

DEPARTMENT OF BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Conducted by Paul C. Olsen.*

COMMENTS, QUESTIONS AND SUGGESTIONS ARE INVITED AND WELCOME.

Readers are invited to submit comments, criticisms and suggestions regarding the material which appears in this department. The Editor also will undertake to answer questions regarding general problems of business management. Letters of general interest will be published, but the writer's name will not be revealed without his permission.

WHY PEOPLE PREFER THE PHARMACIST.

BY PAUL C. OLSEN.

The title of this article may seem to be unduly optimistic. Many people will consider it so because of the volume of business which formerly went unquestioned to the drug store, but which to-day is going in important amounts to department stores, variety stores, mail order houses, house to house canvassers and a considerable number of other and newer types of retail distributors.

I don't want to minimize the importance of this business which has been diverted from the retail drug stores of the country. I simply want to try to indicate what the situation is and what seem to me to be the reasons for its existence.

One of the most important classes of merchandise in which other types of retail stores are now aggressive and successful competitors of retail drug stores is that of toilet goods. The principal competitors in this field are department stores, variety stores and beauty shops. Barber shops are also a small factor.

The reason, in my judgment, that this business has gone to these other outlets is the failure of a great many druggists to capitalize effectively the natural advantages which a pharmacist has in the sale of toilet goods. These natural advantages result from the necessary training and experience he must have to become a licensed pharmacist. This necessary training and experience means that he understands the composition and purposes of practically every line of toilet goods.

On the other hand, the department stores and beauty shops, with far less scientific training and understanding of the compositions and purposes of toilet goods, have achieved greater success in the sale of this merchandise. This success has come because of their superior knowledge of the purposes these preparations serve, and the selling appeals employed to stimulate sales.

The lack of practical use for much of the scientific training with which students in colleges of pharmacy are equipped to-day is frequently decried. My own judgment is, that the real weakness is a failure on the part of many pharmacists to take advantage of opportunities, such as those described above, to make profitable use of this scientific training. Perhaps, also, there is a failure to make clear to students the specific ways in which scientific training may be of profitable service in many retail drug stores.

Patent medicine stores and their variant, perfume shops, are other directions in which the business, which formerly was exclusively that of retail drug stores,

* Lecturer on Business, Columbia University and Philadelphia College of Pharmacy and Science.

is believed to be diverted now. Patent medicine stores may be as elaborately equipped as drug stores and include in their stock practically everything drug stores carry, except the lines which the law, for reasons of public health and safety, restricts to licensed pharmacies. The perfume shops, so-called, generally have the bulk of their stock, as the name indicates, in toilet goods and a few related and popular lines.

Still another variation is the candy and ice cream parlor or the exclusive soda fountain and luncheonette. In such stores there occur frequently calls for aromatic spirit of ammonia, headache remedies and similar preparations which are dispensed at a soda fountain. It is just one step from dispensing them at the fountain to selling the preparations in original packages, and thus such stores are led into the sale of proprietary remedies.

The facts are, however, that stores in the groups above seldom achieve permanent success in the sale of medicinal preparations. The reason is not difficult to find. A person who undertakes self-medication, however simple the treatment that is indicated, likes to be assured that the person from whom he buys the medicine is familiar with its character and purpose. The purchaser has greater confidence, therefore, in dealing with a pharmacist in matters of this kind, than with a person who does not have the scientific training and experience which a pharmacist is required to have.

This is one more illustration of the economic value to a pharmacist of the prescription department. It is of vital importance, not only for itself, but also because of the prestige and standing which it gives to the store and to many lines of merchandise which are sold and are not strictly prescription items.

That is why it has always seemed to me that there exists in a drug store an opportunity for the proprietor to take advantage of the prestige which pharmacy enjoys to promote the sale of toilet goods and many other items to which attention will be called. (It is well understood that the promotion by pharmacists of the sale of medicinal preparations requires them to distinguish between those preparations which can be safely sold directly to the people and the others which must be used only under professional direction.)

Toilet goods are not the only line in which there has been this frequent failure to make profitable use of the scientific training and experience with which pharmacists are equipped.

Years ago, the flavoring extract and spice business slipped away to grocery stores. This happened largely because of price competition. Any one familiar with the small and slow family use of flavoring extracts and spices knows that the saving from the purchase of inferior flavoring extracts and spices over a period of years is infinitesimal compared with the cost of the highest quality flavoring extracts and spices. It is well known, too, that the differences in quality of flavoring extracts and spices are amazing.

Tragically, pharmacists have known these two facts, but comparatively few of them have impressed them profitably upon their customers.

A somewhat similar situation has developed in the sale of insecticides and even of veterinary medicinal preparations. Seedsmen have become important outlets for this type of merchandise, largely because of their more comprehensive knowledge of the existing markets. It is unfortunate that few pharmacists have capitalized

the scientific knowledge they have of the composition and purposes of preparations in these fields to enlarge their sales of this class of merchandise.

Another field in which opportunities no doubt exist is in cleaning preparations. The selection of suitable cleaning preparations is complicated on account of the variety of fabrics in use to-day and the mixtures in woven textiles. The weighting of silk, also, has added complications to cleaning problems.

I emphasize these specific fields, because it is a well-known fact that people turn naturally to the pharmacist as the most accessible source of scientific knowledge and prefer to do business with such a qualified person.

Other retailers who have been able to secure considerable business in lines which formerly were sold exclusively in drug stores have had to overcome this natural advantage which the druggist has. It is a tribute to the merchandising skill of these other types of retailers that they have been able to successfully overcome this advantage which the pharmacist has.

It is interesting to contemplate the effect of the use by pharmacists of similar merchandising ability. The scientific training and experience of pharmacists plus the natural preference people have for dealing with pharmacists in the purchase of merchandise of the classes named in this article give to pharmacists outstanding advantages which it certainly appears that skilful merchandising can capitalize effectively.

These facts force the conclusion that scientific training and experience is an invaluable and priceless advantage of the retail pharmacist which, with aggressive and skilful merchandising, he can make of even greater benefit to himself and to the community he serves.

DISEASE NAMES ON LABELS.

A decision by Judge Thomas, of the United States District Court at Hartford holds that a drug product is not misbranded under the Food and Drugs Act when it possesses some therapeutic or curative value in connection with the treatment or mitigation of the ailments or diseases for which it is advertised. The decision differs from the policy of the Food, Drug and Insecticide Administration of the United States Department of Agriculture, in attempting to secure the removal of disease names from labels and advertisements of proprietary medicines.

We quote the interpretation of Judge Thomas of the Food and Drugs Act in the following:

"In the use of the words therapeutic and curative, as set forth in the statute, it seems clear that these words were intended by the Congress to be given their ordinarily accepted meaning, and while they have a certain meaning to the expert doctor, nevertheless they are a part of the vocabulary of any intelligent person. Therapeutics to the medical world means to heal; to make well; to restore to health. It is that branch of medicine deal-

ing with the proper use of the right medicines in the treatment of disease. The medical student studies Therapeutics for the purpose of learning about different medicines to prescribe for the many ills to which the flesh is heir, in order to assist nature to make a sick patient well. The ordinary definitions found in the dictionaries are as follows: Having healing qualities; curative; alleviative; a medicine efficacious in curing or alleviating disease. Webster defines Therapeutics as that part of medical science which treats of the discovery and application of remedies for diseases. The word, curative, is not found in the medical dictionaries. The regular dictionaries define the word as "possessing or tending to cure; relating to the cure of disease; relating to or employed in the cure of disease; tending to cure. In none of the definitions is there a suggestion that the words, therapeutic or curative, convey the meaning of absolute cure. The testimony of the experts shows that a therapeutic or curative agent is something which alleviates or tends to cure a disease, and that, except in a few instances, there is no medicine which, of itself, is an absolute cure for disease."