

Section on Education and Legislation

Papers Presented at the Sixty-First Annual Convention

IS THE PROHIBITION OF METHYL ALCOHOL IN PREPARATIONS FOR EXTERNAL USE ONLY JUSTIFIABLE?

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The attention of the writer was first directed to Methyl Alcohol when an effort was made to incorporate in the misbranding section of the Pennsylvania Drugs Act a third paragraph as follows:

"If it contain Methyl or Wood Alcohol."

This paragraph, however, was not incorporated.

My attention was next directed to the subject at a legislative conference under the auspices of the N. A. R. D. at Niagara Falls in 1911.

That Methyl Alcohol is entirely unfit for use in preparations intended for internal use, is frankly admitted by all of the manufacturers of the same, and I agree that it should be a misdemeanor punishable by fine and imprisonment for any one to make such a use of it, but I fully believe that it is entirely safe for use in preparations for external use only, and so labeled.

The question having been raised, I concluded to look into the subject for my own satisfaction, and was greatly surprised at the lack of information contained in our text books on this subject, and concluded to collect some information on my own account.

Very exhaustive reports relative to Methyl Alcohol have been made by Dr. Casey A. Wood, of Chicago, and Dr. Frank Buller, of Montreal. Many cases of blindness are reported from its use internally; a few as a result of inhalation, but practically none from its use externally.

The writer secured a list of the plants in Pennsylvania and found the number to be 37, then secured a list of physicians and druggists residing near these plants and entered into correspondence with many of them, with the result that no cases of poisoning or blindness are reported, but on the other hand, many cases are found of men who have been employed in these plants for a great period of time—some as long as 25 years—and their vision is still unimpaired.

Much ado has been made in relation to two cases of poisoning by inhalation by workmen varnishing vats. The facts are that the men were at work varnishing vats with shellac made from Methyl Alcohol. The vats were 20 feet wide and 10 feet deep, cylindrical in shape, and almost entirely closed, there being a vent of only three or four inches in diameter at the top. The workmen entered the vats through a manhole, which was partly closed. The temperature raised to about 70 degrees, in order to dry the interior, and the exposure lasted several days.

With these facts given I think a different light is thrown on the incident, and the blame should not be placed on Methyl Alcohol.

In view of the fact that there is about 25,000,000 of dollars invested in wood alcohol plants in the United States, and employment given to about 75,000 people, ten million dollars being invested in plants in Pennsylvania, and until more proof is given that its use externally is dangerous, I do not believe that the regulations and proposed legislation prohibiting its use in preparations for external use only are justifiable.

PHARMACY IN CALIFORNIA IN 1913.

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At the recent state pharmaceutical convention at San Jose a number of prominent pharmacists and educators ventured to criticize the medical profession for its lack of familiarity with materia medica subjects and urged upon the colleges of medicine the necessity of devoting more attention to these subjects. The prominence of the men engaged in this controversy brought out newspaper comment in which it was stated that physicians could diagnose well enough, but when it came to selecting the remedy to fit the ill, they were found wanting and at a loss to know how to proceed.

As yet we have heard no retaliatory utterances on the part of California physicians. A letter from a Nevada physician appeared in the *Pacific Medical Journal* under the caption, "Are Doctors Fools?" in which the druggist is taken severely to task for his own discrepancies, and he is accused of endeavoring to justify himself in the eyes of the public by belittling the profession of medicine.

The dignified silence of California medical men is what would naturally be expected when one considers the exceptionally high standard of medical education in California compared with the deplorably low standard of pharmaceutical attainment. It is a gap no self-respecting physician would venture to bridge.

It is noteworthy that college men took the leading part in this discussion—men holding chairs in leading medical and pharmaceutical schools. These men above all others should be in a position to judge and to know the necessities of the medical and pharmacy student. They should know not only what is essential to the groundwork of the student's education, but their knowledge should be broad enough to understand the conditions under which the student has to labor when he embarks upon his career. It is not sufficient that the student should know what the past has accomplished. He should be alive to the kaleidoscopic changes of the present as well as the general drift of medical and pharmaceutical progress, so that he may meet new developments as they arise. If the student is not educated along these broader lines, he is incapable of adapting himself to new conditions and consequently lowers the standard of the profession of which he is a member.

The question then arises, how well is the college equipped to prepare the student for the broader activities of life after he emerges from the college? Is this equipment confined to a study of text-books which are out-of-date almost