

The Critics and Their Criticisms of Pharmacy.

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Much has been said and written concerning the relationship of pharmacy and medicine. This, among the intelligent, has always been to the effect that the two pursuits are closely allied—sufficiently so, at least, for us to recognize a constant and fixed interdependence from which neither can ever expect to be wholly emancipated. While this remains as a fact, so far as the two arts *per se* are concerned, nevertheless, in these days of complete unrest—when private personal preferment seem in the ascendancy at the expense of neighborly considerations—the individuals practicing these professions are said to have, one for the other, a questionable feeling of friendship; so that the followers of the healing arts in its two avenues—the one to the prescriber, the other the compounder, may be considered as inviting an estrangement, which in turn might possibly suggest little affinity or as even them, being “strangers yet.”

Whence emanates this growing self dissatisfaction? So far as I have been able to take in the situation, that portion of the organic whole characterized as the *prescribers of medicine*, or more elegantly, the physicians, seem to think themselves to be the aggrieved parties, in consequence of which they have taken the initiative, and thus have entered upon a crusade against the already over-oppressed *compounder of medicine*, or more restrictively, the pharmacist, and indeed would apparently enjoy seeing him, “Othello like, his occupation gone.”

All this is surely to be regretted and deplored, inasmuch as I am convinced that there exists little ground for the accusations claimed in even those cases where suspicion is apprehended. Equally am I confident that the entire trouble is a pure and simple result of a misapprehension or misunderstanding somewhere.

An examination of a few working forces contributing to this turbulent and unsettled condition may not here be out of place. The physicians mainly claim that there are two tangible questions of infringement involved—that the pharmacist abrogates the doctor's usefulness often by these absorbing methods, and that he is presumptive in assuming for himself a sufficient knowledge to exercise other than his strictly legitimate compounding. “Vengeance is mine,” they say, and some retaliative measure must be inaugurated to offset these spurious innovations.

First. As to complaints.—These chiefly seem to be two: 1. That the druggists do a great deal of unwarranted counter prescribing: this they do not sanction. 2. That again the druggists put up too many renewals, which is decidedly contrary to the physicians' interest.

Second. As to retaliation.—They have so far but one gigantic scheme, and that

has been to a certain extent already inaugurated, viz.: That every physician's office is to contain or to be converted into a small-sized drug store, having all essential remedies and compound formulae in tablet-triturate or pill form. From these supplies all office demands will be drawn, and enough material for visiting practice will be carried in well-appointed chests, so constructed as to nicely fit in the foot of the carriage. It is a well-known fact that “history repeats itself,” and how noticeable is that truism portrayed here! Why, this is but a return of the custom of former times, when quackery was so prevalent, knowledge little disseminated, and medical science semi-understood. It is now again taken up, from the necessities which the stringent times suggest, inclining to make persons, as well as professions more selfish, with a craving desire to *combine and to do for one's self every thing*.

This custom of acting in the dual capacity of prescriber and compounder has long since been condemned by all ranks and classes, and is now-a-days only sanctioned (by the most intelligent physicians) in places where convenience is an essential element. Thus in rural districts it is an effort to send to a distant town for medical aid, and then, after the doctor's visit, should the farmer have to retrace his course to the nearest drug store to have the prescription compounded, great indeed would be the task and inconvenience. Under such conditions and these alone—does humanity seem to indicate the combination.

This is the method pursued in homeopathy, and we all know, from Hahnemann down, there never was created a system, in anything, so fraught with false conceptions and so inviting to wholesale deception. They dispense their own medicines, and thus can administer strong or mild, deadly or harmless, with no tell-tale prescription on the druggist's file to give mute but dangerous evidence against their honesty.

Our school of medicine needs no such shielding. It is public with its investigations—always searching for the “truth and the whole truth.” And why at this progressive age, with a footing far out-reaching all others, should any digression be made? No! the doctor cannot afford to do without the druggist as a guard to his errors. We are inestimable, consequently our position is impregnable; all mankind make mistakes, both druggists and doctors, for *errare humanum est*. Thus it is the province of the pharmacist to catch those of the physician, and the compounder is overlooked by his assistants, thereby reducing risk to a minimum. What druggist is there who has not detected some inaccuracies in written prescriptions which might have sent the patient to an untimely grave? And had the physician dispensed their own prescriptions, the same serious result would have, in all probability, followed.

I have within the past few months visited a number of physicians in our city

who had been induced to adopt this plan of resurrected departure. They have bought thousands of pills, and with them have treated their patients, but they tell me they are getting tired of it. They do much more work, have greater bother, receive no more compensation, and are out the cost of the medicine used. It is, therefore, evident that things will aright themselves if we will only allow a little time. Already some physicians have returned their limited supply, while others are not replenishing their decreasing stock.

Let us briefly consider the two complaints as offered against us by the physicians, and see if they are not less formidable than imagined and totally unworthy the stand the medical fraternity is now trying to assume.

First. As to counter prescribing.—From personal interviews with many pharmacists of our own and other cities I have but the one universal experience, which is in testimony, *that counter prescribing is the exception and not the rule*. And there are many common-sense reasons why such is the case. Thus to enumerate a few:

1. Druggists, like other sensible persons, shrink from giving medicines at haphazard for complaints the rationale of which they are entirely ignorant. Our watch word for every act is to be “careful and cautious,” and why should we incline to vary from this to such a serious extent as to treat ailments of which we know nothing?

2. Most pharmacists have plenty to do in their own legitimate line—they need no borrowing from outside avenues to keep themselves employed.

3. Whenever consulted concerning this or that complaint, we invariably say, *You had better see your physician*, but the rejoinder frequently follows: *Well, give me a porous plaster, some quinine, antibilious, blue or compound cathartic pills. I will try this first*. Evidently the druggist is not to be censured here; he has given his advice, but the party prefers to take chances, and that ends it. We are in business to furnish harmless medicines to the public indiscriminately, and we even do this with remarkable care. A doctor once fell foul of me for giving a man one dozen $\frac{1}{16}$ gr. calomel powders—told the party I knew nothing about my business, and that the powders would kill him. I thought I was doing humanity a service, as the person wanted a large dose of calomel and in the best form, and see what thanks I got for using precaution and judgment. The trouble was in the man not telling the doctor the *whole truth*, and herein lies the origin of nine-tenths of all such complaints. Every person wants to shift responsibility to other shoulders and thus allow criticism to be placed where it does not belong.

4. The druggists get the credit of treating many cases of venereal diseases, but such are always assumed under protest, and the majority of medicines is put up from prescriptions borrowed from some kind friend who has been there before.