

An Appeal for Better Business Methods in the Drug Store.*

I want to make an appeal for better business methods in the drug store. To be sure, the American druggist is as far ahead of the druggists of Continental Europe as America is ahead of Europe in all that we hold dear. The druggists of Germany are prohibited from recommending any remedy of any kind. They are under iron clad Government rules. The druggists of Belgium must live at their place of business, nor can they leave without permission. Think of the hum-drum and dreariness of that. The druggists of Russia are under closest supervision and are not allowed to sell any patent medicines except a simple ointment. Nor can they manufacture or sell any remedy of their own. The English druggist is all chemist. I would not say one word against the dignity of the profession of pharmacy, but we must look at conditions as they are. Cardinal Newman says that this is the great purpose of art and science—to see things as they are. There is an ever-growing realization of the need of better business training and better business methods in the drug store. Some of the better schools of pharmacy, realizing this need, have established classes to give rudimentary instruction along this line. At best, however, the instruction must come through experience in the regular channels of business.

BUSINESS AS AN ART.

Business is an art, a fine art. Like genius, as Matthew Arnold says, it is more a matter of hard work than of inheritance. The fool in the fable says that he will not go into the water until he has learned how to swim. Some druggists are that way. They want more business, but will not go out after it until they have more to build on. Their professional preferences have made them forget that the way to learn business as well as to get more business is to jump out and swallow whole gallons of salt water. Eventually, if you kick and splash and swallow enough you will learn how easy it is to swim. So with business. You must learn how to breathe and at the same time learn how to get the stroke and the drive. How many have it? Two years ago a prominent druggist of Harrisburg, Pa., sent me a \$10 cash order with instructions to hold for full directions.

*From an article by M. P. Gould, in the *Druggists' Circular*.

After repeated requests for these full directions the money was placed to his credit and is there still waiting. Two years ago a prominent druggist of Charleston, S. C., sent in a \$25 order, cash in advance, with a request for quotations on printing. The quotations were furnished. No answer! They were repeated. Again no answer! Then I wrote: "What shall I do with your order?" and in a month's time came the reply: "You will hear from me soon," and that \$25 has been germinating to my advantage ever since. Come to think of it, a druggist of the most hospitable city of Detroit sent me a check over two years ago, with an order which could not be filled without additional data. I wrote back for the data. I kept writing. After six months of one-sided correspondence I notified the druggist that the money was placed to his credit and held at his disposal. However, they are not all so generously careless. Some—I will not attempt to estimate the proportion (it is not small)—are shiftless about sending out their own monthly statements, and hence are not prompt in the settlement of their own accounts. "Thirty days net" is sometimes sixty days, sometimes ninety days, sometimes not at all, I am sorry to say.

But I do not mean to say that all druggists belong to these extreme classes. There are retail druggists who have attained success on solid, fair business principles. Men who have kept in the van of modern competition. There are pirates in the drug, as in all trades, but the men I refer to, some of whom you all know, take their place among the great retailers of all trades. Fearless, vigilant, trustworthy, systematic, progressive!

What these have done, others can do. And how? How? If I could define that "how" with precision I would be as famous as those mosquitoes which John W. Lowe tells about, which attacked the yacht, ate all the sails off and the next day appeared in duck trousers. However, there are fairly definite methods of conducting the business of a drug store.

TOO MUCH PAY FOR HELP.

In the first place, the average druggist pays too much for his help. I do not mean that he pays too big salaries. I mean that he does more of the detail work himself than he can afford to do. He should do the thinking and let the clerks do the work. Three years ago in an Eastern city I was in a drug store and saw the proprietor working harder than

anyone else behind the prescription counter. I told him he did wrong; that he had an opportunity to build up a big business if he would manage the store and let the clerks do the work. Strange to say, he took my advice. At that time he had three clerks. Not long ago I happened to be in his store and he told me he now had eleven clerks, that he had not done any actual work in the store for over a year; that his whole time was devoted to the management of the store; that he was now able to get system and discipline in every department. This is an essential. It was a lesson that I learned a number of years ago from the department stores. I saw there at the head, a despot. Everyone under him had to jump at his beck and call, and yet he was kind hearted and generous to a fault in his personal character. He taught me the same system in my department, the mail order department. He taught me that with thirty or forty mailing clerks, wrapping clerks, buyers and samplers under my supervision, if I attempted to do anything else except oversee them, half of them would shirk their work. By experience I found it to be true. The more I have to do with the drug business the more I find that this is the thing needed—better management. I could not have cited such cases as those I have referred to before, if there had been proper management of those stores. The proprietor should see everything. He ought to be on the floor to welcome customers, to see that they are waited on promptly, to thank them for their patronage, to correct any errors, to make them feel all the time that they are being taken care of and that their patronage is wanted by you.

You may say that nobody but a druggist with half a dozen or more clerks can conduct his business in this way. This is not true. I know a druggist in the suburbs of Buffalo who two years ago started a new drug store without help, and yet he found time to always thank a customer for making a purchase and almost always to open and close the door when a customer left the store. His business has grown from the very first day. Business cannot help but grow when you wait on your customers in this way. They feel that you want them to come there to trade.

As I said above, there are pirates in every trade. The drug trade is no exception. There are druggists who have made their names and business a laugh-