

PEREGRINATIONS OF PHARMACEUTICAL PRODUCTS.*

BY ROBERT J. RUTH.

Most of us who were privileged to spend many hours daily breathing in the pungent atmosphere of the druggy drug store of two to three decades ago, when the Twentieth Century was still in its colicky days, can remember the "canning season."

Whole or ground pepper, cloves, cinnamon bark, nutmeg, mace, ginger root, mustard seed, dill, celery seed and allspice—all weighed out and wrapped in neat packages for the lady with the shopping list—hundreds, thousands, millions of packages of spices to be used in countless kitchens all over America, where hundreds, thousands, millions of cans and jars of fruit and vegetables were being "put up" for home consumption during the months intervening till nature would again afford these ripened foods.

The aromatic atmosphere of every community bore out the fact—indeed, you can still smell "canning season" in this sophisticated era of the Twentieth Century, but the spices don't come from the drug store.

What has become of this great volume of condiment business, which the retail drug stores enjoyed at "canning season" and which was supplemented by a steady if not so voluminous demand throughout the entire year?

Most of it has gone to the grocery store. Just when or how it went is difficult to define, but grocers began to sell attractive packages of ground spices, with sifter tops, convenient to use and convenient to purchase because they were well displayed—the pharmacist could not very well display a bulk stock of spices, so the grocer largely annexed this considerable condiment business which amounts to millions of dollars each year—spices ceased being drugs and became food products.

Perhaps it is just a natural evolutionary process, this migrating of the spice business—the fact remains that the housewife of to-day has pretty well forgotten that her mother had the habit of going to the drug store for spices.

Equally as sad to contemplate is the peregrination of the business, once enjoyed by the pharmacist, on olive oil, extract of vanilla, extract of lemon, beef cubes, meat juices, malt extract, ammonia water, chlorinated lime, borax and many other products once persistently purchased in drug stores and now almost entirely obtained from grocery stores, mail order houses and house to house vendors. The annual sales of olive oil in this country reach a stupendous figure. Pharmacists enjoy but an infinitesimal part of this business to-day.

Science has, through the discovery of vitamins, laid kindly hands upon an old medicinal product—one used since the Middle Ages—and elevated it to the position of one of the "best sellers" of all drug store products. Within the past decade the use of cod liver oil has increased in an almost unbelievable manner. If the rate of increase of cod liver oil consumption continues, it would seem that the product will cease to be a by-product of the cod fishing industry and become the major part of the business.

It is interesting to know that the United States consumes more than one-third of the world's supply of medicinal cod liver oil, which translated into cash receipts

* Section on Commercial Interests, A. P. H. A., Portland meeting, 1928.

means millions of dollars in the cash registers of the drug stores of the nation every year.

The rancid odor and nauseating taste of old-fashioned cod liver oil have been eliminated by new scientific processes of refining in the manufacturing laboratory which have robbed the product of its late terrors and no longer need the child be bribed or threatened into taking this health-giving ambassador of "Sunshine from the Sea."

In March, when I was in Little Rock, where I lectured at the Medical School of the University of Arkansas, Dr. Vinsonhaler, the Dean, told me that there were many newly developed cases of pellagra following the Mississippi River flood disaster. The cause was, of course, the faulty and impaired diet of many of the flood victims. The treatment employed, Dr. Vinsonhaler said, was the administration of milk, eggs and cod liver oil, which brought about speedy recovery.

We know that cod liver oil is a specific in the treatment of rickets, and so we must consider it a medicinal product when so used and also when it is employed in the treatment of certain nutritional diseases. Just so must we consider milk and eggs in the category of medicinal agents when they are employed in the treatment of nutritional diseases—in other words, whenever they are used as medicines. We would not fail, however, to recognize milk and eggs primarily as food products, and so to-day we must consider cod liver oil a food product, for health authorities throughout the world recognize cod liver oil as an important food product necessary to the proper diet of the baby and growing child in building strong, sturdy bodies free from skeletal mal-formations.

Most of the cod liver oil consumed to-day is taken as a food product, supplementing the baby's milk or the regular diet of growing children and adults.

Will the grocery trade soon come to recognize the possibilities of the cod liver oil business? Will grocers stock and sell cod liver oil as they have olive oil and the spices? But wait—there is an important point which must not be overlooked. Cod liver oil may be a highly potent food or medicine, or it may be without appreciable merit as such. Scientists have not only discovered the vitamin A and D content of cod liver oil, but they have perfected methods for standardizing and protecting the vitamins.

The United States Government has realized the importance of protecting the public in the matter of cod liver oil, its preparations and concentrates, and has realized that a vitamin standard must be set for any product, upon the label of which the terms "cod liver oil" or "vitamin" are used.

It is important that retail druggists have a thorough knowledge of the production and refining of cod liver oil and the standardization and protection of its vitamin content and that they acquaint their patrons with the fact that only a reliable, standardized product should be used. If pharmacists will do this and prominently display cod liver oil in their windows and upon their counters, it will continue to be considered as a drug store product by the public and will not peregrinate to the grocer's shelves, the mail order house and the migratory vendor's wagon.

**Make your preparations early for attending the Rapid City meeting
of the AMERICAN PHARMACEUTICAL ASSOCIATION.**