

Canadian Druggist

WM. J. DYAS, EDITOR AND PUBLISHER.

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The Sale of Poisons.

THE many deaths resulting from poisons of which notices appear almost daily in the press, show the necessity for still further restrictions on their sale. The ease with which many of the stronger poisons may be obtained shows a great laxity in our laws, and some steps towards its remedy should, in the interests of the general public, be adopted by our Legislature. It is a noteworthy fact that, although the druggist is not allowed to practise his profession without first satisfying the authorities as to his capability, and when engaged in business is restricted in the matter of sales of poisons, yet the grocer or general storekeeper may sell many things with impunity, which, in the hands of the ignorant or maliciously disposed, are frequently the cause of crime and death. As an English daily very pointedly says, "There are doors which we are careful to shut but not to lock; for instance, we buy poison from a druggist only under certain conditions, but we may buy poison from a grocer or oilman with no restrictions whatever." Certainly, in justice to the public whose protection should be the aim of all Legislatures, to the druggist who is amenable to the strict letter of the law, and in the interests of morality, it is high time that this matter was looked into and the laws amended in regard to the sale of all poisons and dangerous drugs.

The Pharmacist as a Man of Science.

In an address before an English local Pharmaceutical Association, one of its members dwelt at some length on the pharmacist as a man of science, contrasting his position with that of the general public, mentioning the experiences of the pharmacist, embryo or mature, which gave him the opportunity of forming more accurate and distinctive judgments on phenomena and their causes. The speaker said that "applied science, so called, was not really science at all, but art," and would like to see these two more definitely distinguished. One instance selected to show where a pharmacist might exercise the scientific curiosity was the ascertaining of the limits of error in weighing grain quantities of substances on a small balance and ounce quantities on large scales. Another, to show desire for scientific accuracy, was the care displayed in having his shop bottles, drawers, &c., labelled correctly. There are many steps to advance yet in pharmaceutical education towards the attainment of true science and the thorough chemist is one who probes deeply into the mysteries of everything pertaining to science in medicine and its kindred arts:

The Letter of the Law—Sequel of a Celebrated Case.

Rarely is such a measure of interest accorded a legal process by the pharmaceutical and medical world as was aroused some two and a half years ago by the famous *Nux Vomica* suits in the Atlantic Court of Common Pleas, New Jersey. A brief review of those proceedings and of the curious solution which time has recently effected in the legal complications, will not be devoid of profit.

The plaintiff in both these cases was George W. McGuire, State Dairy Commissioner for New Jersey, and criminal action was brought by him against the two defendants* on the charge that each had sold a quantity of tincture *nux vomica*, which, upon examination, was found to contain less than two per cent of dry extractive. The basis of the prosecution was an existing New Jersey statute, which enacted that any preparation shall be deemed to be adulterated if (when sold under or by a name recognized in the U. S. Pharmacopœia) it "differs from the standard of strength, quality, or purity laid down therein." And 2 per cent extractive, as stated, was the standard of the U. S. P. at that time.

The evidence introduced developed the fact that the tincture had been prepared from normal liquid *nux vomica*, Parke, Davis & Co.; the plaintiff's witness testified that it contained 0.712 per cent. of dry extractive; and upon this the prosecution rested its charge of adulteration within the meaning of the statute, no attempt being made to establish the therapeutic inferiority of the disputed preparation, or any deficiency in the needed contents of the all-important alkaloids.

Seldom has such an array of learned or such a wealth of distinguished evidence been brought forward in defence of any cause involving a pharmaceutical question as was now adduced by the respective defendants in sustaining their position. Professors Remington, Hare, Rusby, Ryan, Marshall, Dr. Eccles, and the lamented Prof. Bedford, all went upon the stand and declared with one voice that the active constituents of *nux vomica* are its two alkaloids, strychnine and brucine, alone; that the quantity of dry extractive forms no standard of strength, quality, or purity, and may, indeed, be completely inert—without medicinal property or physiological action; that tinctures of *nux vomica* made, as was the one in question, from the normal liquid, are far more reliable than the tinctures on the market produced in exact accordance with the U. S. P. formula, since the former are of uniform alkaloidal strength, and the latter subject to extreme variations of medicinal potency; that the U. S. P. standard could be easily evaded by the addition of sufficient glucose to any inferior tincture;

*The defendants were Harry B. Leeds and Albert D. Guskaden, druggists, and the expenses of the defence were borne by Parke, Davis & Co.

and finally, that the Pharmacopœia of 1880 really offered no means of determining the "strength, quality, or purity" of the tincture to which the name standard could with any propriety be applied, hence was virtually devoid of such standard.

All for naught. Here the gods themselves would have contended in vain. Conceding the entire probity of the defendants, and the full medicinal value of their tinctures prepared from the normal liquid of *nux vomica*, Judge Reed, nevertheless, decided in the first case that such tinctures were adulterations within the meaning of the New Jersey statute, since the requirement of 2 per cent. dry extractive was not fulfilled! In the second case, some misgivings must have begun to assail the judicial intellect, since the case still hangs suspended in the limbo of the undecided.

But if the Judge showed an undue tenacity in clinging to an obsolete standard, and a disposition to apply the narrow letter of the law, our Pharmacopœia Commission have taken a very different view of the question. In the revised edition (1890) we are happy to observe a radical change in the requirement made of Tincture *nux vomica*: it is no longer 2 per cent. of extractive, but rather 0.3 per cent. of total alkaloids—the identical alkaloidal content which the manufacturers of the normal liquid had long adopted as their own standard for the tincture. The new Pharmacopœia became a part of the New Jersey law on Jan. 1, 1894, thus depriving the cases of all legal basis.

While we may now smile at the emphatic way in which time has rejected the decision of the New Jersey court, it is obvious that its very absurdity from a medical and pharmacal point of view was not without a compensating benefit in promoting the adoption of a rational standard for this and a few other important preparations in the new Pharmacopœia. Inasmuch as five of the witnesses for the defendants were likewise members of the Revision Committee, the agitation imparted to the question of standardization by the *nux vomica* cases was unquestionably an active agent in the pharmacopœial changes thus far introduced—changes which, it is to be hoped, will be multiplied until every potent official remedy shall be provided with a standard which will guarantee a uniform medicinal action.

The introducers of normal liquids may well feel content with the handsome vindication which their enterprise has received at the hands of the Pharmacopœia Commission, and with the high compliment embodied in the recent adoption of their well-known standard for the official tincture.

A SWEDISH LADY has started in business as an analytical chemist at Kopparberg, the centre of the Swedish mining industry. For some years she has held the position of analytical chemist to some large ironworks there.