

THE HIGH COST OF PUBLICITY.*

BY P. HENRY UTECH.

"I can't believe that," said Alice. "Can't you?" the Queen said in a pitying tone. "Try again; draw a long breath, and shut your eyes."

No Alice in Wonderland ever had a more difficult time trying to extricate herself than we, the American public, are experiencing to-day. As purchasers of every-day commodities we are surrounded with a barrage of conflicting statements, high-sounding phrases, convincing claims, fancy packages and whatnot, until we are lost in a veritable maze of impenetrable ignorance. In their avidity to attract the buyer and hold his interest, to rivet his attention and break down sales' resistance, all the human emotions and weaknesses are played upon by the promoters of these newer products in the wild endeavor to have us exchange our hard-earned dollars for the latest type of motor car, the 1928 model cigarette lighter, or even our favorite breakfast food when invested with a more fantastic label. The same is true whether we speak of food-stuffs or furniture, of textile or toilet articles, of building materials or medicines, in short, of every human desire and need.

It is not the purpose of this paper to discuss the merits or methods of the products above referred to, but rather to review some interesting data that has appeared recently with reference to a number of products with which we as pharmacists are all more or less familiar. For years the writer has noted with keen interest the rise, growth and development of new remedies, nostrums, medical preparations, as well as technical products, that have appeared in the market from time to time, the number of which has grown with remarkable rapidity within the past decade or two. Sponsored by an intensive campaign of advertising wherein the reported merits of the product or preparation were cleverly extolled and exploited to a credulous and unsuspecting public; many of these newly devised products have, within a reasonably short time, met with considerable financial success, while certain others were so over-zealous in exaggerating the claims for merit or therapeutic efficiency of their product, that their program in many instances was abruptly terminated by such protective agencies as the Federal Food and Drug Act, the Council of Pharmacy and Chemistry of the American Medical Association, and in the case of technical products or compounds, by the Government Bureau of Standards and the Federal Trade Commission. The many fallacies, quacks, nostrums, deceptions and misstatements of fact exposed by these latter agencies would fill a large volume of interesting information—or more properly speaking interesting misinformation.

Singularly enough many of these newly devised compounds and preparations are usually sold by the pharmacist and it is therefore highly desirable that he acquaint himself with some of the salient facts concerning these products, together with such information as may be available about their general character or composition. It is fascinating indeed to note how many of the simple remedial agents sold daily by the pharmacists, when disguised with a fictitious name, a deceptive dress, or even a different color or flavor, and bedecked with much ingenious hypo-

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thetical verbiage, may be made to possess all the magic, mystery and chicanery of the Black Art. Judged by the success of many of the promoters, the American public to-day are fully as unwary and credulous as were our ancestors back in the days of sorcery and witchcraft. Let me give you a few concrete illustrations. Within the past decade we have all witnessed an intensive advertising campaign—nation-wide in character—extolling the virtues and merits of different brands of tooth-pastes, tooth-brushes, mouth lotions, etc., and while this increased interest in dental hygiene has been more or less educational and therefore commendable, the same cannot be truthfully said of all the much-heralded publicity attached thereto. On the contrary, much of the popular advertising has been misleading and deceptive, *e. g.*, we are told in the advertising "copy" that many functional maladies are traceable either directly or indirectly to defective teeth, hence it is all-important that the mouth be kept in a healthy condition. We must therefore protect ourselves against pyorrhea, the forerunner of systemic poisoning, arthritis, neuritis, senility, etc., hence the use of a distinctive brand of dentifrice or antiseptic mouth wash will bring about the normal healthy mouth conditions.

Now, as to the merits of the suggested treatment for the "cure" of the aforesaid condition, permit me to give you the results of laboratory tests recently made by the American Medical Association. It reads:

"A dentifrice is not a therapeutic agent for diseased gum tissue. It is under no circumstances a cure or even a preventative of pyorrhea. The medicines incorporated in many of the popular and widely advertised dentifrices are valueless and only afford the manufacturers selling talks to get their products before the public. . . . The dentifrice has in itself no chemical or magical power to clean. Because dentifrices are pleasantly flavored, they make brushing the teeth a more agreeable task."

Since the scientific function of a mouth wash is to eliminate the debris loosed by the brush, it follows that any simple saline solution used as a rinse will be fully as effective as the more costly highly advertised products. Dental authorities therefore recommend either warm water; a teaspoonful of salt to a pint of water; the salt solution with a little sodium bicarbonate added. The cost of these latter is practically negligible. With reference to the value of the so-called antiseptic mouth washes, Hygeia says:

"The cool, clean feeling left by agreeable highly flavored and equally high-priced concoctions leads the patient to think his mouth is clean. He is really only disguising a dirty mouth and in using such mouth washes he is a worthy disciple of the Oriental who uses perfume instead of soap and water."

As stated above, high pressure advertising is the medium employed for developing the market for these various products and the information used in the copy is oftentimes grossly misleading. The reason, therefore, is all too apparent once the *modus operandi* is understood. Read the statement of Mrs. Helen Woodward, one of the most successful advertising women in America. She says:

"If you are advertising any product, never see the factory in which it is made. Don't know too much about it. Don't watch the people at work. Just know all you can about the finished article and the man who is going to buy it, and the conditions of selling in the business. Because, you see, when you know the truth about anything—the real inner truth—it is very hard to write the surface stuff which sells it."

The author here took occasion to point out many specific instances of gross misrepresentation and misstatements of fact, of a number of nationally advertised preparations, the result of revelations and discoveries made by the Council of Pharmacy and Chemistry of the American Medical Association, all of which were highly instructive and interesting.

She also referred to a number of technical products and preparations commonly sold by the pharmacist, the composition of which in many instances revealed nothing more or less than a simple drug store commodity, disguised with a foreign flavor or odorous principle, and exploited to the laity at fabulous prices. Mimeograph inks, for example, costing upwards of \$3.00 per gallon, upon analysis proved to be merely highly colored dilution of glycerine and water. The Government Post Office Department recommends a formula of two ounces of glycerine to one gallon of warm water as answering every possible requirement. The widely advertised food products were also discussed. "Simple cereals" said the author, "when put through special mechanical processes yield enormous profits for the producer." He quoted the statement of the Department of Agriculture to the effect that all such products are no richer in nutritive value and that the housewife can by grinding her cereal in a coffee mill secure a good breakfast food for from three cents to four cents per pound.

In conclusion, the author said that conditions on the whole were much improved within recent years. Public Health authorities and individual communities the country over are awakening more and more to their civic trust and responsibility. Federal regulation, and also many individual states, have well defined statutes as protective measures. The indiscriminate use of narcotic drugs is now forbidden under the Federal Food and Drugs Act. Sodium benzoate content in soft drinks must be declared and sugar substitutes may not be used in candies unless stated on the label. In many states, natural fruit flavors only are permitted as beverages. Fraudulent claims and misstatement of fact are no longer permitted on the labels of products, however much they may be tolerated in advertising, to which the law does not extend.

As pharmacists, it is clearly our duty as guardians of the public health to take cognizance of these problems; to investigate the nature and character of these new fangled nostrums, their merits and composition, in order that we may be in better position to safeguard the health and welfare of the people.

THE ACTIVITIES OF F. ARTHUR BECKETT IN EDUCATIONAL PHARMACY.*

BY FRANK T. GREEN.

The writer first met F. Arthur Beckett in the year 1882 while he was a student in the California College of Pharmacy, which was located at Dupont and California Streets, San Francisco. A close friendship was formed between us. He was in the first-year class and I in the second. He was engaged at that time in the manufacturing laboratory of Redington & Company, wholesale druggists.

* Section on Historical Pharmacy, A. Ph. A., Portland meeting, 1928.