

The Sensational Year in Drug and Chemical Trade

Market Characterized Alike by Heavy Declines and Sharp Advances

Reviewing the drug and chemical trade of the United States during the year just closed, the outstanding feature appears to be the progress made by American manufacturers in producing profitably many lines that formerly came exclusively from Germany. These satisfactory conditions also apply to the relatively infinitely small Canadian market. Prices in the majority of cases have tended to rise, although as our list of comparative values shows, declines are also to be found in many instances. Although the year's business contained many developments of a sensational character, at no time was there any of the great excitement which prevailed following the outbreak of the war, but there were many periods of decided activity during which prices changed rapidly.

Quicksilver Spectacular.

Developments in quicksilver during the year were of a spectacular nature. It rose violently only to fall back still more violently. At the end of 1915 quicksilver stood at \$145 per flask of 75 pounds, having risen from \$37.50, the latter price ruling at the close of July, 1914. The consumption greatly increased when hostilities commenced. England placed quicksilver under embargo. Manufacturers of explosives in this country became heavy buyers of the domestic liquid metal. In the spring of 1916 quicksilver mounted in this market to \$300 per flask. Manufacturers who were supplying the Allies with munitions appealed to the British Government and shipments of quicksilver were sent to this country. With the withdrawal of the largest consumer from the market weakness soon developed. Prices fell in a sensational fashion. At the close of 1916 quicksilver was available at \$80 per flask, showing a decline of \$220 from the high record established last March.

Slump in Phenol Products.

Phenol derivatives of importance have shrunk very noticeably in price after advancing decisively. As early as June it was predicted that salicylic acid, which was then selling at \$3.40 per pound, would decline very sharply before the end of the year. This prediction subsequently found verification in the event, for by the middle of November the market had fallen to \$1.20 per pound. Salol, which was quoted on June 1 at \$8 per pound, has since steadily declined to \$2.40 per pound, and sales were reported to have been made in isolated instances late in the year at still lower figures. Sodium salicylate, which was bringing \$3.50 per pound at the opening of June, has declined to \$1.10, while methyl salicylate has dropped from \$2.50 per pound on June 1 to \$1.15 @ \$1.20 a pound. Further reductions are expected by some in the trade, as prices are still far above normal.

Marked Rise in Camphor.

Refined camphor moved upward very sharply, the rise during the second half of the year amounting to 34½¢. The highest prices on record, with one exception, established since the Civil War, were recorded. This exception was the period covering the Russo-Japanese war, when the market rose to the neighborhood of \$1.50 per pound. Still further advances are expected by some in the trade, as crude camphor in Japan rose again recently. Glycerine sold at high prices throughout the year, with demand for both the chemically pure and dynamite grades, consumption of the latter among manufacturers of explosives being heavy. In addition, crude material is still scarce and high in cost.

Increase in Production of Synthetic Dyes.

In the United States 35 or 45 companies are manufacturing coal tar intermediates, of which they are selling nearly 20,000 tons a year in the open market. Manufacturers engaged in making dye-stuffs from coal tar derivatives have already demonstrated their ability to produce those dyes in most general use and they have assured Congress that practically everything imported from Germany can be made here. After the war is over the German chemical works undoubtedly will make strenuous efforts to recapture the American market and will have the support of their government in selling at whatever prices it may be necessary to quote in order to kill this infant American industry. In response to these representations Congress passed an anti-dumping law last year which does not meet their requirements. The Canadian anti-dumping law is simpler and has proved highly effective.

High prices have, however, been the order of the day in spite of the increase in the production of synthetic dyes.

The arrival of the submarine Deutschland at Baltimore with synthetic dyes of German manufacture created a sensation in dye and color circles, but apparently it had little influence as a market factor. Reported to have brought over fully 1,000 tons of German dyes, the estimated size of the cargo gradually dwindled to about 200 tons. For a time business in domestic synthetic dyes was checked by the arrival of German colors, but this was only a temporary influence. The second voyage to this country of the same vessel had no effect upon the domestic dye market, as little of a definite character was ascertained as to the nature of its cargo of dye materials. Natural dyes were in good demand during the year at good prices.

Violent Fall in Bromides.

Early in the summer of 1916 the drug trade was stirred by a decidedly sensational cut in the price of bromides. It was announced by the old and leading manufacturers. The high altitude to which the war and speculative purchasing carried prices encouraged new manufacturers to enter the field. With a view of discouraging these new manufacturers, especially two well-known out-of-town manufacturing chemists, from continuing in the field, the older makers announced a reduction in prices of all bromides which was so severe as to create a very pronounced stir throughout the trade. Speculators in these commodities undoubtedly suffered severe losses as a result of the action of manufacturers.

Essential Oils Scarce.

Some essential oils of foreign production are in decidedly small supply, and this stringency is reflected in prices unprecedentedly high. That they are likely to remain scarce and high for some time to come, regardless of political developments in Europe, is the opinion of some well-known members of the essential oil trade. As a result of this scarcity and also because of the high cost and smallness of supplies of many crude materials used in the distillation of oils the market as a whole displayed noticeable firmness much of the time throughout the year. Rose oil has latterly advanced and exhibits an inclination to rise still further. Oil of juniper berries is one of the articles which has almost disappeared from the market, only one or two quarters apparently having supplies.

Flurry in Chlorate of Potash.

In the fall of 1916 chlorate of potash forged to the front as a speculative feature. For a time there was a flurry in this salt. In October the prices advanced sharply. The rise was due largely to reports that the contract price for 1917 delivery was about to be named by the manufacturers' agents and rumors were persistent that it would be much higher than the contract figure for 1916. Speculators bought freely. Another factor in the speculative operations was a report that the Russian Government was in the market for large quantities of chlorate of potash and was prepared to pay high prices for it. This rumor also stimulated the demand from speculators. Later on manufacturers named the contract price for 1917 chlorate of potash and when it was found that there was no change from the 1916 basis the market weakened.

Opium Advancing Steadily.

The fact that New York practically controls the trade of the world in druggists' opium, has been a steadying factor in regard to prices. Nevertheless, the market has been advancing gradually and now is at the highest point known since the Civil War. Most of it comes from the Turkish provinces which are involved in war and great uncertainty prevails as to the possibility of securing adequate supplies when the present stocks are exhausted, if the war lasts much longer.

The opium grown in India and commonly used as smoking opium by the Chinese contains a much lower morphine content, but the British Government may encourage its cultivation temporarily in order to provide a substitute for the Turkish opium should the scarcity affect the well-being of the armies in the field. In military surgical practice opium is as indispensable as ether and chloroform.

Increased Consumption of Natural Indigo.

All reports agree that consumption of natural indigo is now running at a pace larger than at any time

in recent years. The natural indigo varies in price according to grade and the range extends from \$2.50 to \$4.00 per pound which compares with \$1.99 @ \$2.00 per pound for 20 per cent. synthetic indigo. The increase in the demand for synthetic indigo has been because of the scarcity of the synthetic substitute which is still in light supply. The increasing volume of shipments of the natural product are indicative of a return of prosperity to Indian planters who since 1914 have again turned their attention to the natural.

Price Comparisons.

The following table appeared recently in the New York Journal of Commerce, showing the wide fluctuations in the prices of drugs and chemicals during the past two years:

	Dec. 30, 1916.	Dec. 31, 1915.	July 31, 1914.
Quinine, oz.	\$0.55	\$0.75	\$0.26
Opium, lb.	13.50	11.00	7.45
Morphine, oz.	7.00	5.35	4.70
Codeine, oz.	8.25	6.75	5.50
Acetphenetidin, lb.	20.00	14.50	.80
Acetanilid, lb. . . . .	.50	1.10	.20½
Salol, lb.	2.40	9.25	.65
Alcohol, grain, gal.	2.72	2.66	2.52
Do., denatured, gal. . . . .	.65	.51	.34
Do., wood, gal. . . . .	.90	.55	.45
Antipyrine, lb.	17.00	30.00	....
Bromide, potash, lb.	1.35	.55	.37
Bromine, U. S. P., lb.	1.50	6.00	....
Caffeine, lb.	11.00	11.50	3.65
Chloral, lb.	1.28½	1.30	.29
Coumarin, lb.	10.75	7.00	3.15
Glycerine, C. P., lb. . . . .	.55	.55	.19½
Do., nitro, lb. . . . .	.52½	.50	.19½
Chloroform, lb. . . . .	.60	.60	.21
Blue pill, lb. . . . .	.62	.84	.40
Calomel, lb.	1.43	1.61	.60
Naphthalene, lb. . . . .	.09½	.13	.02¾
Cod liver oil, bbl.	115.00	80.00	17.00
Menthol, lb.	3.20	3.25	2.95
Castor oil, lb. . . . .	.19	.16	.08½
Quicksilver, flask	80.00	145.00	37.50
Saccharine, lb.	19.50	13.00	1.15
Strychnine, oz.	1.10	.70	.40
Thymol, lb.	10.00	12.00	2.75
Aniline oil, lb. . . . .	.25	1.40	.10½
Gambier, lb. . . . .	.11½	.18	.04½
Indigo, Bengal, lb.	3.55	3.50	.85
Soluble blue, lb.	1.00	1.30	....
Acetate lime, 100 lbs.	3.50	6.00	1.50
Acetone, lb. . . . .	.22½	.40	.11
Acetic acid, 100 lbs.	3.50	6.00	1.50
Salicylic acid, lb.	1.00	4.00	.22½
Carbolic acid, lb. . . . .	.52½	1.45	.07¾
Sulphuric acid, 100 lbs.	1.50	1.50	.90
Oxalic acid, lb. . . . .	.47	1.50	.07¾
Muriatic acid, 100 lbs.	1.75	1.75	1.15
Picric acid, lb. . . . .	.75	1.50	....
Tartaric acid, lb. . . . .	.66	.52	.30½
Citric acid, lb. . . . .	.65	.59	.53
Blue vitriol, lb. . . . .	.14	.15½	.04½
Saltpetre, lb. . . . .	.31	.35	.05
Potash, bichromate, lb. . . . .	.42	.45	....
Potash, chlorate, lb. . . . .	.67	.48	.08
Do., prussiate, yel., lb. . . . .	.92½	.90	.12½
Do., prussiate, red, lb.	2.50	7.00	.30
Do., permanganate, lb.	2.75	1.60	.08¾
Do., caustic, lb. . . . .	.85	.65	.04
Do., muriate, ton	450.00	450.00	39.07
Soda, benzoate, lb.	8.25	3.50	.24
Do. prussiate lb. . . . .	.55	.68	.11
Do. salicylate lb.	1.10	4.00	....
Do., chlorate, lb. . . . .	.28	.50	.08½
Do., caustic, 100 lbs.	4.50	5.25	1.80
Soda ash, 100 lbs.	3.00	3.00	.75
Balsam Peru, lb.	3.45	5.25	1.40
Buckthorn bark, lb. . . . .	.20	.50	.20
Cinchona bark, lb. . . . .	.25	.26	.10
Almond oil, lb.	13.00	7.25	3.35
Caraway oil, lb.	3.25	2.00	1.35
Cinnamon oil, lb.	20.00	15.00	6.25
Bergamot oil, lb.	6.00	3.35	5.00
Clove oil, lb.	1.20	1.40	1.00
Juniper oil, lb.	16.00	4.25	.70
Sandalwood oil, lb.	10.50	6.50	4.65
Wintergreen oil, lb.	1.10	3.25	.27½
Gum arabic, lb. . . . .	.15½	.22½	.09¾
Gum asafetida, lb. . . . .	.85	.65	.23
Belladonna leaves, lb.	1.40	1.50	.50
Digitalis leaves, lb. . . . .	.45	.50	.07¾
Henbane leaves, lb.	3.25	....	.10
Sage, lb. . . . .	.70	.50	.03¾
Dandelion root, lb. . . . .	.27	.25	.10½
Belladonna root, lb.	4.00	....	.10
Doggrass root, lb.	1.00	.85	.06
Ipecac root, lb.	2.20	3.25	1.40
Valerian root, lb. . . . .	.75	.50	.07