

Specialties Versus Profits.

BY A. MACK.

Read at a meeting of the California Pharmaceutical Society, "*Specialties versus Profits*."—The Tendency of the Trade to Specialties and Their Effect Toward Lessening Druggists' Profits."

In 1872 I began my apprenticeship in New York as a retail druggist. At that time, my preceptor seemed well content with the gains of each year's business, as the restrictions which surround the drug gist were then comparatively few or virtually unknown. The usual assortment of patent medicines were kept for sale, but the sales of family medicines were proportionately larger, while the prescriptions gave a revenue that represented a handsome profit. During this period pharmacy made a noticeable stride, as it can be easily understood that when superior proficiency meant increased custom the druggist felt it incumbent upon him to attain this object.

Since then, however, a gradual change has taken place, imperceptible at first, but so apparent now that the conclusion is at last forced upon to declare ourselves tradesmen.

The business of a druggist has reached the stage where almost every article now sold is the product of some one firm who enjoy a monopoly of its manufacture, and who prescribe not only the quantity which a jobber must purchase to secure his trade discount, the price at which it must be sold to the retailer, but also the price at which it must be sold to the consumer. Here are three stages, in each of which the profits are fixed, and a firm control maintained by the manufacturer. In all, the middlemen are helpless, and whether the retailer possesses the peculiar ability which classes him as a good business man or otherwise, is, under existing conditions, of no moment. With the laws of trade which govern the purchase or sale of any other class of merchandise, the druggist has no concern, neither can he avail himself of the advantages which a rising or falling market may present, as in other commodities.

On the contrary, he is restricted in every sense, and must be satisfied with the simple announcement of the owners of those specialties he buys. "This is your profit, and with this be content."

Human nature is so constituted, and the supposed emoluments of a monopolist so alluring, that we are all striving to join the ranks, and the result is more and more specialties.

This being the case, although the term "specialties," as formerly applied to the wares of the druggist, meant only patent medicines, their domain has gradually extended, and to-day they comprise drugs, chemicals, patent medicines, and druggists' sundries.

It is even invading the Pharmacopœia. The proposed "standardising" of the tinctures indicates the influence that manufacturers of pharmaceutical preparations now possess.

Mind you, I do not deery the "standardising" of pharmaceutical preparations; on the contrary, this will, in my opinion, give greater reliability to such preparations, and be of value to the physician when estimating the effect of his prescription upon his patient. With this phase of the subject, however, I have nothing to do in this paper.

I wish merely to point out that in order to produce standard or assayed products economically, large laboratories have been founded, and the facilities which capital commands have been utilized by proprietors to establish their particular label, and the retailer is finally constituted the vendor under the conditions previously mentioned.

In the department of druggists' sundries, the conditions are the same. Manufacturers of a line of perfumes, soaps, sachets, etc., create a demand for their goods, and the consumer obtains his supplies from the retail druggist, who is thus obliged to add line after line to his stock.

That "specialties" are the order of the day in the retail drug business will, I believe, be conceded from the foregoing illustrations, and that from this very nature of things druggists' profits are limited. Now, then, the question arises, in what way can the druggist turn this condition of things to his advantage, thus keeping abreast of the times, and obtain results with which, from a pecuniary standpoint, he will be content and at the same time, how can he utilize his professional acquirements, which from year to year, in spite of the tendency noted above become more and more exacting?

Various articles on this subject have been written, all, however, terminating with a mere statement of the grievances which obtain in the drug trade, but without offering a satisfactory corrective for the existing evil.

My observation leads me to make the following suggestions.

First. That the druggist must hereafter combine two qualities within himself:

- (a) that of a professional man, and
- (b) that of a business man.

Second. In his capacity of a professional man, his ability in this direction may be turned to his pecuniary advantage according to its quality. If he is superior as an educated pharmacist, he secures the confidence of physicians and patrons, and the preference of their influence and business, to prepare prescriptions and to be called upon to supply medicines, upon the scientific preparation of which and purity they depend.

Third. In his capacity of a business man, he will soon recognize that protests avail not to stop the manufacture of "Specialties," and he should, therefore, shape his business methods in such a way as to get the greatest possible returns from his transactions in "ready-made" goods.

To accomplish this, he may resort to two methods. One is to adopt the same tactics that manufacturers of specialties

do to create a demand, and that is to advertise, and as Lord & Thomas, of Chicago, say, "advertise judiciously," and by turning his stock during the year as often as possible.

The second method is to add every other line of goods to his stock that might be considered a legitimate adjunct to his main business. In order to exercise judicious care in this selection, he can make no mistake if he will peruse the advertising columns of the *Druggists' Circular* and *Pacific Druggist*, as he will find advertised therein all classes of goods, any or all of which might safely be added to his stock.

These, gentlemen, are the principal ideas that occur to me at present, and while thanking you for your kind attention, I trust others will take this subject up again for further consideration and the general welfare of the drug trade.—*Pacific Druggist*.

Parchment Paper as a "Protective."

Dr. Boucher (Hertford) writes to the *Lancet*. I should like to call attention to the existence of a cheap and efficient substitute for oiled silk, gutta percha tissue, and all other forms of "protective." I refer to the so-called "parchment paper," prepared by the immersion of paper at a certain stage of manufacture in sulphuric acid. It is largely used commercially on account of its grease-proof properties. I was first led to use it owing to a temporary failure in the supply of gutta percha tissue in the treatment of an extensive burn of the thorax, in which numerous skin-grafts and a considerable extent of growing edges required "protective." I was gratified on finding that it answered the purpose admirably, possesses the further advantage, on the dressing being changed, of remaining free from the discoloration which always results from chemical decomposition when gutta percha tissue is used. Being unaffected by heat or moisture, it is available for every occasion on which we wish to retain these properties—*e. g.*, as a backing to hot fomentations, stapes, poultices, compresses, &c. It is unaffected by alcohol, ether, turpentine, oils, &c., and is the most suitable covering for a piece of lint soaked with any liniment when used as a local application for neuralgia, sciatica, &c. It remains unaltered by temperature and time, and consequently never become sticky like oiled silk, nor does it crumble to pieces after being laid aside for any length of time, like gutta percha tissue. Its cheapness and indestructibility, with all these advantages, ought to bring it into universal use.

Moistening aconite tubers with alcohol before powdering in a mortar will prevent the irritating dust from rising.

An application of a weak solution of hydrochloric acid, followed by a weak solution of chlorinated lime, will remove logwood stains from the skin.