

Business Without Profit, or the Folly of Cutting Prices in the Retail Drug Business.

BY EDWARD C. PFINGST.

What is to be gained by cutting the prices of patents and toilet articles?

Probably for a short time sales may increase, but the cutter's neighbor is sure to meet his prices. Patent medicines are not like groceries, dry goods or clothing; the consumer will not buy them because he can get them cheap. They are never bought until actually wanted, and persons wishing a bottle of sarsaparilla will pay \$1 as quickly as 75 cents. They will not purchase your "Anti-chill Mixture" at even less figures, unless they are having chills, while the consumption of paregoric, arnica and camphor remains very much the same whether the price is 10 cents an ounce or 5.

Nor do the sales of postage stamps and the telephone nuisance add either to the revenue or amiability of temper of the druggist. The undue lowering of prices may attract customers from other stores, but such advantage will be short-lived, as the "cuts" will be met, the final result being a general loss of profit without any corresponding gain. While this lowering of profits is going on expenses usually remain the same with remarkable pertinacity—the landlord more apt to raise than lower the rent, and the assessors of taxes are anything but "cutters." There is another item of expense, too, which must be taken into account—"dead stock." The most careful and economical buyer will find himself burdened with some unsaleable goods, and those who are less careful will acquire a considerable quantity in a few years.

No way has yet been invented by which the attractive "bargain counter" can be adapted to the drug business, and when things in that line die they are apt to remain dead indeed. Then there are leakages and breakages and other wastes which are usually not taken into consideration as expenses, they are so practically, nevertheless. When these items are added to those customarily put down in the expense account the figures will yield quite a respectable total.

It stands to reason that the gross profit on the business done must bear such a relation to this total that the man doing business may have enough left to live on. If this relation does not exist the result is easy to foresee. The pharmacist will struggle along, perhaps through a short life-time, at the end of which it will be found that in the process of making a poor living he has sunk his capital and perhaps left his family unprovided for. Such unhappy results, it can safely be predicted, will become the rule if the modern notion of "Cheap John" drug stores is permitted to work itself out in general practice.

No doubt some will say that the estimate of 25 per cent. as the expense of conducting

real business is too high, but it is easy enough to convince yourself that the estimate is not overdrawn, and if you sum up the different items of rent, clerk's hire, boy or porter, insurance, light, fuel, taxes, telephone, charity calls and other incidental items, you will be surprised at the sum total.

In conclusion, I will say that even where full legitimate prices are realized on all sales the average retail druggist is but poorly paid for his time and services; that while your neighbors, the butcher, grocery man, baker or even shoemaker, are gradually accumulating money and getting rich, the poor druggist is becoming gray and remaining poor, and were it not for the love of his profession, would be better off in conducting some other business which would not be dependent upon the ailments of mankind for a living, and wherein his capacities as a merchant would find a more extensive and lucrative field of labor.—Pharm. Record.

IODIDE OF AMMONIUM.

A SIMPLE METHOD OF DECOLORIZING WHEN DECOMPOSED.

[Read before the Missouri P. A. by John C. Falk, Ph. G.]

Iodide of ammonium, as is well-known to all pharmacists, is a very unstable compound, the ammonium very easily dissociating from its union with the holoïd element iodine.

This decomposition with the resultant coloration from a snow-white salt to a yellow or even dark-brown—depending on the amount of liberated iodine present—is an occurrence seen in nearly every pharmacy. In this condition the chemical is, of course, unfit for use, and as the small quantities usually on hand in the stores do not justify the trouble and expense of manipulating in the customary methods, such a spoiled salt is generally thrown away or set aside, and a fresh supply obtained.

The pharmacopeial process for the recovery of decolorized iodide of ammonium is to wash it with stronger ether, filter off the latter, and rapidly drying the salt.

R. Rother recommends treating the salt with sulphurous acid and ammonia, and then drying on a water bath. Both these methods are somewhat troublesome to carry out, particularly when the amount of material is small (say one or two ounces), while the pharmacopeial directions are very apt to result in an expensive product if extreme care is not taken in the use of the ether.

Having several small lots of decomposed iodide of ammonium come into my hands during the past year, it occurred to me that they might be redeemed in a manner that I have not yet seen in print. This consists simply of placing a lump of carbonate of ammonium into the bottle and allowing it to remain there until the salt has regained its

normal whiteness, this may require from several days to as many weeks, the time being dependent upon the amount of material and the degree of decomposition it has undergone. The ammonia that is constantly being disengaged from the unstable carbonate unites with the free iodine present to form iodide of ammonium, and, as the superfluous ammonia is subsequently allowed to escape, there is no resisting contamination with a foreign substance.

I usually remove the iodide to a large salt-mouth bottle, wrap a vitreous piece of ammonium carbonate in filter paper, drop it into the bottle, stopper tightly and place aside until the desired change has been effected. Then remove the ammonium carbonate, leave the bottle unstopped until the excess of ammonium has disappeared, when the salt is practically pure and ready for use.

Observations on Cod Liver Oil.

M. Unger, of Wursburg, (Pharm. Centralhalle) after numerous experiments, agrees with the opinion already expressed by Professors Salkowski and Von Mering, that the quality of cod liver oil does not depend upon the amount of free acid it contains, but rather the reverse. He concludes: (1) In cod liver oil, the phosphorus and iron exist in combination with albumen. (2) In a good quality of oil, these albuminates undergo no alteration, whereas they are gradually decomposed in the brown and yellow sorts. (3) The albuminates may readily be separated by mixing the oil with water and adding carbonic acid. (4) The Pharmacopœia should require that the proportion of free fat acid should not exceed 4.5 per cent., and that the oil, when in contact with nitric acid possessing a specific gravity of 1.40, should in five hours display a ring of albumen.

Naphthol-Camphor and Salol-Camphor.

The valuable properties of the compounds of camphor with carbolic acid and with salol form the subject of a communication by M. Desesquelle (Repertoire, May 10th, p. 200.) In hospital use they have been found to possess considerable antiseptic properties, and the application of the naphthol camphor is not followed by pain, in consequence of the anæsthetic action of the camphor. In preparing them, M. Desesquelle finds the most convenient proportions to be 200 parts of camphor to 100 parts of beta-naphthol or 300 parts of salol. The two ingredients are reduced together to a fine powder and then gently warmed until liquefaction is complete, the liquid is then filtered and preserved in a well closed bottle. The liquids obtained are denser than water, in which they are insoluble, and miscible with fixed and volatile oils, ether, and alcohol. They also possess considerable solvent powers, 10 parts of iodine, for instance, being soluble in the cold in 90 parts of naphthol-camphor. Cocaine hydrochlorate and the cinchona alkaloids also dissolve in them in considerable proportions.

Lastly, the liquids are said to constitute an excellent medium for keeping surgical instruments, as they attack neither the metal nor the wood.—Pharm. Journ.