

### Physicians' Supply Houses.

The remarks on substitution which have been presented recently in these pages, and another instalment of which is given in this issue, bring very forcibly to attention the fact that the present condition of the retail drug trade calls for the most careful investigation of its causes, with the view to such reformatory measures as shall bring it to a state where it shall be more satisfactory in both a financial and professional sense. It cannot be denied that the drug trade is in a precarious condition, suffering from evils which threaten its very existence as a separate calling. Acrimonious discussions between doctors and druggists, the diversion of trade to the departmental stores, the charges of illegitimate substitution, and the general accusations in the newspapers of unprofessional and unbusiness-like practices are destined to destroy the occupation of the pharmacist sooner or later, if a remedy be not found and promptly applied.

This condition of affairs cannot be attributed to any one cause, but is the effect of many influences which have been to greater or less degree operative for a number of years. It may, however, be asserted that one of the most powerful of these influences has been the physicians' supply houses, and the drug trade have not recognized soon enough the great influence for evil which these houses exert, and now it is necessary to employ drastic measures to counteract this influence, which threatens the very existence of retail druggists. The patent medicine evil is a minor one in comparison, and the substitution claim of manufacturers is of still less importance.

All will admit the injury done the retail drug trade by these supply houses, but all are not agreed upon the causes for the existence of these concerns. We believe, however, that the druggist himself is largely responsible for the success of this new competitor. The local druggist is the natural purveyor of medicines to and for the physicians in his locality, but he has frequently been slow to recognize the opportunities at his command for serving the physician, for holding his patronage and good will, and for extending his own business. The time has now come for every druggist to bestir himself and to ask, What shall I do, and how shall I meet this competition? Shall I permit these outside concerns to supply the medicines and instruments to the physicians in my territory merely because I am so poor a business man that I cannot control this trade, or shall I do my part as an active business man, and try to regain and hold this trade, which is rightly mine?

Instead of getting out of his store, going around and calling upon the physicians, the same as representatives of the supply houses do, the druggist in many cases has been too content to sit in his store and growl, because the physicians do business with these energetic sales-

men. We do not believe that doctors, as a rule, have had any just cause for complaining of the prices charged them by druggists, and we sympathize with the druggist, who has often been imposed upon by the doctor, who helped himself to cigars and knickknacks about the store, as if the goods were his. But these latter are comparatively trivial matters which the druggist must expect to put up with if he wants the good will, patronage, and influence of the doctors. We are convinced that the average doctor prefers not to buy his goods in such large quantities as he is compelled to from out-of-town dealers. Instead of buying one bill of fifty dollars worth of drugs, he would rather get these as he wants them from the local druggist; but so long as the druggist sits with his arms folded and makes no earnest attempt to secure this trade, he must expect the business will switch off into other channels.

If the druggist will take it upon himself to keep in touch with his physicians, cater to their wants, and call their attention to the injustice of their buying their goods abroad, he will find every sensible doctor ready to admit the justice of his claims. The doctor realizes that the drug store is a necessity in every locality, and he is broad-minded enough to recognize that the more trade a druggist enjoys, the better variety of goods he can keep, the fresher will be his supplies, and the cheaper he can afford to sell them. Physicians are entitled to buy their medicines at physicians' prices, and while some manufacturers will sell as cheaply to a physician as they will to a druggist, the larger and more reputable makers allow the druggist an extra discount, and we have a positive assurance that it is the preference of the better class of manufacturers not to sell direct to physicians. The curse of the business is these little manufacturing houses who make a few pharmaceutical products, but buy more, issue a price list, and send out agents to charm the doctors with a discount song about 25 per cent. This is the worst competition the druggist must meet, and, if he isn't business man enough to meet it, then he must expect to lose the trade. When you find that a manufacturer is selling as cheaply to physicians as he is to you, then you should most emphatically protest, and, if it is not stopped, refuse to handle his goods, and send your orders to the manufacturer who will protect you. There is plenty of competition among the manufacturers, and no druggist need feel compelled to handle any line of goods which he can not sell to his physicians at a reasonable profit. These small manufacturers of medicines who work up their business by selling direct to physicians are on a par with the manufacturer of soap who peddles his product from house to house instead of selling it through the retail grocers. The physicians' supply house is an outgrowth of an example set by a sharp Yankee peddler, who worked up a large business in his own county and

state by selling surgical instruments. He soon found that the word "discount" was a charm to the average doctor, and he reasoned that if he could sell instruments, why couldn't he sell medicines, and soon he extended his line. This example has been followed until these concerns have sprung up like mushrooms in all large trade centres. Their tendency is to destroy rather than to support established trade channels, but nevertheless their influence should not be underestimated by the druggists, and if the latter wish to control this trade, which justly belongs to them, they must make a desperate effort or it will soon be beyond their reach.

Among many of the larger and more reputable manufacturers there is a strong feeling against these physicians' supply houses. Some of them positively refuse to sell goods at better than retail druggists' prices, but the volume of business which some of these houses do, and, in consequence, the large orders they are able to place, have forced the manufacturers in many cases to recognize them as jobbers. The legitimate wholesale druggists are unanimously opposed to these supply houses. These jobbers do their business through the retail druggist, and dare not openly sell to physicians. In consequence, the supply house takes a large volume of business away from the jobbing drug trade. If the retail druggists would only arouse themselves and assert their position, they would find the jobbers ready to work with them, and the combination ought to seriously impede the progress of this outside influence. But so long as the physician believes that he can buy his goods cheaper of the physicians' supply house, just so long will it be impossible to break that connection. The local druggist must give the physician to understand distinctly that he can and will supply his wants in a satisfactory manner, and at as low a price as the doctor can buy from the outsider.—*Pharmaceutical Era.*

### An Important Decision.

The following, taken from the *Detroit Free Press* of April 2nd, is of considerable interest to the drug trade, involving, as it does, the rights of the manufacturer to an exclusive trade mark:

Judge Swan yesterday dismissed the bill of the California Fig Syrup Co. against Frederick Stearns & Co., by which it was sought to restrain the defendant from the use of the words "fig syrup" on one of its preparations. The complainant is engaged in the manufacture and sale of a preparation which it denominates "Syrup of Figs, California Liquid Fruit Remedy, Gentle and Effective." The words "Syrup of Figs" are blown in the bottle, inscribed on the labels and on the pasteboard wrapper. The company is organized under the laws of Nevada, and has its principal offices in New York, Louisville, San Francisco, and Reno.