

Section on Commercial Interests

Papers Presented at the Sixty-Second Annual Convention

THE BUGABOO OF COMMERCIALISM.*

HARRY B. MASON.

As this brief address was being written, the week preceding the convention, certain reform measures were under discussion with reference to the internal organization of the A. Ph. A. Now, as I am reading the address, these reforms are doubtless about to be taken up for final action. I speak of this reform movement for the reason that one of the suggestions advanced during the preliminary discussion of the subject has been that the commercial section should be abolished. Several ultra-professional members of the organization have had the temerity to advance such a proposition.

This affords me a text upon which to base a short sermon. It has several times been proposed to discard this commercial section, but the sound sense of the association as a whole has always set down heavily upon the idea—and always will. The very fact, however, that such a suggestion could be made at all is significant of a condition of things in pharmacy that has always been most unfortunate. It harks back to the time-honored attitude that the pharmacist is a scientific and professional man who should scorn all commercial considerations.

This notion has been a serious handicap to druggists. It has permeated the whole calling. It has leavened the whole mass. It has been preached in season and out of season by our idealists. It has been deeply instilled into the minds of every new class of pharmacy students. Year after year the same old fallacy has been perpetuated, and it is with exceeding slowness that we are coming to see the light.

As a matter of fact, all this scorn of commercialism in the drug business is the worst kind of stupidity. The old school pharmacist speaks yet of the "ethical" pharmacist and the "ethical" pharmacy, as if what he would call a commercial druggist and a commercial drug store was *unethical*. But ethics has nothing to do with the question. The word ethical in such company is a rank misnomer. The ethical law is the moral law—the law of honor and honesty—the law of square dealing—the law of rectitude and decency and integrity.

There is every bit as much ethics in honest commercialism as in honest professionalism, and a druggist who runs a soda fountain, providing he dispenses pure soda water, and indulges in no deception to the public, is just as "ethical" as the pharmacist who spends all his time in putting up prescriptions or performing urinalyses.

* Address of the Chairman of the Commercial Section of the A. Ph. A., read at the Detroit Meeting in August.

The sad and distressing feature of this whole tendency to canonize professionalism in pharmacy, and to bemoan commercialism, is that it has caused the practical failure of thousands of druggists, and has prevented the entire body of them from being as successful as they should have been. In making this statement I am indulging in no wild exaggeration. I am confining closely myself to the facts. For upwards of ten years now I have been making a close and systematic study of the pharmacist as a business man. For the most part I have found him wanting. I have discovered, for instance, that he usually has no idea at all of what it costs him to sell his goods or what his gross and net profits on them are. He is doing his business largely in the dark, and this is chiefly for the reason that he has been taught traditionally to have a fine scorn for business as something beneath him.

This whole attitude is so cruelly wrong—so diametrically opposite to the truth. Commercial skill and commercial occupation are not things to scorn. On the contrary, commercial ability is a far rarer flower than professional ability. You can go up and down the country and hire professional training of all sorts at a very low wage, but you can't find business skill enough to serve your purposes. It isn't to be had. It doesn't exist. There isn't enough of it to go around. Consider, for a minute, the large chain of drug stores in the eastern part of this country that is now endeavoring to increase the number of its establishments as rapidly as possible. What is holding it back—a sufficient number of crack prescriptionists? No, the woods are full of them. The one obstacle is that of finding a sufficient number of men who are competent to manage the new branch stores that the company expects and desires to establish.

What distinguishes this nation from all other nations? Isn't it commercial genius—the genius of the business creator that builds up vast commercial enterprises? Why are all of our leading universities establishing courses in commercial science? Why is a student who wants to prepare himself properly for the conduct of American business now urged to spend just as many years in university work as he would if he desired to study engineering or medicine or law or what not? Business, indeed, is just as much of a science as any of these, and the sooner this fact is realized by American druggists, the better it will be for them.

There is no disgrace in handling side-lines in a drug store. The man who sells souvenir post-cards is not headed straight for perdition. The pharmacist who makes a specialty of photographic supplies or optical goods or stationery should not be read out of the society of decent people. These things are all honorable—just as honorable as the dispensing of prescriptions. There isn't prescription business enough in the United States to keep its 47,000 druggists out of the poorhouse. The only course for the druggist is to do what has already been done—round out his sales by carrying allied things for which there is a public demand, and then study the art of salesmanship and the science of commerce so that he will make a success of the enterprise. And he should do it with his head in the air. His course is every bit as "ethical" as that of the purely prescription druggist, and he is just as good a citizen and may be just as skilled a man.

If I were disposed to make a plea on this occasion it would be for more instead of less business. I would have the American pharmacist become so skilful a business man that he would know how to take care of himself under any and all conditions. I would have him more self-reliant. As some new form of competition arose, or a particularly aggressive form of price-cutting developed, I would have him so independent that he would look to himself for protection instead of to any local or state or national organization. I would have him able to protect his own interests instead of waiting until a Stevens bill or some other law came to his relief.

Competition in the drug business, as in all other lines of trade, and in every profession, is steadily growing keener. It will be worse in the future than it has been in the past. Statisticians tell us that expenses are going up while profits are coming down. What is the lesson? It is this—that the pharmacist must become more and more of a business man, more and more a student of commercial practice, more and more a man determined to make the most of every honorable opportunity presented to him in the conduct of his store. He must study expenses. He must study profits. He must know precisely where he stands. He must be able to reduce his costs. He must be able to increase his selling figures. He must become a skilled advertiser. While not turning his back upon pure pharmacy, and while respecting to the uttermost his occupation and training as an apothecary, he must nevertheless reach out and make himself successful by the use of every commercial art that he can decently call into service.

Some timid souls may fear I am preaching a doctrine of heresy—that I am urging a course which means the destruction of all professionalism in pharmacy. Far from it. The able business man in our calling is the man who develops the purely professional aspects of his occupation just as shrewdly as he grasps every other opportunity and makes the most of it. He respects pure pharmacy because it is after all the foundation of his calling. But as a practical man he respects it still more because it contributes to his success. To prove this point without superfluous argument let me ask a question or two: Where do you find the largest, the best organized, the best equipped prescription departments? Where do you find men who do nothing all day long but dispense prescriptions, and who become specialists at the work? Isn't it in the big city stores where commercialism is pushed to the limit, and where the establishments have become so large and so successful as to make it possible to organize separate prescription departments, and conduct them as they should be conducted? Is there any lack of sympathy here between pharmacy and business—between profession and trade? Do they not lie down together in perfect harmony and does not one help the other?

In conclusion, I want to make one prediction. I have remarked on several occasions that our colleges of pharmacy do not pay sufficient attention to the subject of commercial training. I want to go farther and prophesy that 50 years from now, if not before, the typical school of pharmacy will be an entirely different institution from that of to-day. It will no longer give students the notion that the business side of pharmacy is beneath their consideration. It will frankly

recognize the pharmacist as a business man. It will follow the lead of the universities, with their elaborate commercial courses, and will devote one-half or two-thirds of its curriculum to commercial subjects. It will necessarily abandon many of the superfluous studies that are now deemed essential. In short, it will grapple with conditions as they actually exist, and it will make an earnest, studious and systematic effort to prepare the druggist for the intelligent and successful conduct of his business.

To state the case still more succinctly: The college now teaches its students the science of pharmacy. It will then teach them to run a drug store.

HOW TO GAIN GREATER EFFICIENCY AND CO-OPERATION FROM CLERKS IN DRUG STORES (AND, INCIDENTALLY, DUE APPRECIATION ON THE PART OF THE EMPLOYER).

CHARLES R. SHERMAN.

It has always seemed to me that the employer and employe should easily find common ground of mutuality of interest.

It is true, one gives his service and the other gives a money consideration for same, but if either has any faith in the ultimate triumph of the equities, it will tend to make the employe tender a full measure of prime quality service; while exactly the same motive, only originating at a different view-point, will tell the employer (individual or corporate) that, for the service he receives, he must inevitably, sooner or later, give a fair return.

How to secure faithful and efficient service in drug stores, is a most perplexing question. There are several reasons why this is so, and why this condition will not change, materially, until an entirely new status is recognized and agreed upon, as the basis for employing drug store help.

This *Status* is most essential for it relates to the actual work to be performed in most retail drug stores at the present time.

As to "ye ancient apothecary," the condition is little changed. We will presume and grant, that this type of a pharmacist knew his stock, and gave intelligent and adequate service to his limited number of patrons. The *personnel* of his store underwent metamorphosis in due time, by the employment of an apprentice, who was taught the "3 Rs" of Pharmacy, and who, in turn, became a "clerk," and, in time, (D. V.) he took the place, in part, and finally, in whole, of the proprietor.

Not one word will be said here, belittling this type of store, its proprietor or his assistants, but this sort of a drug store is becoming extinct. If men and boys could be found now to conduct this kind of a drug store, I believe the returns would be better than ever, but the measure of service was too great for the returns; too much of sustained effort and deprivation, too little of recreation and recompense.

The new drug store establishment, large or small, still needs and must have, (if it would retain the confidence of the public), careful, intelligent men and women, well skilled in the "Art of Pharmacy," for, let it be noted that this art