

PHARMACEUTICAL ASSOCIATION

The following papers were read at the first annual convention, held in Winnipeg, Friday, 23rd August, 1897:

A REVIEW OF CHEMISTRY FOR SIXTY YEARS.

By C. Flexou, President of the Association.

In contemplating the subject of a paper to read before the members of the Pharmaceutical Association of Manitoba, it was with many misgivings that I undertook to outline a review of chemistry embracing the 60 years of our Majesty's reign—a reign as renowned for its illustrious men of British blood and magnificent deeds, as it has been for its remarkable length. Should there be any wonder that the recent congratulations of the civilized world were so richly bestowed on the commemoration of the greatest historical event of our times?

A search for the causes of the high standard of chemistry among the sciences of to-day, or to trace the progress of science generally throughout the Victorian era would occupy too much of our time. We shall, however, be aided in the estimate of our subject at the outset by a rapid glance at the social conditions of Her Majesty's subjects in 1837, and contrasting them with the well-known comforts of the people in the present year. Are we not forced to admit the foremost and most important factors to be the marvellous improvements in the panorama of locomotion, and the binding together of the nations by electricity? Those are the factors, as a great writer has said, which "diminish local ignorance and prejudice, and create common interests among the most widely separated people." Modern progress, indeed, is but a history of contrasts. We cannot talk of comparisons with the past. Think for a moment of the old methods of travelling either by land or water 50 or 60 years ago. In fact, nobody would be so bold as to deny the astonishing achievements of mankind in these days, to be the products

of rapid transit, and of that unknown agent which we have named electricity. Daily and hourly intercommunication of thought throughout the world has resulted in competition among the nations, and markedly so among the eminent minds of the nations. No sooner is a discovery made than it is heralded abroad before the setting of the sun. Our imaginations fail in predicting what will follow from all the vast enterprise known to us. One thing certain is, that chemistry has kept pace in the struggle with the other sciences, and there are reasons to suppose will ultimately secure the most prominent position in the ranks of the world's triumphant march towards the goal of earthly bliss.

To form anything like a conception of the present status of chemistry, we should start by peeping into a document in the Chinese historical records, dated 4,000 years ago, which mentions the elements as earth, fire, metal, and wood. Then, skipping over the next 2,000 years, we reach the school of Aristotle, which considered the elements as dry or humid, warm or cold, light or heavy. The modern view of the elements is not exactly like that of our immortal sage. The properties of substances in those times were solely physical, chemical properties did not dawn upon men's minds. The Hindoo considered the elements as earth, fire, water and ether, and those ideas soon invaded Europe. The next stage of our journey finds us perhaps in the more chaotic age of alchemy, when astronomy and magic held the unmolested reigns of power; but whether for good or evil, it is none the less true that in the contentions and confusions of the alchemists there were born the problems "which science is still engaged in solving." Time will not permit us to speak of the cosmogonies and philosophies, the sacred art of the alchemy of the middle ages, and of Paracelsus and his influence, and the subsequent overthrow of the Paracelsian doctrine by Van Helmont, and the inauguration of the great work of Robert Boyle. We must pass on to consider the more