

## The Pharmacy of the Minor Syllabus.

JOSEPH INCE.

Read before the Chemists' Assistants' Association, November 24, 1892.

### INTRODUCTION.

Pharmacy is a branch or rather an integral portion of the theory and practice of medicine; so far as it aids the former, it is professional; so far as it relates to the latter, it is more nearly associated with trade. Nothing is more difficult than to set the boundaries of pharmacy, of which chemistry is the mainspring, while other sciences lend tributary assistance. There still exists a distinct plot of ground called Pharmacy, which it may task one's best energies to cultivate aright, and he who imagines a knowledge of certain allied sciences to be alone sufficient, will be mournfully disappointed.

The pharmacist faithful to his vocation will find himself in an honorable position, and one which he may claim as his own. There is a visibly increasing wish on the part of the great medical profession to separate itself from the art of pharmacy, for the union of experience and discovery has so widened the sphere of knowledge that it is impossible to grasp the whole, and unwise to make the attempt. The physician is only too glad to confide the operations of pharmacy to a body of men whom he can safely trust, and he will be still more anxious so to do in proportion as the educational qualifications of the pharmacist render the latter worthy of such an alliance. This is the situation—the reason for, as well as the explanation of, the official Syllabus of the Minor Examination, with which we, as far as it relates to pharmacy, are to-night concerned.

Let me venture to dissociate the subject for a moment from its examination trammels, and to give an insight into the manner in which it is treated as a study. We have first a small contingent of hospital students, who desire to learn systematically the general principles of the art, and who wisely gain their information from direct pharmaceutical sources. They come therefore to get practical knowledge which may serve them in good stead in the right construction of formulae, in an acquaintance with the therapeutic value of drugs, and with approved methods of combination. They start fair with a liberal education and consequently make rapid progress; while, attending a course of pharmacy for a definite purpose, their industry is exceptional. They are more than welcome in our midst; their presence is esteemed an honour, and their action is distinctly advantageous to themselves.

Secondly, a small contingent of women enter upon pharmacy as a study; a few intend to commence business on their own account; more wish to assist a relative; and these two classes enter for the full Minor work and come under the examination system. But far more are already

engaged in Women and Children's Hospitals where male assistance is inadmissible. Added to these are Sisters, or lay members of various nursing communities connected with some philanthropic scheme. Their attendance at any public course tends toward order, and courtesy and good work. Their courage is to be admired in attacking a subject with which previously they were not particularly well acquainted. These are wise in their generation, for hereafter they may proceed to acquire legal qualification and take higher rank: meanwhile they are infinitely better prepared to discharge their daily routine of duty. That they interfere with the position of the chemist and druggist is a figment. Not even a Pereira Medallist could attend with much success to a ward of infants, or to the wants of female patients.

Leaving these extra-pharmacopœial students, we come to our own men, the thoroughness of whose work has to be officially tested, and recognized by law. Our ranks are recruited from a remarkably small number of London apprentices and assistants, as far as my experience goes; the majority at least are derived from the provinces. They are handicapped a good deal by the want of that liberal education which should precede apprenticeship. This is the blot which compulsory measures should erase. Otherwise there is no better training for subsequent systematic study than that which the country, with its general business and multifarious developments of trade pharmacy, can afford. Broadly—the student reaps the greater benefit from any public course of instruction in direct proportion as the foundations of his learning have been already laid.

### THE OFFICIAL SYLLABUS.

The Minor Examination Syllabus begins with Pharmacy because it affects those who aspire to registration under the Pharmacy Act, 1868, as Chemists and Druggists. There are four Sections. 1. Prescriptions. 2. Practical Dispensing. 3. The theory and practice of pharmacy. 4. Pharmacopœial strengths.

It is thought necessary for the safe conduct of a chemist's business that he should be able to translate prescriptions committed to his care; should have a general knowledge of posology and be able to calculate percentage quantities.

The reading of autograph prescriptions is an art only to be gained by practice. They should be mounted separately, and not arranged in book form when meant for class instruction; the grammatical construction of the Latin should have been learnt at school. One may as well have to teach the rudiments of chemistry in the Research Laboratory as the agreement of an adjective with a noun in a technical course of pharmacy.

A great help towards correct translation is the practice of "rendering in good Latin ordinary prescriptions written in English," a point on which the syllabus insists. The average student is short in

his vocabulary; words, probably more than grammatical construction, are his failing. How can he "spot" words in a prescription which he does not know? Practical dispensing, which forms the second section of the syllabus, is a personal matter, and so must remain. Happy is the youth who has had an all round practice in the art as a preparation for systematic work.

Before entering a public course he should know how to weigh and measure; direct, wrap and finish; be sure about general doses, and be able to recognize his drugs. When familiar with the mechanical operations of his trade, he should venture on dispensing simple forms and gradually be introduced to more difficult combinations, the more the better; at first under the strictest supervision, continued until he may be safely trusted to the exercise of his own discretion. Soon he is in the swim and under the efficient guidance of a master, he should have learnt how to make pills and powders; mixtures, drops and draughts; liniments and lotions; ointments and electuaries; gargles, embrocations and fancy remedies. Shall we who have the interests of pharmacy at heart, let that be the beginning and the end of that young man's knowledge of dispensing? Shall we let him grope his way as our fathers did, through interminable formulæ, till long experience has revealed to him those principles, chemical, physical, and pharmaceutical, on which his work depends? "Understandest thou what thou readest?" is an old question; "understandest thou what thou doest?" is another, which systematic training and instruction have alone the power to answer.

### SYSTEMATIC DISPENSING.

I cannot be expected, nor would you wish me, to concentrate a dispensing course into the limited space at my disposal, and moreover, didactic teaching on this subject is useless unaccompanied by manipulation.

Systematic dispensing aims at setting a student free from the fear of an "unread" formula by demonstrating the principles on which it is based. With a few exceptions (strictly galenic) each prescription will be found to belong to some distinct group or family in which some distinct principle which creates a method of dispensing is involved. On three former occasions I have had the honour of bringing before the notice of the Association certain sections of dispensing: the prosaic but utilitarian subject, Pills; the preparation of Emulsions, and Misturæ.

I endeavored to show that not one of these was to be compounded at haphazard, but following Etty's dictum they were to be mixed with brains. Now, while no system of classification can ever be a substitute for personal work, advanced dispensing as required for the pharmacy of the Minor Syllabus may with advantage be studied under two aspects.

### I. A classified galenic arrangement