

"Fred Fitch's Own Page," 1981

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As you have learned by reading the editorial on page 3, with this issue the Square Deal passes out of my hands, for our company has sold complete control to other interests. To some of you this may mean very little, to others it may mean a whole lot. To me it is one of the saddest events of my long association with the barber profession.

The Square Deal has been to me the realization of a cherished dream. When I was a journeyman barber in Madrid, Iowa, more than 30 years ago, I dreamed of the day when barbering would be a respected profession offering an attractive livelihood to men of high character, good education and sound training. Of course, there were many such men in practice at the time, but they were a helpless minority. Barbering at the beginning of the present century was anything but a profession. Except in one or two states, any man, regardless of his mental, physical or professional fitness, could set himself up as a barber. There was nothing to prevent diseased, incompetent and immoral individuals from preying on the public and on the profession itself. The name barber that had a few hundred years before been the proudest professional title on the European continent belonged to anyone who cared to assume its social liabilities.

As a humble journeyman I could do very little to remedy conditions, although I quickly joined the local organization. As a shop owner, I had my first opportunity to apply modern principles of salesmanship, advertising and sanitation to shop operation. I found that the public readily responded. When I sold the old O. K. Barber Shop in Boone, Iowa, in order to devote my entire time to the promotion of my dandruff discovery, it was the most prosperous shop in town. I had proved that the public will pay more when you give more and this was the message I carried to shops in all parts of the United States as I demonstrated my product.

Ignorance--not in the sense of being stupid or unwilling to learn, but in the sense of being unfamiliar with the history of the barber profession and with its present possibilities--was the greatest obstacle to the progress of barbering a generation ago. I hoped some day to be able to start a nationwide educational movement and that opportunity came with the establishment of the Square Deal in March, 1923. Since then almost ten million copies have been published and distributed free of charge to barbers in all parts of the United States and Canada and in many other countries throughout the world. At no time has any barber been asked to buy anything in order to receive the Square Deal. It has been given absolutely free, with no strings tied to it and no discrimination. If any barber has not received it, it was only because we were not aware of the fact.

Shortly after the Square Deal was established, its platform for the future of the barber profession was expressed on this page in the slogan--Organization, Sterilization and Standardization. From this platform neither I as an individual nor the Square Deal as a magazine has ever deviated. I believe now as I believed then that this gospel will carry our profession to heights even greater than those reached by the illustrious barber-surgeons of the middle ages. On the basis of these three cardinal principles, barbering must rise or fall. If any one of the three is lacking, the other two are meaningless.

Without organization there would be no legislation, no uniform code of ethics, no standardized education program, no exchange of ideas and information, no leadership. Without organization barbering would be a ship without a rudder, drifting aimlessly, helpless to combat the storms of hostile forces. I am not speaking of any organization in particular, but of the principle of organization, a principle as indispensable to barbering as to medicine, law or any other profession.

Sterilization means the safeguarding of your health and of the health of those you serve. It is a responsibility that you must accept as a law-abiding citizen, as a good business man and as a true professional man. The technique of sterilization cannot be understood or carried out without education and therefore this part of the gospel of progress embraces the entire educational movement. When I announced in the Boone News-Republican over 25 years ago that every instrument in my shop was sterilized before being used on another customer, the other shop owners called it hokum. Today sterilization is compulsory in 38 states and is an important part of the course of study in every barber college in the land.

Standardization is a principle just as vital as organization or sterilization. Not only do standards of service and supplies vary all over the country, but they vary even in individual shops. Very few shops have any system of service which each man is compelled to follow. Here is where standardization should start and the responsibility for it rests squarely on the shoulders of the shop owner.

But standardization must go much farther than this if we are to build a real profession. Until the law requires that all preparations intended for use on the human anatomy must be manufactured in scientific laboratories under the supervision of graduate chemists and doctors, barbering will never win public respect. When such manufacturing standards are set up, they will be reflected in correspondingly high standards of shop service.

I wish the Square Deal every success under the new ownership. But even if this issue proves to be the last, the gospel it has preached will never die. That gospel is enshrined immortally on the statute books of an overwhelming majority of states and in the minds of thousands of barbers who will pass it on to their successors. My dream has to a great extent come true. Barbering has made more progress in the last generation than in the ten preceding generations. A trade that was not long ago largely a refuge for the shiftless and the incompetent is becoming a true profession, with high ideals, with a code of ethics, with a systematic educational program, with scientific textbooks, with real schools, with protective legislation.

I am proud of the part the Square Deal has played in this march of progress. For my own humble efforts I ask no reward and no appreciation. To have contributed in some small measure to the profession to which I owe so much is in harmony with the name of this little magazine. Barbering is still beset with evils and the road ahead will be slow and tortuous. But the ground has been broken and I have every reason to believe that our profession will continue onward irresistibly.