

Pharmacy in England

A Pharmaceutical Review—The Ethics of New Remedies—Proprietary Articles and the B.P.C. Formulary.

(By our own Correspondent.)

The year of 1899 will not be distinguished for any epoch-making feature when its pharmaceutical history comes to be written, but the step towards the production of a truly Imperial pharmacopœia, following on the issue of the 1898 British Pharmacopœia, is especially noteworthy. Canada, India, and Australia have issued reports that are intended to be incorporated in an official addendum, and will probably be found to embrace all the most useful suggestions for the various needs of the colonies. The collection of these reports has been the particular work of Professor John Attfield during the past year, and, as editor of the B.P., will be a fitting close to the labors of the last four or five years. The alterations and additions introduced by the B.P. 1898 are now thoroughly understood, if not generally appreciated, and the medical and pharmaceutical professions have, on the whole, loyally accepted what are intended to be considered as improvements. In Great Britain an attempt to deal with company pharmacy, with its attendant soil of extreme cutting, has been inaugurated by the Pharmaceutical Society in the shape of amended legislation under a Companies Bill which has been promised by the Government. It must be admitted, however, that the authors are not unanimous in their ideas and by no means sanguine as to the effects. The problem is of considerable complexity, and surrounded with difficulties, and, if chemists are divided amongst themselves, will never reach a satisfactory solution. The unfortunate outbreak of the war in South Africa has already diminished some of the prospects of contested legislation being considered by a Parliament that has not two years to last, but it may afford a good opportunity for pharmacists to evolve a plan that will unite them in one concerted action.

The flood of new remedies continues, although there is some indication that the expense in successfully introducing new synthetic preparations to the medical profession has a considerable influence upon their staying properties. An antipyrin or a saccharin is not daily discovered, and the majority of the recently-

introduced remedies disappear as speedily as they come. Many of these, which are popularly called new, have been introduced some time ago, but their properties are only slowly being located. The silver preparations, such as largin, argonin, protargol, etc., have failed to realize all the expectations placed in them. Utopin has made very little progress as a remedy for either gout or cystitis. Creosote and guaiacol preparations increase in number daily, and several of the combinations appear to have secured a considerable body of believers. Naftalan has been in some demand. Larthin is a new remedy for rheumatism.

In chemistry, pure and applied, there has been the same steady progress that has marked each year for some time past. The death of Ladenburg has removed another alkaloid chemist from the scene of his labors. But we are daily learning more about the constitution of alkaloids and other plant products, and the progress in solving the composition and chemical constituents of essential oils has been wonderful. Many of these constituents are non synthetically prepared and largely employed in perfumery. The constitution of camphor and its many derivatives is still the bone of contention amongst whole schools of chemists. Low temperature research has progressed in the hands of Professor D. Ewar, one of the latest experiments proving that even after subjecting seeds to a temperature at which no animal life could exist, they will subsequently germinate when exposed to the proper conditions of warmth and moisture.

In the chemical arts much attention has been paid to electrolytic process, whilst the application of aluminium is making considerable progress. Substitutes for ivory, leather and other articles are being invented, and Japanese wood oil has been found a valuable substitute for linseed oil as a drying agent.

In pharmacy, attention has naturally centred on the new B.P. preparations and a good deal of evidence has been published not wholly satisfactory to these articles. The assay of liquid extract of ipecacuanha and belladonna has been

improved by Alcock, and his modification confirmed by Henderson. The B.P. requirements for asafetida have been shown by Umay to be impossible, unless the strained variety be used. The melting-points of several well-known drugs such as acetanilide, etc., have occupied the attention of Tyrer and in some instances indicate alterations in the B.P. description. Apparatus for the rapid filling of collapsible tubes is a distinct novelty advantageous to the pharmacist.

Counter machines for the manufacture of compressed tablets are appearing with the utmost regularity, most of them from America. C.chet machines, on the other hand, come from Germany, and apparatus for making capsules or similar medicaments come from France. A machine for automatically filling bottles with a definite quantity of liquid has been invented in England and will shortly be on the market.

An interesting point in the ethics of new remedies is shown by some of the wholesale price-lists bearing urotropin at 60 cents per ounce, and hexamethylene tetramine (synonym urotropin) at 24 cents per ounce. Apparently someone has registered the name urotropin, and when prescribed under this name the 60 cent article is intended, but if the physician should like to disclose his chemical knowledge, and some few do, then he may use the longer term and the pharmacist is justified in using the cheaper synonym. A similar point occurs with dermatol, which is simply the trivial name of bismuth subgallate, although it is only fair to say that of late no one seems to have claimed the exclusive right to use the name dermative. It is high time that this practice of using trivial names for chemical compounds and then claiming proprietary rights should receive some control. No one is anxious to deprive an inventor of his rights, but when a compound which is well known in chemistry is claimed on the ground of a fancy name having been given to it, some line ought to be drawn. It would not be a bad idea if the A.P.A., or committee of the B.P.C. formulary, would periodically issue a list of new remedies with semi-official fancy names by which physician and pharmacist might identify six-syllable chemical compounds. Such a proceeding was taken officially in the case of antipyrin and saccharin which were described under the fancy