

The Ethical Aspects of the Pharmacy of To-day.*

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Under the prospect of a new edition of the "British Pharmacopœia," the professional mind is at present being directed to pharmacy. There are some aspects of the subject which, although connected only indirectly with the Pharmacopœia, are yet well worthy of consideration. Recent developments are tending not only to modify the methods of prescribing, but also to affect the ethical relations of medical men to the pharmaceutical world.

Pharmacy, though now regulated by a distinct corporation, with its own organization, protected by acts of parliament, is still a branch of the healing art. Home rule has been granted, and not independence. Between prescriber and dispenser there is a mutual dependence and mutual obligations over which an ethical, if not legislative, power should preside.

Though now distinct from medicine as a profession, pharmacy has developed a professional status for itself, safeguarded by examinations that demand considerable scientific education and practical training. This position, however, requires strengthening and purification. As a profession pharmacy has, in its business relations, to contend with gross influences, which, for the sake of gain, are engendering practices inconsistent with all professional character. A keen commercial and speculative spirit is becoming rampant; it threatens to degrade pharmacy, and is affecting seriously the interests of those who are devoting themselves to the work in a proper professional spirit.

The enterprise shown of late by pharmaceutical chemists is to be commended so long as its aim is the improvement of pharmacy by scientific and professional means. When, however, it becomes associated with the craving for gain, and endeavors to satisfy it by the introduction of novelties that are turned into proprietary interests, when it is promoted by self-laudation and misleading statements in persistent and obtrusive advertisements, then the professional spirit is crushed. Under such circumstances it behooves medical men to be on guard, lest they are enticed into abetting actions that are opposed to the treasured principles and traditions of their profession.

One marked feature of the present day is the invasion by wholesale houses of the province of the dispensing chemists. Machinery is displacing hand labor, wholesale manufacture the home-made article. From the wholesale manufacturer the druggist must obtain much of his stock materials, and on his knowledge, experience, and character we must rely for the selection as to quality; but, in dispensing, the preference should always be given to the freshly home-made article over the factory compounds turned out in

hundreds of gross, and that may be months and years old before they are used. In the movement the spirit of personal aggrandizement can be readily detected. By a mere coating of varnish, or the use of a registered name, it is turning even the formulæ of the Pharmacopœia into proprietary preparations. If we prescribe for a patient any of the pills of the British Pharmacopœia, or of a well-known formula, have we any right, is it becoming, that we should require that they be those of one particular maker? Yet this is what the wholesale houses ask us to do, and is done by many practitioners. Would it not be more reasonable to require that the ingredients be those of certain makers than that the desired peculiarity should consist solely in the excipient or the coating of the pill? Chemists are now often compelled to keep in stock some half-dozen makes of an article which they themselves could freshly and as skilfully compound—all to suit varying whims and bring grist to particular mills. There are many remedies where it may be desirable to name the maker preferred, but then only as a recommendation. These are the proper factory or laboratory preparations demanding special skill and facilities; but when the prescription is of the nature of a pill, a syrup, or a mixture that, the formula being known, can be compounded by any qualified druggist, it is unbecoming to restrict the dispensing in any way.

In the present day the art of combining remedies and of prescription writing is imperfectly acquired and little studied. Ignorance is the fruitful soil of gullibility; hence the large crop of non-official compounds of remedies, combined in unrevealed proportions and by secret processes.

The objectionable character of proprietary articles is not removed by a professed publication of the formula. Any value they possess must either be a secret, or, if the claim be skill and facilities in compounding, in most cases it is unsupported by such intrinsic value as to merit "exclusive dealing."

The Pharmacopœia Committee will have some difficulty in preparing the new edition. Can it be expected to keep pace with the "new pharmacy," with its tablets, tabloids, tabellæ, cachets, capsules, jelloids, hypodermics, perles, parvules, palatinoids, hipalatinoids, and soloids? There is good in the "new pharmacy," but this fresh development is showing a redundancy of action, and is invaded by and proving to be a favorable medium for the cultivation of the germs of pure personal aggrandizement. There are many instances where the capsule or the tabloid is a well-adapted form for the administration of a remedy, but there is a danger, under the continuous pressure of puffs and samples, of the system being carried too far. The disciples of the "new pharmacy" are shouting "Eureka!" and are discarding draught and mixture.

An important question, however, has

been raised, whether many drugs will act as efficiently when given in the dry and concentrated as in the fluid form, especially when freshly prepared. It may be difficult to prove the point as regards many medicines, but the special form in which a remedy is administered is not unimportant. It is known that the infusion of digitalis is at times more serviceable than the tincture; caffeine does not give the same results as freshly prepared coffee, and no one surely would prefer a tea tabloid to a cup of that beverage. For convenience's sake, or to make the dose more palatable, we are to discard as of no importance the corrective and the adjuvant in our prescriptions.

Another marked feature of the pharmaceutical world of to-day is the extensive use of advertisements. In business this custom is legitimate and beneficial to the public, so long as it is conducted in a fair, truthful, and business-like manner. But it is reprehensible and unbecoming when it assumes the aggressive form against rivals, and makes use of unwarranted statements dressed up in quasi-scientific garb, the truth that is half-untruth—all calculated, if not intended, to deceive the public. It is to be regretted that pharmaceutical chemists are degenerating in the style of their advertisements.

The evil effect of the keen commercial speculation can be readily traced in the changes which the advertising mania is producing in infant and invalid feeding. Articles such as condensed milk, infants' food, essences and extracts of meat, all useful in their proper place, have been seized upon and made to serve the purposes of the insatiable greed of gain. Their proper use does not create sufficient demand to meet the excessive production arising out of the large sums invested in their manufacture. Hence that demand must be artificially increased. The speculative spirit conjures with the latest scientific terms and ideas, it seeks favor by fallacious quotations of chemical analysis and physiological experiment, and makes unwarranted assertions as to medical experience and opinions. Malt has "come as a boon and a blessing," not to babes alone, but to speculators too. Of the making of meat extracts there is no end. The fresh milk of the cow is discredited in every way. It must be sterilized, peptonized, "humanized," before it is fit for use. Freshly-prepared home-made articles are useless; invalids should be fed on factory prepared meats and peptones, months and years old; and are not medical men all the country over aiding in the production of the artificial demand necessary to earn dividends to the joint stock companies limited, accepting chemical analysis as a test of digestibility, and thoroughly trusting in the permanency of the artificially-peptonized state of foods, and the nutritive quality of desiccated and pulverized albumin and fibrin?

It is evident that there is much in the ethical aspects of the pharmacy of to-day

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