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THE VALUES OF VEGETABLE DRUGS AS RANKED BY PHYSICIANS.

SOME time ago, Prof. John Uri Lloyd undertook to determine the extent to which American Physicians are influenced by the authority of the Pharmacopœia in selecting the vegetable drugs employed by them, and also the order in which they considered them of value.

The results of these inquiries were set forth in a paper read before the section on Pharmacopœias and Formularies at the Denver Convention (see Nov., 1912, Journal, p. 1228), which presents statistical information that does not fit in well with doctrines which many of us had previously considered to be well established.

It is sometimes said that nothing lies like statistics, and that although figures will not lie, liars will figure, a rather crude way of expressing the fact that statistics are frequently so carelessly gathered as to be worthless as a source of information, or that they are sometimes so juggled as to apparently substantiate conclusions far removed from the truth.

In the paper under consideration, however, the figures seem to have been gathered with great, or even unusual care, and as far as we are able to judge from the context they have been fairly and honestly tabulated.

The sheets sent to physicians contained lists of the vegetable drugs upon which answers were required, and contained nothing that could have influenced those to whom they were sent to answer other than according to their own opinions as to the value of the drugs pronounced upon. That Prof. Lloyd endeavored to reach a list of physicians sufficiently large to be fairly representative

of the whole profession is evidenced by the fact that something like three thousand dollars was expended in postage alone. From the surrounding circumstances, therefore, we are justified in assuming that the figures in the tables fairly represent the consensus of opinion of practicing physicians of the country as to the value of the drugs passed upon. If any error is made in drawing conclusions from the results, the fault cannot fairly be charged to Prof. Lloyd.

The first surprise is reached when we examine the replies submitted by a selected list of physicians, none of whom were Eclectic, and in which the drug echinacea is given first place among valuable remedies, being ranked many degrees above such old pharmaceutical favorites as nux vomica, digitalis, ipecac, cannabis, colchicum, colocynth, ergot, rhubarb, and senna, while in the same list certain other official celebrities, as columbo, guaiacum, jalap, cinchona, and a number of lesser note, are thrown into the discard, not being favorably mentioned by a single physician who replied to the queries.

Some less prominent, or as many of us have been taught, quite unimportant drugs, as bryonia, pulsatilla, cactus, chionanthus, thuja, and even dioscorea, collinsonia and crataegus, are favorably mentioned with such frequency as to bring them well within the therapeutic "400," while others of undoubted respectability are either not mentioned at all, or are set away down toward the zero point in value.

If these answers had been furnished by Eclectic physicians alone, it might have been said that such vagaries were to be expected from the adherents of a sectarian school, but when the answers come from physicians whose regularity and orthodoxy are beyond doubt, we are moved to exclaim with Truthful James:

"Do I sleep, do I dream?
Do I wander and doubt?
Are things what they seem
Or is visions about?"

Nor are we able to extract any satisfaction from the list of drugs esteemed of value by Eclectic physicians. As was to be expected, some differences appear, but not sufficient to make any very material change in the list. On the whole there is a surprising similarity in the two lists; in fact, the Eclectics appear to be slightly more regular than the regulars themselves, since twelve of the first fifteen named Eclectics' favorites are U. S. P. drugs, while only eleven of the first fifteen named in the other list are recognized by that authority.

In the Eclectic list gelsemium is given first rank, and echinacea the fifth, an exact reversal of their positions in the non-Eclectic list, while aconite, bryonia, macrotys, belladonna, and numerous others occupy either the same or nearly the same rank in both lists.

In only a few cases is the difference in rank sufficient to be termed striking, the more notable being podophyllum, ranked 18 by Eclectics and 28 by the non-Eclectics; ergot ranked 22 by the Eclectics and 32 by the non-Eclectics; and digitalis ranked 24 by the Eclectics and 14 by the non-Eclectics. In the majority of cases the difference in rank in the two lists does not amount to more than

three to four points, certainly a remarkably close correspondence when we remember how doctors of different schools are reputed to disagree.

If Prof. Lloyd's work had stopped with these two lists, we might have adopted the hypothesis of a carefully hand-picked jury to explain the unexpected verdict and the placing of such therapeutic ragamuffins as *echinacea cactus*, et al., high above such old and undoubtedly respectable medicaments as *nux vomica*, *digitalis*, *ipsecac*, etc., but just as we are about consoling ourselves with this reflection, Prof. Lloyd springs another list compiled from over 10,000 replies to questions addressed to 30,000 physicians of all schools, widely distributed over the United States, and who are as perverse and unorthodox in their opinions as to the relative value of vegetable drugs as are the physicians who replied to the first two lists. In some respects it is a case of worse and more of it.

Cactus, which is placed in the 12th rank by the Eclectics and in the 9th rank by the non-Eclectics, is given first rank in the last list, being named as a valuable drug by 6239 out of 10,000 physicians who replied to the questions, a clear plurality of over 600 votes above *hydrastis*, the next most popular candidate.

Echinacea, however, is reduced to the 12th place, while twelve out of the first named fifteen drugs are official.

Many other equally striking anomalies—judged by our preconceived ideas—appear from a study of these lists showing the relative esteem in which the various vegetable drugs are held by practitioners, but for these the reader is referred to the original paper. As Prof. Lloyd says, "a study such as this leads to distractive confusion, and a shattering of ideals."

One conclusion which we think may safely be drawn, is that physicians are guided by their own experience in the selection of vegetable drugs, rather than by the recognition or non-recognition of such drugs by the *Pharmacopœia*, and also that having observed favorable clinical results from their use, they are not deterred from prescribing them by the fact that chemical examination has failed to show the existence of any definite active principle to which such favorable result could be attributed.

If physicians are to be credited with the ability to correctly interpret the results obtained in their daily practice, numerous teachers of *materia medica* and therapeutics need to make an early revision of their lectures and text books.

J. H. BEAL.



PARCELS POST UNDER THE ZONE SYSTEM.

THE beginning of the year witnessed the inauguration of the Government's experiment of parcels post under the "zone system," whereby the postage upon mail transported merchandise is, within certain limits, apportioned to the distance through which it is transported.

This, of course, falls far short of the desires of the advocates of the flat-rate-for-everywhere plan, which, for example, would have enabled the New York mail order house to have delivered goods within ten miles of Seattle at the same rate as the Seattle retailer could have delivered them at the same place.

It was admitted on all hands that under the flat rate the Government would lose money on the long hauls, but it was claimed that the loss would be more

than met by the profit on the short hauls. Thus the practical result would have been to increase the profits of those who had a nearly complete monopoly of the long hauls (the big mail order houses in the cities) at the cost of those whose shipments were mostly short hauls—or the small retailers in the rural districts.

Unfortunately, many advocates of parcels post never took the pains to acquaint themselves with the true inwardness of the movement, and consequently were inclined to criticise the retailer for blindly standing in the way of cheaper and quicker methods of transportation. But the retailer was not as dull as his critics thought him. He was not opposed to the cheaper transportation of merchandise by mail, but only asked that the burden and profit should be equally distributed, so that those who shipped the longest distances should pay in proportion to the services received. In other words, he objected to a plan which, though seemingly for the benefit of all, was really a cunningly devised scheme that would have operated mainly to the benefit of a single class of dealers.

As it turned out, the retailers' opposition to the flat-rate plan was successful; in fact, almost too successful, since the rates finally established are, for distances beyond the first 50-mile zone, but little better than the prevailing express rates. This affords the advocates of the flat rate an opportunity to charge that parcels post is not being given a fair trial, and to press their original proposition, i. e., to carry parcels all distances at the same rates. Bills to make this change are still before the Congress, and are being pressed by the same powerful lobby that was behind the original movement. These efforts should be vigorously resisted until experience with the present form of parcels post enables us to determine what amendments are needed to make it an effective method for the transportation of merchandise, without becoming an instrument for the enrichment of a small but powerful group of special interests.

It will also be good policy for druggists to familiarize themselves with the present form of the plan, and utilize every opportunity for using it to the benefit of their own business.

The present rates are as follows:

	First Lb. or fraction	Each Additional Lb. or fraction	Limit 11 Lbs.
Rural Route and City Delivery.....	.05	.01	.15
50-mi. zone .....	.05	.03	.35
150-mi. zone .....	.06	.04	.46
300-mi. zone .....	.07	.05	.57
600 mi. zone .....	.08	.06	.68
1000-mi. zone .....	.09	.07	.79
1400-mi. zone .....	.10	.09	1.00
1800-mi. zone .....	.11	.10	1.11
Over 1800 mi.....	.12	.12	1.32

The limit of weight is 11 pounds, and the *combined* length and crosswise girth must not exceed 72 inches.

Poisons or habit-forming drugs, or preparations containing them in material quantities, intoxicating liquors, explosives or inflammable articles, and articles intended or adapted for immoral use are unmailable.

J. H. BEAL.

A NEEDED PIECE OF LEGISLATION.

MEMBERS of the American Pharmaceutical Association and pharmacists generally have now an exceptional opportunity to help materially a large and deserving body of pharmacists who constitute the personnel of the non-commissioned officers of the Army Hospital Corps. Several hundred of these army pharmacists are members of our Association. They are unfairly discriminated against both in rank, pay and in opportunity for advancement under the present constitution of the Army Hospital Corps. Our Association has undertaken to secure just and fair treatment for these men along the lines of the recommendations of the Surgeon General of the United States Army as contained in his memorandum to the chief of staff of August, 1911, and to this end has secured the introduction into Congress of the Hughes-Bacon bill, indexed as S. 5725 and as H. R. 22263, and now under consideration in the Military Committee of both Senate and House.

This bill was printed in the Journal and commented upon by Dr. George F. Payne, in May, 1912. Every member of the Association is earnestly requested to write at once to the senator from his state and the congressman from his district and urge the passage of the Hughes-Bacon bill. As this is a short session of Congress we must act quickly if we hope to accomplish anything. Do not put this aside, but write today to your congressmen and senators.

W. B. DAY.