

## Pharmacy in England.

The Research Laboratory Squabble—Freund and Dunstan on Aconitine—Dr. Williams' Pink Pills—Allen & Hanburys' Anti-cutting Scheme—Drug Stores Amalgamate Coca Wine and Petroleum Emulsion.

(From Our Own Correspondent.)

Reference was made last month to the unfortunate squabble which is now going on over the aconite research conducted by the Research Laboratory of the Pharmaceutical Society. Matters since then have assumed an acute stage, and no one can forecast what the upshot will be. Briefly stated, the affair arose through a comment in the official review of the year, published in the *Pharmaceutical Journal*, in which Professor Dunstan regards the action of that journal as having been antagonistic for some time. The editor warmly repudiated the insinuation, and demanded an apology, which the Research committee at one stage of its proceedings was quite prepared to accord him. Now they are reported to have unanimously passed a report in favor of Professor Dunstan's claims, and the apologizing is expected from the other side. The whole affair is unquestionably lamentable, and it hardly appears possible, from the acrimony imported into the discussion, that any mutually satisfactory understanding can result. The resignation of either Dr. Paul, the editor of the *Pharmaceutical Journal*, or Professor Dunstan, would be a most unfortunate close to an incident that should never have occurred, and which a little reasonable action of the committee would have prevented.

Quite apart from this regretful disagreement, Professor Dunstan has to meet some severe criticisms from Dr. Martin Freund, who, having repeated some of Dunstan's work on aconitine, has arrived at different results. Freund has obtained totally different numbers in the combustion of aconitine, and has identified Dunstan's isaconitine with a product of the hydrolysis of aconitine. Freund's work on hydrastine is well known, and his determination to continue the aconitine research will be productive of interesting results to all who desire to see the answer to a complex question. The abilities of the two investigators are unquestioned, and the duel will be intently watched by chemists and pharmacists. The constitution of alkaloids is a subject of deepest interest, and allows room for any amount of speculative imagination. For over four years the Research Laboratory of the Pharmaceutical Society have devoted their best energies to clearing up the uncertainty which surrounded the aconite alkaloids. It will, indeed, be disappointing if the greater part of the evidence produced during the investigation should be called in question and proved to be incorrect. At any rate, as Professor Brauner, the eminent chemist of Prague University, remarked to the London Chemical Society this week, "It is better to acknowledge one's error than have it proved by some one else." Holding

this view, we are bearing with equanimity the corrections in his own work that Professor Dunstan has since made.

The proprietor of Dr. Williams' Pink Pills is pushing the sale by very extensive advertising in England just now. Some marvellous testimonials are reproduced, and the pills are claimed to cure locomotor ataxy, scrofula, and other almost incurable diseases. The claim that these pills are not a patent medicine is hardly fair, for, although literally true, it has been the custom for many years to class all these proprietaries as patent medicines, and the public still regard them so. Indeed, one of the points upon which most reliance was laid, when the Pharmaceutical Society commenced its crusade against the unqualified sellers of these so-called patent medicines, was that by long custom they had become regarded as patents, and were therefore entitled to the exemption made in favor of patent medicines in the Act. As the readers of the *CANADIAN DRUGGIST* are aware, this argument was not successful in the law courts when proprietaries containing poisons were concerned.

Messrs. Allen & Hanburys, Limited, of Plough Court, have joined the anti-cutting league by demanding a signed guarantee that their preparations shall not be sold below the minimum prices which they have specified. This only applies to their well-known specialties, such as their infants' food, hynn (extract of malt), bynol (extract with cod liver oil), etc. Whilst giving Messrs. Allen & Hanburys credit for the best intentions, there is nothing very striking about the scheme. Chemists can hardly be supposed to wax enthusiastic over a scheme that practically sanctions the selling of a 42-cent bottle of hynn at a minimum retail price of 35 cents, of which the wholesale price is 32 cents, or even their popular food, which is supposed to retail at 24 cents, and for which they have settled a minimum cutting price of 19 cents, the whole sale price being 18 cents. There is no doubt that the adhesion of such an old-established firm to the principle that it is wise to do something to prevent unreasonable and ruinous competition amongst traders will have more beneficial effect than the mere value of their scheme. All these methods of protecting the trade have the serious drawback of inflicting extra clerical work and hampering bona fide business transactions amongst all concerned. Were it not for this there would be far more wholesalers joining in the movement, and something like success, in the objects desired, would be attained.

It is a significant fact that four of the large drug store proprietors in London have joined hands and invited the co-operation of the public in running their businesses. These four vendors are the proprietors of some eleven stores, five of which have been opened during the last four years. The price for the whole has been fixed at £65,900, of which £33,900 is to be in cash and the remainder in

shares. This amount includes the leases of the various shops, fixtures, and stock. The profit during the past three years average about £7,000 on a turnover of about £49,000. If this rate of profit should be maintained, and the directors confidently anticipate an increase, it will be sufficient to pay 6 per cent. on the preference and 10 per cent. on the ordinary shares. It is rumored that some of the shares have already been dealt with at one quarter premium, but there is a clause in the prospectus which financiers regard as ugly. It is stipulated that 100 deferred shares of £1 each (taken wholly by the vendors) are to be entitled to half the profits after 10 per cent. has been paid on the ordinary shares. This means that if the profit, after 10 per cent. has been paid, should be £2,000, £1,000 would be divided among the ordinary shareholders, and would give them an extra 1½ per cent. The remaining £1,000 would go to the deferred, giving them 1,000 per cent. interest. This is truly an equitable piece of drug store subtlety.

After the influenza is the harvest time for tonic wines and general pick-me-ups. Coca wine is daily growing in popularity in this country, although care has to be exercised that the wine contains a sufficiency of the drug or the revenue authorities object. The method of mixing the fluid extract of coca with an ordinary red wine is frequently productive of an almost inert and alkaloid-free product. The tannin in the wine precipitates the alkaloid and filtration removes the precipitate, and also a good deal of the color of the wine. This may be partly prevented by detannating the wine first with gelatine, in the proportion of half a drachm of gelatine to a pint of wine. The wine, after clarification, usually precipitates resinous matter on the addition of the coca, owing to the acid present, but there is no fear of precipitating alkaloid. Cod liver oil emulsion, syrup of the hypophosphites, etc., all have their advocates, and each chemist should be prepared with a nice staple article. Petroleum emulsion, made with the odorless and tasteless petroleum oil, with hypophosphites, has been more popular this winter, and if it has any efficacy is certainly much less nauseous than cod liver oil. Clinical opinions so far appear divided, but perhaps not much more than they usually are.

The cod liver oil scare, coming as it did at nearly the end of the season, caused a good deal of commotion. Many firms had run their stocks low, and as each week the livers were reported from Norway to be scarcer than ever, and prices went up, things began to look black. Many chemists all over the country have contracts to supply drugs, etc., to the local hospitals or unions, and those who had no stocks left were in a tight corner. But already the scare is over and prices are falling rapidly. Apart from the fact that considerable stocks of 1894 oil existed in London and Hamburg, the