

Pharmacy in England.

Strychnine for Phenacetine—Responsibilities of Pharmacists—Accessories to Enema Syringes—Vanilline and Wool Fat—The Liniments of the Pharmacopœia.

(From Our Own Correspondent.)

Some six months ago I reported in these columns the unfortunate fatal accident that occurred at Birmingham through the dispensing of strychnine for phenacetine. The sequel has now taken place. The widow of the unfortunate man who received the fatal dose sued both the chemist and the wholesale druggist, and has received damages to the extent of \$14,000 from the wholesaler, whilst the chemist was practically absolved from blame. No one reading the account of the trial could help feeling that Messrs. Wyley, Limited, the wholesale druggists concerned, were very ill-advised in allowing the case to come to court. Whatever may have been the true facts of the case, the sympathy of juries is always expressed in a solid manner, and generally at the expense of the wealthiest of the defendants. This is daily seen in cases coming under the employer's liability and where insurance societies are concerned. If there had been any tangible proof that the error rested with the chemist alone, Messrs. Wyley would, no doubt, have been right in resisting the liability as reflecting otherwise upon themselves; but after the acquittal and exoneration of the chemist by a coroner's jury, it was rather late in the day to take up such a line of defence. The principal misfortune of this trial is the revival in the minds of the public of such an unfortunate event, and the opportunity it gives to the daily newspapers to pass damaging comments upon pharmacists as a body. One journal has surpassed itself by gravely suggesting that the pharmacist should not be allowed to absolve himself by proving that he sold an article exactly as he received it from his wholesaler, but that he ought to be bound to know what he is selling. From the arm-chair theory this point of view is admirable, but practically it is absurd. A druggist would have to spend the greater part of his days in his laboratory—if he had one—testing his drugs, etc., in order to fulfil this requirement. Even then his task would not be done. If this theory has to be carried out to its legitimate conclusion, it would not be enough for the pharmacist to guarantee that the article, for instance, was phenacetine, but he must be prepared to guarantee that it contained no other body besides phenacetine. Then only could his task be said to be completed. Perhaps this same editor would suggest that there still remained one other test that the pharmacist should be compelled to apply: that he should take the first dose of every medicine himself.

Messrs. Reynolds & Branson, of Leeds, have introduced another useful accessory to the necessary enema. Some time ago they devised a rack so that an enema

syringe could be suspended, and not left curled in a box so as to produce the inevitable kink, together with a drip tray attached, into which the syringe drained. Now they are introducing a registered basin enema clip that serves a two-fold purpose—of retaining the tail end of the syringe under the water, and also of providing a rest for the other end, when not in use. Their ingenious pill-box and bandage shoot has been widely recognized as a long felt want, and is simply invaluable in hospital wards.

It looks as if the revisers of the B. P. addendum were more perspicuous than at first appeared, when they declined to put lanoline into the pharmacopœia under its registered name, but adopted *adepts lanae* instead. By this means the door was left open to any other wool fat being used should it answer the B. P. tests, which were avowedly based upon lanoline. The event thus anticipated seemed a long way off when, some two years ago, Messrs. Richardson, of Leicester, Eng., defended an action for infringement of the lanoline patent and were defeated. From the judge's remarks it was evident that wool fat *per se* could not be protected, but that the incorporation of water with it was a new discovery that could be patented. Since then the Bremen company, rejoicing in the elegant title of Norddeutsche Wollkammerer & Kanim-Carnspinnerei, have introduced an *adepts lanae* which they claimed to be purer than lanoline. Whether this claim were true or not, it certainly had a lower melting-point than lanoline, and was much less sticky in consequence. But for many practical purposes it did not seem to catch on, probably because its appearance was more suggestive of petroleum jelly than wool fat. But it has now been much improved, and the hydrous preparation has the clotted cream appearance of lanoline, and is altogether an excellent article. The lanoline proprietors in Germany did not fail to notice the advent of this competitor, and lawsuits have been apparently meandering on for some time, but, according to the N.W.K., these have now been settled, and their brand is to be left undisturbed for the future. As their product is some 16 to 20 cents per pound cheaper than lanoline, it will, doubtless, fill the place of the latter article when *adepts lanae* is ordered, provided the pharmacopœial authorities revise the melting-point in the next edition.

It is fairly safe to say that wool fat is not employed generally so much as its value really merits. In cold cream, eczema, and healing ointments, it is a splendid addition, and has been recognized by the leading medical authorities. Perhaps its price has been the cause of its not being more often employed; but the introduction of the N.W.K. brand is probably only a step to the advent of much cheaper brands, and soon we shall have as much variety to select from as we now have of petroleum jellies.

The *Pharmaceutical Journal*, rather late in the day, has followed the lead of other journals, and instituted a series of critical articles upon the preparations and formulae of the British Pharmacopœia. Last month, as I reported, ointments were dealt with, and now the B.P. liniments have come in for review. The author, unlike the instance quoted in the case of other journals, remains unrevealed. Liniment of aconite is stated to possess a formula that does not appear to be capable of improvement. It is quite evident that the author has never made this liniment, or he would not make such a rash statement. The loss of spirit in its manufacture is very great, and a far better plan would be to adopt the method of making a strong fluid extract and dissolving the camphor in the product. This can best be accomplished by macerating the powder with a small quantity of spirit for two days, percolating with more spirit until about three-fourths of the quantity required is obtained. This is set aside and the remainder of the spirit forced through with water, the spirit recovered, and the extract dissolved in the first liquor, the camphor added, and the whole brought up to the proper quantity with more spirit, and filtered. The loss in this way is reduced to a minimum. Soap liniment is another absurdity that the author imagines cannot be improved upon. Perhaps he is hardly aware that there is not a hospital in the kingdom that follows the B. P. formula, and very few wholesale druggists, to judge from the products they send out. Soft soap, in spite of the variable amount of moisture, is always employed instead of hard soap, as the greater part of the latter is quite insoluble at ordinary temperatures. A useful hint, worth remembering, in the case of liniment of chloroform, is to dissolve the camphor in the chloroform and add to the oil. In this way the camphorated oil is made in the preparation, so that its separate manufacture is unnecessary. This suggestion first emanated, I believe, with Mr. Squire, but it is so frequently overlooked that it seems worth while to revive it. Turpentine liniment will always be troublesome until the revisers determine whether they desire a thin or thick emulsion. It is easy enough to make either by a slight manipulation of the proportion of water in the present formula. So far we have heard nothing appreciative of the suggestion that all liniments should approximate to the soap liniment of iodide of potassium. The public unquestionably prefer a liniment that can easily be rubbed in, and those of a consistency more resembling ointments are in little favor. So that probably we shall hear no more of this ridiculous suggestion. The author concludes his paper with the remark that there is no liniment in imitation of Elliman's embrocation in the pharmacopœia; at least that is the inference when he refers to an egg emulsion of camphor and turpentine with acetic acid vinegar.