

the *revanche* of the chemist for the almost universal practice of medical men in this country to dispense their own medicines. If the members of the two great departments of medicine and pharmacy would stick to their last respectively, the abuse would cease of itself. If medical men abandon to the dispensing chemist the function which properly belongs to him of compounding the medicines which his hierarchical superior, the physician, prescribes, there would probably be little difficulty in stamping out counter prescribing by pressure from within the craft. At present, in order to gain a precarious livelihood, chemists are fain to trespass not only on the domain of the duly qualified medical practitioner, but to dabble in groceries (the grocers having taken to selling "patent" medicines) and oil-shop wares—all this simply because he does not get enough dispensing to keep body and soul together. Foreign chemists do not indulge, to any appreciable extent, in the practice of prescribing, because the law prevents medical practitioners from infringing their privileges. Until by consent or legislative enactment the same order of things comes to pass in this country, it will, I fear, be idle to expect the retail chemist to forego so stable a *clientèle*, be he ever so reviled for making hay thereof.

I think it is only fair to urge these views as a set-off to the denunciations which have been so freely showered of late in your columns upon a useful, if sinful, class of men.—I am, etc.,

Gower Street, W.C., Nov. 6th.

ALFRED S. GUBB, M.D.

SIR,—I have been reading the correspondence upon the above subject, and am somewhat surprised at the evident ignorance which appertains to the exact scope and meaning of the Medical Act of 1858. The Bill of 1858 strongly sets forth that the art of prescribing is not the sole monopoly of medical men, anyone being free to visit, prescribe, and doctor to their heart's content, provided they do not pretend to be registered or qualified medical practitioners, or assume the title or titles of any of the licensing bodies. The only monopoly which the medical practitioner really enjoys is his title, and this title is the sole and only assurance which the law gives to the public that they are in the hands of a qualified man. The law does not say that the public are compelled to employ the man possessing the necessary qualifications. If the public choose to consult an unqualified person they do so at their own risk; but, on the other hand, if the public are led to consult an unqualified person through some pretence or assumption of titles on the part of this person, then this person breaks the Medical Act of 1858, and is liable to prosecution, but only then.

Turning to the question of chemists prescribing, there is positively no law by which this practice can be stopped, and it is just as sure that the British Parliament will never make such a law. It is quite true that in England or Wales, if the chemist visits and applies a blister or other medicament, the Apothecaries' Society may, if they choose, prosecute; but so long as the chemist keeps behind his counter he is safe.

In justice to the chemists, however, I think it may be safely asserted that there are exceedingly few who, enjoying the rights of their calling by the dispensing of medical prescriptions, find time or necessity for counter prescribing; but it must be remembered that there are thousands of duly qualified registered chemists who do not dispense twenty medical prescriptions from one year's end to the other. And why? Because the doctors dispense their own medicine. But there is another reason why the chemist is often applied to. The public frequently want a simple remedy. A person is seized with, say, cramp, headache, or diarrhoea. Naturally, he walks into the chemist's shop and gets the required dose, and is benefited. The chemist in such cases does not pose as a medical man, and his advice is invariably free.

There is another growing evil among medical men to which I should like to draw attention, one by which they will sooner or later undermine the art of medicine, and lose more fees than they now dream of—namely, the habit of prescribing proprietary medicines. If medical men are wise they will abide as much as possible by the *British Pharmacopœia*, and let their prescriptions be the only communication concerning drugs between them and their patients.—I am, etc.,

Pollakshields, Oct. 31st.

GEO. SKEEN ILLINGWORTH, M.B.

SIR,—Prescribing by chemists will continue so long as that *bête noire*, jealousy, is so rampant among medical men in private practice, and prevents them acting in unison in the settlement of many questions affecting their common welfare. This abuse of the work of the qualified practitioner could in the majority of cases be easily remedied by medical men in each town banding themselves together and determining to sink their petty differences for the general good. Unfortunately, in private practice at any rate, this in too many cases seems an impossibility. This is a non-dispensing town, and certainly nineteen-twentieths of our prescriptions are made up by the chemists, and the question of any injustice to them by doctors dispensing their own medicines does not arise. Yet one or two of them (there are exceptions) prescribe freely as well as extract teeth, and I am certain a large sum is yearly lost to the regular practitioners which should legitimately go into their pockets. We could certainly take the bull by the horns in the town I refer to by united action, and stamp out wholesale prescribing by some chemists, but little can be done without combination. There is little more than a handful of us, and yet each of us does not seem to care twopence for his neighbour. A little of that charity which does not look upon an opponent as a natural enemy would do us all good.—I am, etc.,

October 31st.

E. M. T.

SIR,—The question of "Prescribing Chemists" is undoubtedly a serious one for the profession. I quite agree with Mr. J. K. Kinsman Benjamin when he says "medical men have only themselves to thank for this very evil which they are clamouring to stamp out;" but for a reason the opposite of that alleged by him, namely, the dispensing of their own prescriptions by medical men themselves. I believe it is because this practice is dying out that the chemists have of late years come so much to the front. An immense amount of work has thus been thrown into their hands, and they have consequently increased rapidly in numbers and prosperity. If it were not for this fewer chemists would be required, and they would be able to live as formerly on the sale of their general stock, and what little dispensing would be required by the pure physicians.

Another mischief resulting from medical men giving up dispensing is that a great increase of power also is voluntarily handed over to the chemists. The profession is pestered with the daily requests for trying the qualities of every new drug or every fresh combination of drugs which the chemists bring out; only one in a hundred probably will be found worthy of being retained.

This, however, is not the only example of suicidal policy of which medical men have been guilty. Midwifery practice has, I believe, always been considered a lucrative branch of the profession, but now we are handing this also over to another class of practitioners, namely, midwives, who are rapidly replacing doctors in this department.—I am, etc.,

A GENERAL PRACTITIONER WHO DISPENSES  
HIS OWN PRESCRIPTIONS, AND DOES  
NOT CONSIDER IT DEROGATORY.

Northampton, Oct. 31st.

SIR,—During the space of four years I have rigidly pursued the practice of writing prescriptions to be made up by chemists. I prided myself on the fact that I never dispensed an ounce of physic for any one, but little by little I was most forcibly convinced that my position was untenable, and for the following reasons: Whilst I faithfully sent all prescriptions to chemists, they preferred the course of a little preliminary treatment whenever the temptation came in their way. Over and over again did I find, on being sent for to see a patient, that he or she had had sundry bottles of medicine prescribed by the chemist. Again, many times have I been told that such and such a chemist told So-and-So to take the following bottle of medicine, as Dr. So-and-So used it in such and such a disease, and as the chemist thought he or she was suffering from the same, it would probably do good. I have received very impertinent notes from chemists alleging that I had sent a "customer" to an opposing chemist for such and such a drug which the writer kept in stock; yet he had kept my patient waiting twenty-four hours for the same, much to everybody's inconvenience.