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SPECIAL ARTICLE

WORK OF THE COUNCIL ON PHARMACY AND CHEMISTRY: ITS EFFECT ON MEDICAL PROGRESS.*

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It is nearly ten years (it was in 1905), since the creation of the Council on Pharmacy and Chemistry of the American Medical Association, and it may not be inappropriate to look back and see what, if anything, has been accomplished.

The proprietary medicine business, as we know it today, is a development of the last forty years; it had its impetus, at least, in the early seventies, when Lawrence, of "Medical Brief" fame and his imitators began to put on the market the various nostrums, which at one time made St. Louis as famous for its output of "patent medicines" for physicians to prescribe, as Milwaukee is famous for its antidotes to thirst. About this time the German synthetics, especially those which might be regarded as the by-products of the dye works—our so-called "synthetic chemicals"—began to appear. Ten years ago the number of so-called "ethical" proprietaries—including the typical nostrums, the more or less legitimate

mixtures put out under copyrighted names, and the patented German synthetics—had become enormous. The profits being immense, there was naturally a steady increase in the number. While a few of these were of distinct value, the vast majority were simple mixtures of well-known drugs put out under fanciful, copyrighted names, and for the most part fraudulent in one way or another. Some were products of pharmaceutical and chemical houses of greater or less repute; the majority were put out by men who knew nothing about medicine, pharmacy or chemistry, but who went into the business of manufacturing medicines as they might have gone into any other get-rich-quick enterprise. This accounts for the fact that there was no statement too silly, no claim too extravagant, and no falsehood too brazen to go into the advertising literature that physicians were asked to read and to believe, and which was their authority for prescribing. Such commercialized therapeutics was preventing advance in scientific methods of treatment and intelligent clinical observation, creating in the minds of unthinking physicians a therapeutic optimism more fatal than the most radical therapeutic nihilism. But more serious, this commercialized materia medica blighted our literature by debauching medical journals, even tainting our text-books.

But these conditions had not developed without a protest by the thinking members of our profession. The subject was continually

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brought up at the annual meetings of the American Medical Association. As early as 1879 the Association adopted preambles and resolutions strongly condemning the use of these secret and semi-secret proprietary mixtures. In fact, scarcely a year passed that the question was not brought up before the Association in some form or other. Conditions, however, grew worse rather than better, and finally the problem became very acute on account of the advertising pages of *The Journal*. The question was: Must advertisements of all proprietary medicines be discarded? Are all bad? If not, is there some way of making a selection? To answer these questions the Council on Pharmacy and Chemistry was created.

Time prevents a discussion of how the Council attacked the tremendous task that it had undertaken—a task that included the solving of problems so difficult that they looked to be unsolvable. The work appeared, and proved to be, stupendous. Nor has any group of men, working from purely altruistic motives, been ridiculed, slandered—and, may I say, damned—as these men were at the beginning. I say “altruistic” because the work has been absolutely unselfish; it has been done without any remuneration whatever. I wish there were time to tell of the amount and character of the work these men have done and of the sacrifices they have made. If these were known the Council would have had more support from those for whom the work is directly done—the physicians of the country.

Now what has been accomplished? What have been the results of this ten years' work?

I regard as the most important result the fact that the members of our profession have been enlightened in a very practical manner regarding the various phases of the proprietary medicine business as would not have been possible otherwise.

Changes take place in social and business affairs so gradually that there may be radical changes in a certain length of time that may

not be appreciated by the man on the street; it is only by looking back occasionally that we are able to realize that there has been a change. So it is here.

PATENT MEDICINE PROMOTING

About the time the Council was created “patent medicine” promoters were actually seriously imbued with the idea that the easiest way to establish a demand for their goods on the part of the public was through the doctors. I well remember, in the spring of 1904, taking lunch at the New York Drug Club and hearing a discussion, which I was not supposed to hear, at an adjoining table where this matter was being seriously considered. A little while after the same ideas were advanced in a paper published in “Printers' Ink”—an advertising journal. Let me quote from that article:

“But the patent medicine of the future is the one that will be advertised only to doctors. Some of the most profitable remedies of the present time are of this class. They are called proprietary remedies. The general public never hears of them through the daily press. All their publicity is secured through the medical press, by means of the manufacturer's literature, sometimes gotten out in the shape of a medical journal, and through samples to doctors. For one physician capable of prescribing the precise medicinal agents needed by each individual patient there are at least five who prescribe these proprietaries.”

This was possibly true when it was written—ten years ago; in fact, is it not true to a certain extent, even today?

The history of some of the preparations marketed “through the doctors,” is interesting. Glycothymoline and Listerine are found in the majority of homes of the country, and yet these so-called “antiseptics” were not advertised directly to the public until they were “big sellers.” (Listerine has recently gone over openly to the “patent medicine” class.) Antikamnia was as commonly used by the public as quinine, and yet it had never been advertised to the public, except through doctors, until two or three years ago. Bromidia, Gray's Glycerine Tonic, Sal Hepatica, Tyree's Anti-

septic Powder, Angier's Emulsion, which is advertised to the public in England—to name a few preparations—are being widely used by the public, and yet had never been advertised directly to them. It has been asserted that ninety per cent of Fellows' Syrup is sold over the counter directly to the public, and yet it has never been advertised except to and through physicians. This preparation, however, does seem at one time to have been an out-and-out "patent medicine." As to this let me quote from a book called "Forty Years an Advertising Agent." by George P. Rowell, founder of the advertising agency by that name.

"We had a successful advertiser in Halifax, N. S., who sold a medicine known as Fellows' Hypophosphites, that proved so good that some shrewd business men in the medicine trade, who knew about it, bought the trade-mark, incorporated a company with a capital of \$100,000, retained the original owner as manager, stopped all advertising except in medical journals, and thereafter pushed the sale only through the medical profession. I had information at one time of a young man who was heir to an uncle, recently deceased, and had come into possession of a certificate of stock of this company, of the face value of \$6,000, and made up his mind that, shrewd as the old gentleman was, he had, without doubt, acquired trash in this instance, and I heard further, that the young man began to think better of the doubtful asset, when one day a dividend check came; and when, at the end of the year, he realized that within the twelve-month that \$6,000 certificate had brought him \$9,000 in dividends, he began to revise his estimate of his deceased uncle's prescience in making investments."

It is needless to say that the Council's work and an awakened profession have checked this method of introducing "patent medicines" that was seriously considered ten years ago.

CHECKING THE OUTPUT.

Again, it is no longer possible for fraudulent nostrums to get a start. Here are a few of the many that have been nipped in the bud by the Council's work:

Six years ago a physician wrote asking if

the Council had investigated "Mercol," a preparation just introduced. Our correspondent said that he had found Mercol a most excellent way of giving mercury, since it had none of the bad effects of this drug, and thought the Council should accept it. It was advertised as a solution of mercury bin-iodid in oil; investigation showed that it contained no mercury. It developed that in the method of compounding the mercury was eliminated. This, we may be generous enough to presume, was a case of ignorance; not a deliberate attempt to deceive. But had the Council not been in existence, the preparation would most likely have become popular. Certainly if mercury could be given in as large doses as it was represented to be given in Mercol without causing salivation or other untoward results that follow its use in large doses, this preparation ought to have been a big success. So far as I know it is heard of no more.

"Vanadiol" was introduced to our profession as a great remedy for many diseases. It was made by the Vanadium Chemical Company of Pittsburgh, an offshoot of the Vanadium Steel Company. Evidently someone connected with the latter concern thought that as vanadium was a good thing in steel it would also be a good thing in a proprietary medicine. The Council, after investigation, published a report to the effect that there was no evidence whatever to warrant the claims made for it. It is heard of no more.

Three years ago Sinkina was advertised to physicians as a specific for malaria. Judging from the advertising, this preparation would remove malaria from the face of the earth. It was astonishing and rather discouraging to see how many physicians immediately accepted the statements of a layman regarding its use. Our chemists, after examination, concluded that it was an elixir of Roman caraway. Here may I mention the fact that whenever the Council finds it necessary to call on physicians for clinical assistance, as in this case, the call is seldom made in vain. In this instance the

Council was fortunate in securing the services of the Commission for the Study and Prevention of Malaria of this, the Southern Medical Association. It is needless to say that investigations made by such men as Drs. Bass, Henson, von Ezdorf, etc., are scientific and convincing. Since the publication of the report on Sinkina the nostrum has been dead or practically so.

Another "ethical" proprietary of the decade was "Labordine," claimed to be a vegetable antipyretic and a remarkable remedy for many and various diseases. It was becoming popular among a certain class of doctors until our laboratory's report showed that it contained forty per cent of acetanilid, and little else of value.

Among other proprietaries which the Council has eliminated from the "ethical" class are: Jaroma, an asafoetida mixture heralded as a sleep producer; Enteronol, a specific against Asiatic cholera and all kinds of intestinal diseases; Oxychlorine, the chlorate of potash, saltpeter and borax mixture which after exposure by the Council had a short existence as an intravenous injection; Calmine, a disguised veronal sleep producer, and Waterbury's Metabolized Cod-Liver Oil, which contains barely a trace, if any, of cod-liver or any other oil. These are a few illustrations of what the Council has actually done in preventing the successful introduction of fraudulent or semi-fraudulent nostrums. Not a single nostrum has been successfully introduced to the physicians of this country since the Council started; while previously there was scarcely a week—certainly not a month—that at least one "ethical" proprietary was not foisted on our profession.

RESPONSIBILITY OF MEDICAL JOURNALS.

I wish that as good a report could be made as regards the older nostrums—those that had become thoroughly entrenched. While some of these have vanished, many still remain—disgracing our profession and American medicine. And the main reason is that the adver-

tising pages of medical journals are still for sale to those who are foisting these preparations on us.

Incidentally, this brings up one discouraging phase. At first thought one might imagine that medical journals, presumably representing the medical profession, would have supported this movement. As a matter of fact, as is well known, the opposite occurred from the beginning, and has continued, in some measure, even up to this time. There have been a few exceptions, however, and may I at this time be specific and refer to the journal of this Association as one? Certainly the Southern Medical Journal deserves the support of every man in our profession—at least of every man in the territory it covers—if for no other reason than because of the temporary financial sacrifices it has made in co-operating with the Council and keeping from its pages proprietary preparations not approved by that body. Your journal has proved that the medical profession stand ready to support a high-class, clean journal. This question of the relation of medical journals to the nostrum evil in this country is a big one. I wish there were time to say more about it. There is time to say that the same conditions exist here as in the relation of the newspaper to the "patent medicine" business. It would amount practically to stating an axiom to say that if the newspapers would stop advertising fraudulent "patent medicines" the latter would soon vanish; so also if medical journals would stop advertising these fraudulent and "unethical" proprietaries these preparations, too, would immediately become a thing of the past. It is foolish for us to berate newspapers for carrying "patent medicine" advertisements so long as we tolerate practically the same kind of advertising in our medical journals.

LAYMEN SUPPLYING OUR MEDICINES.

Another factor connected with the proprietary business must be emphasized, viz., that many of these preparations, though made for physicians, were originated and promoted by

laymen, who went into the business as they would go into any other money-making venture. Can any of the concerns to which I referred a moment ago be regarded as legitimate manufacturing pharmacists? The Vanadium Chemical Company was a layman's organization. The "Metropolitan Pharmacal Company," which put out Sinkina, was merely another name for a layman. The Labordine Pharmacal Company was owned by H. M. Coudrey, an insurance agent, who thought he saw a great opportunity in "working" the doctors, but who was finally convicted by the Government for fraud. The "Dios Chemical Co.," which for more than a quarter of a century has been foisting on our profession the nostrums Dioviburnia, Neurosine, Germiletum and Palpebrine, is another name for J. H. Chambers, who, so far as I know, has never claimed to have any special knowledge of pharmacy, chemistry or medicine. Micajah's Uterine Wafers—until recently advertised in medical journals, and consequently prescribed by many physicians—were the output of Micajah & Co., a concern operated by a layman, who also owned and promoted the "patent medicine "Piso's Consumption Cure." "Pa-Payans, Bell," Salacatin and Sal-Codeia (Bell) were advertised to physicians by Bell & Co., laymen, who also, it is alleged, composed the L. D. Johns Company, which sold a "patent medicine" known as Dr. John's Pills. Alleotone, liberally advertised in medical journals before the exposure by the Council, was promoted by B. F. Copeland, who—quoting from the expose published in THE JOURNAL—"has at different times been in charge of a stove factory and connected with a brokerage firm, which may exert some subtle influence in developing the ability to relieve suffering humanity, though the connection is not quite clear." Mr. Ballard, of St. Louis, is the promoter of Ballard's Snow Liniment, Brown's Iron Bitters, Herbine, Dr. Herrick's Vegetable Liver Pills, Swaim's Panacea, Renne's Pain-Killing Oil, and other "patent medicines." How many

physicians know that this same concern advertises to physicians Campho-Phenique and Campho-Phenique Powder? Also that the same concern puts out Henry's Three Chlorides, Henry's Tri-Iodides and Maizo-Lithium? Happily, through the Council on Pharmacy and Chemistry, our profession is gradually being made acquainted with this phase of the proprietary business.

Ten years ago one could pick up scarcely a medical journal that did not contain, in the form of an original article, at least one veiled write-up and puff of a proprietary preparation. Nine times out of ten if the word "Anemia" appeared in the title the paper would prove to be a puff for Gude's Peptomangan; if it referred to a specific disease, our old friends Mercauro or Arsenauero would quite likely be found in the body of the article; if the subject had to do with aches or pains, or, in fact, almost any condition, one was likely to find mentioned Antikannia, Phenalgin or Ammonol, and so on with other of the well-known "ethical" proprietaries. Now one practically never sees such articles in medical journals.

Previous to ten years ago testimonials by doctors were a common commodity, and even intelligent physicians, men of standing, seem to have been easily influenced by the persuasive individual who wanted to get a nice letter of recommendation for his product. One of the most interesting exhibits in our Propaganda Department is the testimonial card-index file. It contains the names of probably ten thousand physicians who, during the preceding quarter of a century, had given testimonials, with the particular testimonial credited to each. When this card file was started it required almost the entire time of one clerk to keep it up to date; now the additions average scarcely one a month. The doctor thinks twice and weighs the evidence before giving a testimonial today.

Evidence gained two years ago from druggists in various parts of the country indicated that the prescribing of proprietary mixtures

had fallen off enormously—estimated at from 40 to 60 per cent, according to locality.

Another, and an important, result of the Council's work will be found by comparing the advertising literature sent to physicians nowadays with that of ten years ago; we seldom see the absurdly extravagant and lying stuff regarding proprietaries that was then inflicted on us.

Another indirect result has been the development of the most important work the American Medical Association is doing—that on "patent medicines" and medical frauds on the public. The Council confines its activities to products used by physicians: "patent medicines" are outside its functions. But as the dividing line between "patent" and "proprietary" medicines is invisible, imperceptible—in fact, non-existent—it is natural that THE JOURNAL should step over this imaginary line and branch off occasionally into the so-called "patent medicine" field. This "patent medicine" work has developed so rapidly that it has tended to monopolize the energies of those who were in charge of the work to the neglect of the "ethical" proprietary phase of the propaganda. In a word, with no intention of pushing the "patent medicine" phase of the propaganda it has developed in the past three years almost beyond belief. The correspondence with the public has become so great that the one in charge of this department must devote practically all his time to it and requires the services of four assistants. The encouraging part is that laymen are co-operating, bringing about practical results.

CONSTRUCTIVE WORK.

Constructive, not destructive, criticism makes for progress. For the first few years the Council might be regarded as tearing down rather than building up. But not all its efforts have been destructive: rather, almost from the first it was looking forward to constructive efforts. May I refer to some examples?

It was realized that a part of the responsibility for the nostrum evil rested on the medical schools. A few years ago the Council appointed a Committee on Medical Teaching with the teaching of materia medica and therapeutics especially in mind. This committee has done a great work, but has done it quietly. It prepared a series of letters to the teachers of clinical medicine and of materia medica and therapeutics in those schools which expressed a willingness to co-operate—which means all of the better schools of the country. The object in view was to enlighten the recipient as to the actual conditions, so that he would be able to enlighten his students. These letters pointed out wherein the medical colleges had failed in this branch of medicine—that, as a result, the young practitioner was an "easy mark" for the nostrum promoter. Each year the committee has caused to be placed in the hands of the graduates literature that would enlighten them.

Pharmacology—the science of the physiologic action of drugs—would seem to be almost a new science in this country; a decade ago there were scarcely a dozen medical schools that recognized it. In many colleges it seemed to be regarded as more of an art to be able to write a complex, shotgun prescription than to know the physiologic action of an individual drug and in what conditions it was indicated. Of course each school had its professor of materia medica and therapeutics—although often this chair was an adjunct or subordinate to some so-called major branch—but no teacher of pharmacology as such. The subject was hardly mentioned in the curriculum. Today sixty-seven colleges have whole-time teachers on this practical and vitally important subject; in fact, the demand for trained pharmacologists now far exceeds the supply. The influence of the Council on Pharmacy and Chemistry has undoubtedly had much to do with bringing about this splendid improvement in medical education in this country.

THERAPEUTIC RESEARCH.

Three years ago the Council asked the Trustees for authority and for an appropriation to create a Committee on Therapeutic Research, with the object of securing the application of scientific methods to the investigation of effects of drugs—of encouraging scientific research of practical pharmacologic questions. In the past, statements regarding therapeutic measures found in text-books on materia medica were copied and recopied until they were accepted as gospel truths, and conclusions as to the value of this or that drug too often have been based on superficial clinical experience, and without putting such evidence to scientific proof.

This committee, by awards and otherwise, has been and is securing investigation of such questions as the activity, stability and physiologic action of certain commonly used drugs: as, for instance, the different effects of the various bromides; the toxicity and therapeutic effects of the salicylates, and the difference between the natural and the synthetic; the clinical effects of caffeine, of phosphorus compounds, of mercury absorption; the action of strychnin; the value of the newer opium preparations; the action and limitations of hexamethylenamin, etc. Of the results of some of this work you know, since they have been incorporated in various published papers. The practical value of such work must be evident to all: if progress is to be made in drug therapy it will be based on scientific, and not on uncontrolled, individual, clinical evidence.

USEFUL DRUGS.

I must refer to one more phase of constructive work: It is that of simplification of our materia medica. One of the serious handicaps to the study of this branch of medicine is the number of official and semi-official drugs—the number being so large that it is impossible for

any one individual to obtain even a smattering knowledge of them. To improve conditions in this respect a selection of a limited number has been made of the better known and more valuable drugs, and these, with a brief exposition of their pharmacologic action and therapeutic uses, have been published in a book known as "Useful Drugs." The book contains 245 drugs, many of which will undoubtedly be eliminated from later editions as being worthless. In brief, this is an attempt to supply a semi-official, selected list of drugs to be used as a basis for teaching in medical schools and for examining by State examining and licensing boards. A considerable number of medical teachers have adopted this book; also a number of State examining boards are already basing their materia medica examinations on this selection. Personally I feel that in the future the medical profession will thank the Council for what it has done in this regard.

I have been able in the time allotted me to review only in a disconnected and brief way the work of the Council and its far-reaching results. To what extent these results have already influenced the progress of American medicine, and how immeasurably greater they may influence it and our profession in the future, only those who have followed the subject closely can imagine. This much is certain, the Council's work has made it possible for the practicing physician of today to have a keener sense of the value and limitations of drugs. It has placed the allied arts and sciences of therapeutics and pharmacology on a sounder and more scientific basis than ever before. And, finally, it can be truthfully said that the gentle art of swindling the public through the instrumentality of the doctor is becoming less popular and less profitable every year, and the Council on Pharmacy and Chemistry of the American Medical Association must be given the credit.