal vanity. It is as right to talk about the history of science as it is to talk about research. It is as right to entertain and even amuse audiences with lantern slides as it is to preach the accomplishments of research to the laity. But if it is far more important to accomplish research than to merely talk or write about it, so it is more important to do historical work of the humblest sort, such as the collection of objects of historic interest, than it is to preside at our sectional meetings, or to write a perfunctory report as secretary.¹

The writer's interest in the history of pharmacy did not begin with the birth of this Section in 1902. As a mere boy, he was so fortunate as to have a teacher who quoted the Bible and Faust in the elementary instruction of the natural sciences. The first ten-dollar gold piece received from his preceptor after a year's apprenticeship was carried to a book store to purchase Kopp's "Beitraege zur Geschichte der Chemie." Not many years later he sat at the feet of Kekulé, who in a *privatissime* told about his dreams that led to the discovery of the benzene theory and to his early conceptions of structural chemistry generally, also to the critical reception his speculations had met at the hands of Kolbe. A year thereafter it was the writer's privilege to work in the institute in which Woehler had labored a lifetime and in the museum of which the first bead of aluminum prepared by Deville was exhibited. A few years later there followed the researches into the newspaper files of Milwaukee already alluded to. The Wisconsin Historical Drug Store movement was begun in 1898, when we celebrated the first fifty years of Badger statehood. The organization of this Section in 1902 followed. During the past winter it was my pleasure to move thousands, if not tens of thousands of historical documents, into a room specially equipped for them. Hence the historical interests of the writer have not come into existence with old age, neither have they been stimulated by desire for office. Faithful to the Section since its beginning, he has possibly earned the privilege to warn its members against possible errors. We need not strive to be a large section with a lengthy list of papers. There is a sufficient number of members in the A. PH. A. who can make real contributions to the study of the history of our calling. We need not undertake so pretentious a task as the writing of history. For the present it is much more important to collect material for the future historian. With the promise of an A. PH. A. home in Washington, let us once more begin to collect. Nothing is too trifling. The Beal Library has already been promised as a nucleus for a national library, but tens of thousands, yea, hundreds of thousands of additions in the form of large volumes and unbound pamphlets, of biographical scraps, newspaper clippings and of individual letters are necessary to make this Library what it should be. There was a time when Greek vases were in disrepute because of the crudity of their decorations. They did not represent the highest development of Greek art. To-day the explorer carefully picks up fragments of these vases and puts

¹ In 1904, the writer began his report as *Chairman* of the then Historical Committee with the words: "The first meeting of the Historical Committee called to order by President Payne at Mackinac, was an unexpected success;" and he closed this same report with these words: "The collection of material as historic documents is one of the most important things we can do at present to further the study of the history of American pharmacy. Everyone with but a little time and inclination can assist materially in doing this important work." PROC. A. PH. A., 52, 431.

them together because of these very decorations that throw light on the life of antiquity from an angle not reflected by the best classics, by the most perfect statuary, nor by the grandest remnants of architecture. But few mortals may be an Aeschylus or a Phidias, but we can be modest potters working our clay and decorating our simple ware with designs which, though crude, are nevertheless artistic in their way because they are self expressive. Let us do modestly the things we can do and do them well, not merely talk about them. Every frequenter of our section meetings, every member of the ASSOCIATION at large, should each year make some contribution to the archives that are to be used by the future historian of American pharmacy.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

REPORT OF THE NATIONAL FORMULARY COMMITTEE.*

BY WILBUR L. SCOVILLE, CHAIRMAN.

To the AMERICAN PHARMACEUTICAL ASSOCIATION:

With this report the present N. F. Committee concludes its work. This Committee was appointed in 1919 and the Fifth Edition of the National Formulary was issued in May 1926 and became official on July 1, 1926.

In this edition an attempt was made to supply tests for identity and purity, as well as standards for several classes of preparations not hitherto thus tested, but the task was too great for complete results. In the annual report of the Committee of 1926 there was pointed out the need of assistance in preparing such tests and standards for future editions, and plans were suggested by which such assistance might be secured. This Committee then took upon itself, voluntarily, the task of securing as much information as possible regarding the identification and standardization of National Formulary preparations which can be used by the next Revision Committee. The time since 1926 has been devoted to organizing such assistance and securing the desired information.

The most promising sources of such information are the pharmaceutical colleges and manufacturers. The colleges are in a position to accumulate data, if they so elect, through the regular curricula which will be indicative of results which may be expected of the average pharmacist and at the same time enlarge their educational methods. The manufacturers already possess considerable data which may be of use to the Committee, and which they are usually willing to share, and they are also willing to aid in proving out new tests or methods. The main effort has been to secure the coöperation of the colleges, since the aid of the manufacturers is more easily obtained when it is wanted.

A number of the colleges have responded cordially, and some of the results of their work are included in an appended report. Further reports are expected which will be available soon.

Continuous revision is the ideal method, and the next Committee may well put study and effort into further developing it.

Scope.—The most important question that will confront the next Committee will be that of the scope of the next edition. The National Formulary has adhered closely to its original purpose of supplying standard formulas for preparations not recognized in the U. S. Pharmacopœia, but the time has now come when the Committee must face squarely the fact that the demand for formulas in retail pharmacy is steadily diminishing, and if the National Formulary is to continue and to exert a real influence in pharmacy a somewhat radical change in policy may be necessary.

Conditions have changed very markedly in late years, both in pharmacy and in medical practice. The study of pharmacology, the development and increased use of vaccines, serums and other biological products, of glandular extracts and the abandonment of secrecy, have all

* Presented at Rapid City meeting of AMERICAN PHARMACEUTICAL ASSOCIATION, 1929.