

THE BUSINESS NEEDS OF PHARMACY.*

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Among the illustrious men who have chronicled the history of as noble a calling as man ever followed, but few have touched upon that phase of the business that constitutes the very foundation on which success must be builded. The wizards of scientific research have taken the unlettered youth and led him throughout the mystic aisles and taught him the secrets. Listening, wide-eyed and astonished, he has heard the story and seen the birth of an alkaloid; with trembling hand and brain alert, he has beheld the wonderful transformations of chemistry; with attentive ear and tolerant understanding, he has devoured the wonders of serum therapy. He is tutored in the ethical relations that he must maintain toward his co-worker, the physician, in the field of usefulness. He is sent out into the world with material for a great superstructure, though, with sickening certainty, he must realize that he has no foundation upon which to build.

The commercial needs of pharmacy have been overlooked. Our educators have discussed every requisite of success save one. The young pharmacist comes from the laboratory and lecture room with a knowledge of pharmacy that is superb. Before the State Board, he displays a knowledge of the processes of pharmacy, the accuracy and thoroughness of which are beyond criticism. Yet to the veteran of the tile and spatula, who has been throwing bottles at the wall for a lifetime, he is yet a child, because with all the tutorship of the masters of the mystic art, he has never learned that the grand prize of the high calling is a meal ticket and a room key. He has traced rare chemicals to their sources and made them reveal their identity but has never been enlightened on the subject—"How to pay the rent."

To the gray-haired, practical druggist, the battle-scarred graduate of the school of experience, who has given humanity the "once over" and recorded their numbers on the pages of a retentive memory, the pride of Alma Mater and the wonder of the State Board is a joke. He looks on the young man as a matriculate in pharmacy's finishing school. He sizes him up from every angle, and with figures that do not lie, shows that his real worth to a modern drug store is less than the young man could live on. The education of a pharmacist may start in a noble institution of learning that has to its credit nearly a hundred years of usefulness, but until the curriculum is changed, it must have its finish in a "human suffering parlor" where the dollar is a part of the goal.

The pharmacy schools of the country do not merit all the blame for the existing business needs of pharmacy. A part of this blame may be placed at the doors of the journalists of the craft who have evaded commercial pharmacy with a reticence akin to silence. The editorial pages of our greatest publications are prone to discuss elaborately everything that pertains to pharmacy, excepting that one thing that is so needful, if we are to stay in the game—providing for the girl and the babies and garnering a few shekels for the rainy day. Contributing editors from the ranks send hand-embellished orthographical dreams about how to pack a percolator when really the howling need of the craft is a thesis on how to melt the bearings out of a cash register. The formula page is rife with methods for making everything but a dollar. We seem so fascinated with the work that we forget the wage.

Successful proprietors have come to look on a college graduate as being a man capable of being educated to a degree that he will finally be able to steer a

* Read before the joint session of the Section on Education and Legislation and the Section on Commercial Interests, San Francisco meeting.

store clear of the breakers to success. So far, the colleges have sent us unfinished products and given us the task of teaching them the business of pharmacy.

The writer does not wish to be misunderstood by having any one infer that we do not believe in the highest standards of professional pharmacy. We would not for the world lower the plane of scientific pharmacy one jot or tittle. But since seventy-five percent of the business of a modern drug store comes from in front of the prescription partition, the business needs of pharmacy are at least as important as the scientific or professional needs, though they have never been recognized as such. A knowledge of the business end of pharmacy does not detract from the professional ability of a pharmacist. That a man is able to call the alkaloids by their chemical initials and is versed in the technical processes of pharmacy, should in no way hinder him from being thoroughly conversant with the legitimate dollar-getting methods of modern business. The man who is to come up to the standard of the pharmacy of to-day should be able to make a trial balance and a urine analysis with equal deftness. His inability to do so shows that he is only half equipped. Some of the best pharmacists of this country argue that the business or commercial end of pharmacy cannot be taught successfully in the schools. This we think is an error because not so many years ago many of the proprietors were prejudiced against the college man in favor of the man who got even his technical knowledge of pharmacy in a drug store. We have all seen this theory smashed into smithereens. We know that so far as the scientific side of pharmacy is concerned, the college men of to-day are well-nigh faultless. Our state boards meet men who are wonders of scientific knowledge. If the great teachers are able to graduate men who border on scientific perfection, we know that men may be found who can teach business.

Once the highest priced man on the pay roll of the great factories was the chemist who worked, and loved into existence the processes by which the products were made. This is not so to-day. The wizard who sets his own salary, the man who is of greatest importance and who is worth whatever he costs, is not the chemist—he is the man who is doing for the great manufacturing plants what somebody should do for pharmacy. He is the efficiency expert who conserves the company's interests by husbanding its dollars and teaching its employes business.

The needs of pharmacy are not confined to a thorough knowledge of it as a science. That part has been well cared for. A pharmacist who is unable to go further than the preparation and dispensing of medicinal products can play but a small part in what we are pleased to denominate pharmacy to-day. A very small percentage of the drug stores in America can be divided into departments in which the worker is required to do only the work of his department. The ideal pharmacist is the man who can do whatever there is to do. We do not believe that the scientific end has been or can be overdone, but we do believe that scientific achievement has been cheapened because our young pharmacists have not been equipped to meet the business needs of pharmacy. The vocation of a pharmacist is twenty-five percent a profession and seventy-five percent a business. Some of us are loth to admit this, but it is true just the same.

To equip a man for the scientific end of pharmacy alone is very much like teaching a physician anatomy and sending him out into the world as a general practitioner. He cannot succeed. He is not a master of his craft. He is only partially equipped for the work that is demanded of him. A pharmacist should be able to conduct a pharmacy. When he is given a diploma, he is a finished product and should meet every demand of his calling. When a graduate of the engineering department receives the O.K. of the faculty he is ready to dig a tunnel;

construct a sky-scraper or build a railroad. When a student finishes the school of law, he is able to take care of himself and his client in any court in the land. But when James Brown, Ph.G., winner of the honors of the graduating class of nineteen fifteen, is placed in charge of a busy store on Main Street and told to make an inventory and render a sworn statement to Bradstreet, of the exact financial condition of the business, he feels like mailing the sheepskin back to the faculty with a request to please cancel the honors. He is up against the task of admitting his gross inefficiency. He must tell his employer that he cannot do it. He must make a confession that is the most humiliating one that any craftsman ever had to make. He must say "I don't know how." He must acknowledge that the job is too big for him. This is enough to kill progress and crush every bit of punch and fighting spirit out of him. Is it any wonder that the pathway of American Pharmacy is thickly strewn with financial wrecks? Can you marvel at the fact that a large percent of the drug stores of this country are insolvent and do not know it? There are stores that have been operated for years that have never been solvent. There has been no time since their establishment that they could have been sold for enough money to liquidate their debts, yet the proprietor thinks he is getting along fairly well and has never dreamed that he has been broke for years. Some druggists at the end of each year wonder why they have no money to show for a year of hard work, but they do not know how to find out. Our educators and the pharmaceutical press are too prone to stand aloof from simple, commonplace business. Too many of us delight to delve into science and discuss the rare products that mean little or nothing to the druggist. We are servants of the craft, and to say that so far we have served it poorly is putting it mildly. We do not mean by this that it is possible to make a financial success of every man who enters the game. We do not expect the craft to get in the class of the *steel trust*, but we do think that a full-fledged pharmacist should be able to conduct the average drug store without hanging out a distress signal when a business problem comes up for consideration.

Our ideal pharmacist is a man learned in the science of pharmacy, who is able to make a statement showing the profit on the business for July with the same ease with which he shows the percentage of iodine in a specimen of the tincture. The plan of pharmaceutical education in vogue at present makes it necessary to employ two men to do what one should do. After we have employed a graduate pharmacist to conduct a store, many times, we find it necessary to go to a hardware store or a lumber yard and find a man who does not know whether a halogen is for soft corns or is a new name for the banana split, but one who can tell an asset from a liability without taking it to the laboratory. Merging the two men we get an efficiency that we should get from one. This condition grates on the nerves of the man who wants both the professional and business side of his business efficiently managed. The outlook is not bright to the young man who has spent two or three years in a college of pharmacy and on completing his course finds that he must serve an apprenticeship at a nominal salary to learn business. Of course, there are a few places in pharmacy for the young man whose ambition is to spend his life wearing out a hole in the floor in front of the tile and who is satisfied with twenty-five dollars a week for dispensing physicians' prescriptions, but he is a long way from being an antidote for the business needs of pharmacy because the man who is satisfied with his salary would be satisfied with his sales, and the druggist who is satisfied with his sales is finished.

We hope that in the near future the business needs of pharmacy will be recognized and met by a system of business education that will equip the young pharmacist to fill efficiently the position in the world's work for which he seeks to qualify.