

Observations addressed to the chemists and druggists of Great Britain on the Pharmaceutical Society / by Jacob Bell.

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OBSERVATIONS

ADDRESSED TO THE

CHEMISTS AND DRUGGISTS

OF

GREAT BRITAIN

ON THE

PHARMACEUTICAL SOCIETY.

BY

JACOB BELL.

LONDON:

C. WHITING, BEAUFORT HOUSE, STRAND.

1841.

Numerous communications having been received by the Author, from various quarters, with reference to the advantages and capabilities of "THE PHARMACEUTICAL SOCIETY," and some persons having questioned the necessity of its formation, the following Observations were written for the purpose of setting at rest any doubt which may exist on the subject. It being desirable that the Society should commence active operations as early as possible, and the completeness of these operations depending, in a great measure, on the extent of support which it may receive, the Author considered it important that some immediate reply should be sent to the enquiries alluded to. In order to avoid the delay which would be occasioned by waiting for the next meeting of Council, he has ventured to take upon himself the responsibility of communicating such information as he is able to afford to those who may require it.

OBSERVATIONS
ON THE
PHARMACEUTICAL SOCIETY.

THE time has arrived at which the sincerity of the Chemists and Druggists of Great Britain will be put to the test—when it will be seen how far they are in earnest in their professed desire to carry out those measures of improvement which will be likely to secure the confidence of the public, and thus to prevent future aggressions. By the appearance of impending danger they were simultaneously excited into action—the fear of becoming subject to unfair controul and unjust restrictions caused them to unite for their common welfare, and a determination to maintain their independent privileges has overcome all private jealousies and minor considerations.

The notion which has long been prevalent, that the Chemists and Druggists of Great Britain are “like a rope of sand” has been proved to be a fallacy; and the unanimity which has been evinced among them has been a source of surprise, as well as gratification, to those whose past experi-

ence had led them to fear that an event so desirable was not to be anticipated.

The Committee appointed to regulate those defensive proceedings which the urgency of the case demanded, have gladly availed themselves of this favourable circumstance to concert measures for the entire removal of those evils which have been a source of complaint, for the permanent benefit of the body at large, and for the extension of that unity of purpose which has, in the present instance, been attended with such signal success.

After the most diligent attention and a persevering investigation of every branch of the subject, they have recommended the establishment of the "PHARMACEUTICAL SOCIETY" as the only step which, in their opinion, can remedy existing evils and prevent the crisis of a destructive revolution by promoting a wholesome and desirable reform.

The Society is formed: and whether it be supported in the first instance by a few scattered individuals or by a majority of the Body, those who have laboured at its formation confidently hope that it will become, in course of time, a universal and national establishment.

There are only two circumstances which can possibly occasion the failure of the "PHARMACEUTICAL SOCIETY," which are these—

While it is natural to resist immediate and pressing danger with proportionate energy, there is in mankind a liability, when the proximate cause of alarm is removed, to become lukewarm, and to relax from exertion without sufficiently considering contingent probabilities, and providing for future emergencies.

There also exists a natural propensity to hesitate in the prosecution of an undertaking, when it is discovered that expense is involved in its completion, and to lose sight of its

ulterior advantages and collateral purposes in calculating the probability of a direct and immediate return for the outlay.

The object, therefore, of these observations is to show, that the necessity of a union among Chemists and Druggists is as great at present as it was when that union first took place ; to point out the manner in which the Society, if efficiently supported, will promote the welfare of all its members ; and to prove that the advantage, which they may fairly anticipate from it, is fully adequate to the amount of subscription.

Although the apparent cessation of hostilities, on the part of those who are anxious to enforce legislative restrictions on Chemists and Druggists, has, in some measure, diminished their zeal in defending themselves, there is no reason to expect that the subject will be dropped in Parliament. The daily papers and medical periodicals teem with gross and offensive attacks on Chemists and Druggists, which they are not *in a position* to refute ; and charges are made against them which they are unable either to controvert or to obviate.

The want of a uniform education among Druggists, and the variable quality of the drugs which are found in the market (whether from adulteration, defects in the preparation, or the loss of their properties from keeping), are continually brought before the public in a manner which is peculiarly galling to those who are solicitous of maintaining an unblemished reputation.

As long as Chemists and Druggists *collectively* neglect to take those means which are within their reach for rectifying these evils, the stigma, which ought to be confined to some individuals among them, is extended to all — as long as they continue to be subject to no educational regulations, they are exposed to the imputation of ignorance—and as long as they are disjointed, unrecognized, and indifferent, the influence

which they would possess as an organized body, is lost in the confusion of inoperative individual efforts.

They must, in their present position, submit to any indignity because they have no power to resist it.

The "Medical Reformers" have not abandoned their design. They are only waiting for an opportunity to carry it into execution, and they are likely to persevere until an alteration of some kind is effected in the department under consideration.

It being evident, therefore, that Chemists must and will be included in the scheme of "reform," it remains for them to decide whether they will allow measures of this description to be forced upon them by persons who are indifferent or opposed to their interest, or whether they will maintain their independence under such regulations as shall conduce to their own welfare, and, at the same time, satisfy the public demand and silence all future vexatious allegations.

During the laborious investigation of the Committee this question has been maturely considered, and the result has been a unanimous conviction that the Chemists have no safe alternative but to take the government of their Body into their own hands.

In case it should be objected that this measure would be inoperative without an Act of Parliament and a Royal Charter, we may observe, that the extent of its operation rests with the Chemists themselves. If every respectable Chemist in the kingdom would join the Society, and contribute his share of influence towards its judicious and efficient government, no legislative sanction would be necessary. The certificate of membership would, in course of time, become a guarantee of the proficiency of every member, as well as a test of his respectability; which circumstance alone would uphold the character of the Society, and render its usefulness

universal. But supposing it to be well supported at the outset by a limited number, the principles on which it is based must occasion an extension of its influence, and the support of government, if required, would certainly not be withheld.

There is, perhaps, no avocation in which *character* is of more importance than that of a Chemist and Druggist.

The difficulty which exists in a majority of cases in estimating, with any degree of precision, the qualities of drugs, increases very much the responsibility of the Druggist by placing the Public in a great measure at his mercy. The chief ground therefore on which he can hope for success in his business is, the *confidence of the Public in his integrity and experience*; and any circumstance which could tend to increase that confidence must necessarily be of great importance.

The practice of selling inferior drugs on the score of economy is as much at variance with sound policy as it is with moral principle; for, although these misdemeanors may be difficult of detection, a person who is guilty of them is never safe, and his reputation must suffer sooner or later.

It does not come within our province to animadvert on the quality of the drugs sold by Apothecaries; but it must be admitted that our interest as well as our duty calls upon us to have regard to the superior character which we ought to maintain as a body in our own legitimate department.

But the difficulty of detecting imperfections in drugs applies also to the appreciation of their good quality, and a Chemist may, under our present system, devote the most scrupulous attention to his duty in this respect without obtaining that credit which he deserves.

The organisation of a Body of Chemists into a Society, the chief objects of which are avowedly to raise the character of

the Profession of Pharmacy, and to ensure a uniform and efficient administration of medicine, will confer upon every Member that public confidence to which he is entitled. It will be in the power of the Society to inculcate the impolicy of adulterations, to enlighten the public mind as to the mischief of cheap medicines, and thus to overcome to a great extent the prejudice which exists amongst too many of us in favour of a mistaken economy, and also to disseminate the advantages of that scientific knowledge which every Druggist ought to possess.

The School of Pharmacy, which is contemplated in connexion with the Society, will afford the means of improvement, and establish an instructive intercourse among the Members, which have hitherto been much required in this Country.

In order that the services of Apprentices and Assistants may be rendered efficient, it is evident that they must undergo a course of study involving a considerable amount of labour, independently of their duties in the dispensing department. There are books which they must read, and practical researches which they ought to carry on, in the acquirement of that Chemical and Pharmaceutical knowledge which their occupation requires. But after the usual business of the day is over, these additional labours are naturally felt to be irksome, unless there exist a stimulus which keeps the mind in a state of activity.

The establishment of Morning and Evening Lectures for the benefit of those Members and Associates who reside in London, will naturally create a degree of emulation and desire for advancement; and as a great number of Apprentices in the Country look forward to spending a year or two in London, for the purpose of completing their education, they will participate in the advantage of an additional

motive for industry during their apprenticeship, as well as in the subsequent opportunities of gaining information. The prospect of an examination will furnish all with an inducement to make the best use of their time, and to avail themselves of whatever means they possess of learning the science as well as the art of Pharmacy.

That some inducements of this description are required is evident, from the difficulty which London Druggists experience in obtaining competent Assistants. Young men from the Country constantly present themselves as candidates for that office, who are found to be entirely ignorant of the elements of Chemistry, and unqualified for ordinary dispensing business.

Some London houses, which have been long established, keep up a communication with Assistants whom they have educated, and who have afterwards settled in different towns in the country, and by taking their Apprentices, complete the education which has been commenced on their own principles. This arrangement may be compared to a private school of Pharmacy, as it is evident that men who have learned their business in a well regulated establishment are able to supply it in rotation with better qualified Assistants than those who have not had this advantage. As this system is found to be successful when adopted by individuals, it cannot fail to be much more so if extended to the Body at large, and brought to that degree of perfection which is to be desired.

There are at all times in London a great number of young men perambulating the streets in quest of situations, and many of them, for want of adequate qualification or the needful introductions have considerable difficulties to contend with. They may spend months in idleness and privations of every kind, and are often reduced to absolute

want. The School of Pharmacy, besides affording them the means of profitably spending their time, will also be a place of reference ; and a mutual benefit will be enjoyed by Members who want Assistants, and Associates requiring situations.

The Periodical Meetings for scientific discussion will form a prominent feature in the School of Pharmacy. At these Meetings, papers on appropriate subjects will be read, and it is anticipated that a variety of discoveries and valuable information will emanate from this source. If this proceeding should meet with ample encouragement, the substance of the discussions will, in all probability, be published in the form of Transactions, and circulated among all the Members and Associates of the Society. These Meetings will also be a medium of scientific correspondence with our fellow-labourers in other nations, and enable us to maintain a character as Pharmaceutical Chemists to which we cannot now lay claim.

The construction of a Laboratory on the most approved principles, containing all the needful apparatus, will afford facilities for practical researches which are likely to promote the great object which we have in view. Lectures on Pharmaceutical operations may be instituted, and pupils in this department may "walk the laboratory" as medical students "walk the hospitals."

A complete Museum of *Materia Medica*, comprising specimens of good and bad drugs (exhibiting the difference), and a Library of standard works, required by students, will constitute a necessary, and at the same time a valuable, appendage to the laboratory.

While providing for our own wants and advancement, those among us who are blessed with prosperity and comparative affluence, should not be unmindful of our unfortu-

nate brethren, who, by unavoidable calamities, may stand in need of assistance. The casualties of business, unforeseen losses from bad debts or other circumstances, the affliction of illness, and the arrival of old age before a competence has been accumulated, *may* reduce the most worthy among us to want. It is therefore our duty, as far as lays in our power, to provide for the consequences of events over which we have no controul, and the Benevolent Fund claims the support of every Chemist and Druggist who has the means of contributing to it.

The brief outline which has been given of the various objects contemplated in the Pharmaceutical Society, is founded on the supposition that it will be supported on a scale commensurate with its importance. But an undertaking so comprehensive, necessarily involves a considerable outlay, and on this subject a few remarks may be added.

When we consider the number of Chemists and Druggists in the kingdom, and the aggregate amount of capital which they can command, the practicability of the project cannot be doubted. The only source of doubt has reference to the spirit and energy with which they are likely to follow it up. It is to be hoped that the zeal and activity of the Committee (or, as they are now constituted, the Council) has been sufficiently proved to ensure the confidence of their constituents, and that their unanimous conviction, as to the necessity of the course which they have recommended, will be considered a guarantee of their continued industry. Their credit is at stake in the performance of the duties which devolve upon them; and they are not likely to abandon a cause to which they have voluntarily devoted so much of their time, and for the success of which they feel themselves in some measure responsible. But the labours

of the Council must be seconded by the contributions of those on whose behalf these labours are undertaken.

The Council have no personal ends to gain in the formation of the Society. On the contrary, the sacrifice of much valuable time, the endurance of unceasing labour, the combating with a variety of difficulties and obstacles, which must inevitably attend the regulation of an infant institution; and, above all, the *probable* lukewarmness of some of their friends, from whom they might reasonably calculate upon receiving assistance:—these are the “rewards” for which the Council must be prepared, and to which they will cheerfully submit in the prospect of ultimate success.

In a public undertaking like that which is now before us, all private and mercenary considerations must be laid aside; and every person engaged in it ought to forget his own individual interest in the desire to promote the general good. Regulations which will tend to *protect* and *elevate* the Body at large, must benefit every individual comprised in it, and the union of the strength and influence of all, cannot fail to confer indirect advantage on each. It is therefore important that every person concerned, instead of calculating the probable amount of pecuniary return for his outlay, should consider the emergency of the case and the ultimate objects which are contemplated. On the one hand, we are sensible that unless a decided course of this kind be adopted, we are likely to lose our independence, and to become fettered by a variety of obnoxious restrictions; on the other, we have the opportunity not only of escaping from these evils, but also of assuming a position creditable to ourselves and favourable to every kind of improvement.

A difference of opinion may probably exist as to the amount of subscription which ought to be expected from

each Member and Associate; and it would, in fact, be impossible to meet the views of every individual among us in this particular. This subject was, therefore, amply and impartially considered by the Committee; and in making the subscription Two Guineas for Members, and One Guinea for Associates, they were unanimous in the opinion that the objects of the institution might be effected; and, at the same time that every person connected with it would either *directly* or *indirectly* receive at least an equivalent for his contribution.

The sale of Patent Medicines is subject to a tax of two guineas per annum; and, although this is considered a grievance, and in many cases the profit during the year may not cover the amount, yet few, if any, Chemists renounce the privilege on this account. But, surely, from what has been already stated with respect to the Pharmaceutical Society, it is evident that, even in an interested point of view, the preservation of our present advantages in general business with the escape from external interference, is an inducement to become connected with it, which far exceeds the privilege of selling "quack medicines."

If it be urged that the country members ought to pay a smaller subscription than those residing in London, it may be observed that they will equally enjoy the benefits of *protection, recognition, representation, and increased respectability*; and may, in case of need, avail themselves of the resources of the *Benevolent Fund*. The system of education will indirectly extend to them; the correspondence between the London establishment and the members in all parts of the country will be mutually advantageous; and all parties will have the satisfaction of contributing towards the elevation of the trade into a scientific and professional character.

It should be recollected that the chief labour of conduct-

ing the institution will rest with the London members, and that, in the first instance, they will in all probability find it necessary to give some additional support to the infant society by voluntary donations among themselves. The foundation of the library and museum, and some expenses connected with the laboratory, will naturally depend, in a great measure, on the London members, and many of them have expressed a willingness to come forward as liberally as their circumstances will permit.

Apart from all selfish considerations another circumstance ought to be kept in view, namely, that the public good requires a systematic regulation with regard to Chemists and Druggists. The complaints which are frequently made on this subject, and some of them not without reason—the misunderstandings and skirmishes with the medical profession, and the acknowledged inferior quality of the drugs which are often found in the market, ought to be considered unanswerable arguments in proof of the necessity of some effectual remedy. It is the duty of every man to promote the public welfare as much as lies in his power, and whoever flinches from this duty from mercenary and selfish motives is the victim of a ruinous and short-sighted policy, which must bring upon him injury as well as disgrace.

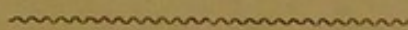
Considering the importance of the art and science of Pharmacy, it is surprising that it has been so long neglected—that those who follow this branch of the profession should have hitherto remained in their present unorganized condition; but now that the public mind has become awakened to the necessity of a reform, and medical men have joined in the outcry, Chemists and Druggists have no alternative but to sink into a state of subjection or to reform themselves.

Every individual who comes forward with his share of assistance at this crisis should reflect, that he is laying the

foundation for a new era in Pharmacy, and that his support at a time when it is most required will materially tend to ensure the establishment of the Chemists and Druggists of the Empire on a permanent and substantial basis. But those who stand aloof, with the idea that it will be more prudent to await the result before they risk any thing in the cause, are doing their part in promoting its failure, detracting from that unity in which alone our strength consists, and are thus becoming their own enemies.

338, OXFORD STREET,

June 17, 1841.



As the *Council* have not yet issued a Circular, it may be as well to state, that the communications of those who may be desirous of joining the Society will receive prompt attention, if addressed to the Treasurer,

RICHARD HOTHAM PIGEON, Esq.

31, THROGMORTON STREET,

Or to any other Member of the Council,* a List of whose Names is contained in the Circular of April 22.

* See the 4th Resolution of the last Circular of the Committee.

