

## REMINISCENCES OF EARLY PHARMACY IN BALTIMORE.

BY DAVID M. R. CULBRETH, M.D.

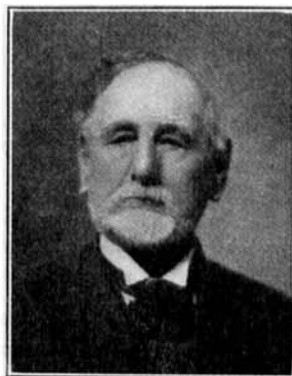
Among the thirty well-established "Pharmaceutic Elders" of fifty years ago in Baltimore, 1877, whose friendships and conversations the writer later shared, only three set interviews pertaining to early conditions and experiences in the drug business have by him been preserved. These were filled in from notes taken at the hour,



J. BROWN BAXLEY.



M. JOSEPH MUTH.



ALPHEUS P. SHARP.

each subsequently submitted for possible correction, *and as such constitute the present article*—Mr. Muth, wholesaler; Mr. Sharp, manufacturer; Mr. Baxley, retailer.

**M. Joseph Muth (1837-1898).**—This gentleman was of composite stature, five feet six inches in height, weighing 160 pounds; roundish face, broad forehead, black hair, moustache and short full beard; alert, easy manners, deliberate action, and conversation filled with wise counsel and judgment; sustained low even voice; never visibly angry or irritated, placid, void of criticism—always placating that tendency in others; a steadfast friend enjoying confidences never to be betrayed, and establishing the belief that you were one of his chosen favorites—an innate quality that stimulated an interest in common humanity, and a contribution, wherever possible, of his generous nature and vast technical information. He was so sympathetic with young men—that they start life aright; with the strongest meaning of morality, industry and economy; his advice and counsel were a veritable inspiration. Owing to business demands he seldom attended college meetings, but held the institution in high regard and made to it liberal contributions.

"When I, a lad of thirteen, entered the wholesale drug house of Poplein and Thomsen, 1851, crude drugs of vegetable origin and dyestuffs were our leading commercial articles, and making fires, sweeping floors and weighing out drugs, but never wrapping or labeling them, were my chief duties. I continued with the firm and its direct successors, then recognized as the second largest in the city (Christian Kéener holding first place), until 1884, when the corporation of Muth Brothers was formed. Our store was next to the present National Bank of Baltimore until 1856, when, being burnt out, we had to seek other quarters: 7 Hanover St., 8 S. Charles St., 26 Hanover St. and finally 56 German (now Redwood) St., 1859, in a new building erected by Mr. Thomsen especially for our purpose, and when we four brothers became more closely identified with the business.

After the fire many of the chemicals were found in fair condition, but with wrappers and cartons consumed; some bottles even cracked and oozing contents more or less charred, so that when Mr. Wood, the manager, asked me to clean up a certain pile of refuse those clerks standing nearby were seized with paroxysms of sneezing, owing to scattered veratrine—an experience that even yet lingers.

Chemicals were few in those days and alkaloids scarcely in any demand, but Rochelle and Epsom salts were quite popular—Baltimore being headquarters for the latter, and so listed in chemical and trade reports, Anne Arundel County being adjacent and furnishing magnesium clay of high grade, from which the salt was manufactured extensively in our city. Only a few patent medicines were in existence: Swain's Panacea, Hawks' Panacea, Brandreth's Pills and Wright's Pills being the four leaders. The most accredited retail drug store at that early period was Coleman and Rogers, 176 W. Baltimore St., just east of Light, 1891, whose semi-annual bills with us averaged \$150.00, from which the profits must have been quite a thousand dollars. They were patronized by our best and wealthiest families, stood high personally, lived well, drove fast horses and were looked upon by the trade in every respect as *bon ton*.

The next prominent store was that of Andrews and Thompson, 5 E. Baltimore St., whose semi-annual bills with us amounted to \$100.00, and thereafter in importance came: Mackenzie, Laroque, Graham, Littlefield and Co., etc. Chemistry had some supporters but precious few followers, George W. Andrews and Charles C. Caspari standing at the head, although a little later Dr. William E. A. Aiken, professor of chemistry in the University of Maryland, enjoyed even greater prominence. My uncle, a skilled musician, was requested to design a church organ and to attend its initial trial, when he readily detected false notes caused by other metal than zinc entering into the composition of the pipes. The recognized best local analyst, George W. Andrews, was sought, who, from slight scrapings of each pipe, found only two of pure zinc—the others, largely lead. So, as a fact, in the not very remote past the pharmaco-chemist had higher recognition than that accorded to-day to the mere compounder of prescriptions.

In the 50's and 60's the powdering of drugs involved much labor for retail and wholesale druggists, as it had to be done by hand, there being no specific machinery. Our two large mortars were kept in continuous service—one of iron, two feet high, 1½ feet in diameter, 3–4 gallon capacity, with a solid iron pestle, four feet long and 1 inch in diameter, enlarged at the lower end to 3 or 4 inches, and employed chiefly in reducing ergot, rhubarb, bayberry, etc., using mostly a vertical motion; the other of marble, broad and shallow, the bowl 3–4 gallon capacity—the lower portion of the pestle being marble—conical shape, rounded base, 6–8 inches in length and breadth, joined to a long wooden rod whose upper end passed through a hole in the ceiling, the operator having simply to give the pestle a swinging rotary motion, when by contusion or trituration substances like acacia, borax, ammonium chloride, etc., could readily be reduced. The first drug mill, Spencer-Thomas pattern, was used here in 1865, but only for bruising—not powdering. The **Pulvis Glycyrrhizæ Compositus** became popular in the early 70's, and owing to the fixed oil in fennel seed was very troublesome to prepare.

*Business Decadence.*—The decadence of the drug business in our city has been due to: 1, Jealousies and misunderstanding among our retail druggists, for as early

as 1855, at a called meeting, when a uniform price list was submitted and signed by all except Columbus V. Emich, J. Jacob Smith, and Henry A. Elliott (who even promised moral support and coöperation when practical)—scarcely a week had passed before William S. Thompson came into our store with the lament that Laroque, his near neighbor, was selling **Liquor Magnesii Citratis** at 25¢ instead of 40¢, as per list, as well as the inquiry—what action should be taken? This early infraction was the beginning of the end, as in a short time all were violating the letter of the schedule which soon led to disturbed confidence—a general distrust that has not decreased with years. Consequently, ever since then our pharmacists have been deprived of the efficiency in team work—each preferring to go independently along lines believed best for individual advantage; 2, Department stores have contributed a share of injury to the retail drug business—the first in our city being: Aikin's Dry Goods Store, which even in 1855 had a cut rate for Lubin's Extracts, Lowe's Soaps and all tooth brushes, the last two items prior to that date selling for not less than 25¢. As an offset to this innovation we strongly advised pharmacists to carry two grades, *cheap* and *expensive*, of all articles that shared in cutting, thereby giving patrons a choice according to price.

I think the advent of the 'drummer,' always so keen and aggressive towards selling, gave the initial impulse to 'cut rates,' for when merchants found that reduction drives on one or more articles attracted patrons, who often made other purchases at 'straight prices' resulting in profit, the custom was encouraged, only to become general and to develop the 'cut rate' store where everything is sold below normal. William H. Read gave us, 1862, our first 'cut rate' store (now, 1929, grown to a chain of thirty or more) of druggists' sundries and supplies, who, under the plea of selling out to visit Europe, reduced Hall's Hair Renewer to 75¢, thereby increasing its sale so enormously as to suggest the inclusion of other commodities, and finally everything, which resulted in abandoning his trip, owing to excessive business and prosperity. His store worried our druggists considerably, causing some to advise meeting his prices, and the majority to endorse a regular campaign towards convincing the public—that all accredited drug store articles sold anywhere at irregular under rates were not genuine but spurious—with the result that many persons thereafter patronized only the drug stores which maintained standard prices. Ferdinand Hassencamp, although an advocate of meeting all reductions, abstained for a time, as did many of his friendly pharmacists, but finally yielded and a short while later a lady came into his store wishing a bottle of Halls' Hair Renewer, who upon his naming its price, 75¢, boldly declared—she wanted the genuine, not a fraudulent substitute, and in spite of intelligent explanation became so excited as to refuse the purchase—hurrying out with a slam to the door.

*Personal Decadence.*—I attribute the weakening of the personnel in the business to the attraction it now offers, less than formerly, when in the absence of manufacturing establishments, it involved considerable technical experience and interesting chemical processes that required a high order of intelligence and training—all making for a social recognition which appealed strongly to quite a few young men with laudable birth and advantages. Stores were less numerous, sales and profits larger, while salaries seldom ranged lower than a thousand dollars per annum—quite sufficient to prevent unrest and continuous planning to start one's own business.

**Edouard Ducatel** might be regarded as the father of pharmacy in our city. He was a French refugee, educated at the *École de Paris*, and trained in pharmacy; he conducted for many years here, undoubtedly, the most professional retail drug store up to his period, where scores of young men of good families, habits and minds found attractive positions, learned the science of the art, and became sufficiently equipped to enter upon the study of medicine, or the practice of pharmacy under their own names. The privileges of clerks were far greater then, while physicians felt more kindly towards the druggist—whom they held as somewhat coöperative, visiting his store one or more times a day to give directions for preparing medicines for this or that patient, in the belief that they themselves knew more about such matters than the druggist himself—a possible fact in that day of pharmaceutical simplicity. Physicians, prior to Ducatel's time, made their own preparations in the office (*officinalis*), buying the crude substances from the druggist and having their own understudies prepare compounds by special directions—a practice that in the taking often enforced the patience of patients as well as language with staccato emphasis. In my early day I recall that cholera was treated by anointing the entire body with blue ointment, possibly not without merit, but a cure which might be considered now—worse than the disease."

February 11, 1891.

**Alpheus P. Sharp** (1824–1909).—This gentleman was of the plain sturdy type, energetic, full size, weighing 175 pounds, 5 feet 10 inches in height; brownish moustache and stubby beard mixed with white; rather indifferent to dress, void of mannerism, free in speech and opinion upon subjects of his experience; at times with hurried movement and action, slightly blustery, inclined to emphasize small things, hesitating about larger ones. Lived simply in spite of means justifying indulgencies, possessed mental and mechanical originality; experimented in agricultural chemistry, fertilization, phrenology; contributed articles to pharmaceutical literature, occasionally attended college meetings and functions helpful to pharmacy in general.

"Our lecture course at the Maryland College of Pharmacy, 1841, was only one year of six months. Dr. David Stewart lectured on chemistry without using notes, but followed Bache in the Dispensary and made his talks, for that is what they were, of little value, as he was a poor speaker with a bombastic style. He told us how to make copper sulphate, also a few other chemicals, and dwelt considerably on physics, his only piece of apparatus being a statical electric machine with which, after class, we amused ourselves beyond measure by taking *shocks*. William S. Thompson could stand any amount, but I very little; in fact, seemingly, I have never gotten over them. I corresponded with Dr. Stewart for some years after he left Baltimore, but I could make no sense out of his letters, as they indicated a mind filled with vagaries. Dr. Rush Roberts lectured on *Materia Medica*, reading his lectures which closely followed Wood in the Dispensary. Thomas G. Mackenzie, Baltimore and Gay Sts., was the great moving spirit in establishing the College of Pharmacy, and gave us occasional talks in the absence of the regulars—all lectures were given in his little office, not larger than the hall of my home, to a class of six young men, one being Mr. Laroque's son, Emile, who did not come up for graduation, 1842, but three did and were successful. It was very easy then, for we had to know so little.

Our commencement was held at the Old Masonic Hall, St. Paul St., where the Court House now stands, and Robert H. Coleman (Coleman and Rogers) delivered

the address, which was fine, he being a remarkable pharmacist teeming with useful advice from his individual experience. A good account of it appeared next morning in *The Sun*, a copy of which I kept many years, but now is lost. William S. Thompson, several years before his death, 1894, showed me the copy he had kept all these years. In 1842, when 19 years old, I assisted Charles C. Caspari, then about 27, to open his drug store, 34 N. Gay St. (removed to 44 in 1849), as he could not speak English and knew only the German method of running the business, in consequence of which it devolved upon me for quite a while—to take absolute charge. I remained with him six years, becoming almost invaluable, when I opened (bought out Mr. James W. W. Gordon, 1849, who, several years thereafter, removed to Cincinnati and became a large manufacturer of glycerin, etc.) my own store, S. W. Cor. Howard & Pratt Sts., taking along much of Mr. Caspari's trade, thus giving me a good business from the start. Six or seven years later I took into my store Louis Dohme, who scarcely could speak any English, but quickly picked it up to perfection.

Mr. Caspari was great on decoctions and infusions, even brought over with him from Germany a Beinzan apparatus for preparing them. We also made in his store—extract of hyoscyamus, getting as much product as weight of drug taken. He knew all about chemical symbols and, no doubt, would have been a professor at the College, but for his English. Mr. George W. Andrews knew nothing of symbols, for I often asked him concerning them, H<sub>2</sub>O, CO<sub>2</sub>, etc., but he could tell very little of their meaning—he knew much less than people gave him credit for. The first question at graduation was: Give the composition of Dover's Powder, also doses of morphine, strychnine, etc. In the store we had an olive oil flask, in which Fowler's solution was prepared—this being our only home-made chemical solution.”

November 10, 1894.

**J. Brown Baxley** (1814–1896).—This gentleman was of the rugged stocky type, 5 feet 8 inches in height and weighing 165 pounds; broad face and forehead, moustache, beard and hair blackish mixed with gray, nearly bald; somewhat contentious, critical of business trend and methods, aggressive in action and conversation, strongly defending his opinions and preferences—standing for fair play and honorable methods in trade; yielded to no one in pharmaceutic ability and technique; discussed freely his own improvements in various preparations, some being published and commended. Struggled effectively for reestablishment of the College of Pharmacy, 1857, and served for years as its treasurer and on the Board of Examiners. He was much interested in Free Dispensary Service for the poor and needy.

“My father was a soldier at Fort McHenry when I was born, August 17, 1814, and three weeks later was most active in defending the city against the furious bombardment of the British, September 13th–14th, the occasion that inspired the famous *Star Spangled Banner*, and nearly cost him his life, as a shell falling at his side simply imbedded itself deeply in the earth without exploding. This, being two feet in diameter, he recovered sometime later and treasured it for years as did our entire family until, becoming my inheritance, it was presented to the Maryland Academy of Sciences.

I was named for both Generals Jackson (Andrew) and Brown, conspicuous in the War of 1812, so fancied myself destined for either the Army or Navy. But as an older brother had served an army post (Fort) where Chicago now stands, for a

long time without any substantial worldly possessions, father vigorously opposed another son following the example. Consequently, through the mediation of another older brother, Dr. Henry Willis Baxley, then a prominent physician, surgeon and professor in the University of Maryland, with a wholesome influence among pharmacists, the drug business, much against my will, was selected for me. Dr. Baxley applied successfully in my behalf to Messrs. Tyson and Fisher, Baltimore St., opposite Hanover, who, in spite of recent establishment, enjoyed marked confidence of physicians and people—Mr. Fisher being a graduate of the Philadelphia College of Pharmacy, which then gave him not a little professional distinction and prestige. But as the position required four years of apprentice service without the slightest remuneration—the custom in Baltimore—father would not listen to its acceptance, whereupon Mr. Fisher advised my going to Philadelphia, where he had been trained—in the store of his uncle, Samuel Powell Griffith, who then needed a clerk and would contribute board, as was the practice there—a suggestion that met hearty approval. Thus, at sixteen, 1830, I began my pharmaceutical career in that city and after remaining four years and attending, without graduation, two courses of lectures at the Philadelphia College of Pharmacy, returned to Baltimore. Some time before going to Philadelphia I vividly recall father taking me to a reception given in honor of the then, or about to be, President, Andrew Jackson, at the Indian Queen Hotel, S. E. Cor. Baltimore and Hanover Sts., now (1891) occupied by Moore's store, and that father, in the rapidly moving procession of hand-shaking guests, called the President's attention to the fact: This lad is your namesake, only to cause the President to invite father for dinner at a slightly later hour. So, when that function was supposed to be nearly over, Dr. Baxley and I called on the President, who, as we were leaving, presented me with a silver medal, size of a half dollar, extended blessing and proffered a helping hand should it ever be needed.

Shortly after returning to Baltimore from Philadelphia I entered into the drug business with Mr. Bennett, who lived only a year, when I disposed of the store and went to Mobile, Alabama, where, forming the drug firm of Baxley and Tilghman (a native of Queen Anne's County, Maryland) I remained eleven years, and when I not only experienced my first epidemic of yellow fever, having it myself in 1837, but, during convalescence, met my first financial loss—the destruction of our place of business in a conflagration that included half of the city. Being unable to reestablish ourselves I took a clerkship until 1844, when, owing to the illness of my father, I returned to Baltimore, where the mere mention of having come from the distressed, fevered South, coupled with the surmise of conveying the deadly contagion (being a germ carrier) made people scan me with great apprehension and fear—a fact that actuated largely against my securing immediate employment. Some months later I was sought as temporary apothecary at the Baltimore General Dispensary, then fully established, a position soon made permanent and which I continued to hold uninterruptedly for ten years, when I was compelled to assume entire management of my own retail drug store, already established in 1852 and hitherto in control of a most reliable clerk, J. Jacob Smith, who found it to his interest to enter business elsewhere on his own account. Sometimes you see two retail drug stores in the same block, but very seldom two side by side, and this is how it happened here with me. My father, before I went South, bought this build-

ing, S. E. Cor. Howard & Franklin Sts., and, in spite of knowing nothing of the drug business, opened therein a retail drug store, having as partner Mr. Warner, a practical pharmacist, whose early death compelled father to sell the business, but not the building, to William H. Balderston, a highly reputable apothecary, who, with William Henck (well remembered by the writer, very deaf yet most reliable) as assistant—conducted the store for some years, and then disposed of it to Mr. James Perkins who still retained the invaluable Mr. Henck. Consequently, when the building came to me from father, 1850, and I desired it for establishing my own business, Mr. Perkins, being forced to move much against his will, went next door South, 136 N. Howard St., taking along Mr. Henck as head clerk and securing a little later Mr. Columbus V. Emich as a partner, who not only has become sole proprietor but still retains Mr. Henck—they both continuing to be my neighbors, active, healthy and popular.”

June 16, 1891.

#### THE HOME OF PARACELSUS.



On the building above, extending over the front of the third floor is a sign, indicative of a drug and photo establishment. Over the entrance is a portrait and a plaque, shown in the adjoining illustrations, placed here by the German Medical and Scientific Society. Paracelsus lived in this building during the last years of his life and died here in 1541. Salzburg is an old city; it is the birth-place of Mozart.

