

NOTE ON TESTING CALCIUM COMPOUNDS.

BY CARL E. SMITH.

This is written to draw attention to a deficiency in the tests of the United States Pharmacopœia for the identification of calcium compounds and for the detection of certain possible contaminations, such as might easily lead to serious results because of the false sense of security the official tests would give. As an example, it might be mentioned that a specimen of strontium carbonate containing several percent of barium carbonate will stand all the tests given in the U. S. P. for establishing the identity and purity of precipitated calcium carbonate.

A sample of powder was recently submitted to the writer for analysis, which, because of a statement accompanying it concerning its uses, was supposed to consist, in greater part at least, of calcium salts. Preliminary tests proved presence of alkaline earth carbonate in large quantity. This led to the tentative conclusion that the powder probably consisted chiefly of calcium carbonate, as there was no reason to suspect presence of barium or strontium salts. Absence of color and complete solubility in dilute acids excluded the presence of elutriated native chalk. It was therefore expected that the U. S. P. tests laid down for precipitated chalk would definitely establish its identity as such and also detect in great probability any impurity or admixture. The sample stood all the tests and conformed also to the description of physical properties given. A little sodium chloride and traces of iron were found and as the U. S. P. lacks a test for magnesia, which is often found in calcium salts to some extent, a test was made in the usual way with phosphate, and a reaction was obtained that apparently indicated presence of a small amount of that impurity. Dependence on the U. S. P. tests, therefore, would have led to the conclusion that the specimen in question not only was calcium carbonate, but a salt of such a degree of purity as to warrant its use in medicinal preparations.

Further examination, however, showed that the sample was *not* calcium carbonate, that it contained neither calcium nor magnesium, but consisted of strontium carbonate contaminated with about 1.5 percent of barium carbonate.

The test upon which the Pharmacopœia relies entirely for the identification of calcium salts is the production of a precipitate on addition, to the neutral solution, of a solution of ammonium oxalate, said precipitate to be soluble in hydrochloric acid, but insoluble in acetic acid. But this reaction is by no means characteristic of calcium alone. It is shared by strontium and to some extent by barium and neither of these latter is excluded or detected by any other test provided. It is true that calcium salts are not liable to contain either barium or strontium as natural impurities, nor are these liable to be introduced in the course of manufacture, but accidental substitution or admixture might readily take place and such contingencies should certainly be guarded against by suitable means.

Examination of the text of the U. S. P. pertaining to other calcium salts show that in no case do the tests adequately differentiate calcium from other alkaline earth compounds. A test for the identification of a substance should be characteristic enough to distinguish it from everything else, beyond all reasonable doubt.

Of course, the remedy for the defects pointed out in this note is self-evident to every competent analyst. It need only be mentioned that a saturated water solution of calcium sulphate would seem to be the simplest means of detecting the presence of either barium or strontium.

CARL E. SMITH TESTING AND RESEARCH LABORATORY, 5 Beekman Street, New York.

PHARMACOPŒIAL BOTANIC DRUGS OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY *

By E. N. GATHERCOAL

| Latin plant names | English names | Austrian | Belgian | British | Croatian | Danish | French | German | Hungarian | Italian | Japanese | Mexican | Netherlands | Norwegian | Russian | Serbian | Spanish | Swedish | Swiss | U. S. P. VIII | U. S. P. IX | |
|--|-------------------------|----------|---------|---------|----------|--------|--------|--------|-----------|---------|----------|---------|-------------|-----------|---------|---------|---------|---------|-------|---------------|-------------|---|
| 191. <i>Elaphrium tomentosum</i> , res. | Tacamahaca. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 192. <i>Elettaria Cardamomum</i> , ft. | Cardamon. | X | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | X | X |
| 193. <i>Elettaria Cardamomum</i> , s. | Cardamon Seed. | | X | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | X | X |
| 194. <i>Embelia Ribes</i> , ft. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 195. <i>Equisetum arvense</i> , ster. hb. | Scouring Rush. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 196. <i>Erigeron Canadense</i> , v. o. fm. hb. | Oil of Fleabane. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 197. <i>Eriodictyon Californicum</i> , lv. | Yerba Santa. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 198. <i>Erythreæ Centaurium</i> , fl. hb. | Centaury | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 199. <i>Erythrea Chilense</i> , hb. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 200. <i>Erythronium Dens-canis</i> , stch. rt. | Adder's Tongue Starch. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 201. <i>Erythroxylon Coca</i> , lv. | Coca Leaves. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 202. <i>Eucalyptus globulus</i> , lv. | Eucalyptus. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 203. <i>Eucalyptus globulus</i> , v. o. | Oil of Eucalyptus. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 204. <i>Eucalyptus rostrata</i> , g. | Red Gum. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 205. <i>Eugenia caryophyllata</i> , fl. bd. | Cloves. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 206. <i>Eugenia caryophyllata</i> , v. o. | Oil of Cloves. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 207. <i>Eugenia Jambolana</i> , bk. | Jambul. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 208. <i>Eugenia Jambolana</i> , s. | Java Plum. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 209. <i>Euonymus atropurpureus</i> , rt. bk. | Wahoo. | | | X | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 210. <i>Eupatorium perfoliatum</i> , fl. hb. | Boneset. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 211. <i>Euphorbia resinifera</i> , i. m. j. | Euphorbium. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 212. <i>Exogonium purga</i> , tu. | Jalap. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 213. <i>Fagus sylvatica</i> , emp. o. | Beechwood Tar. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 214. <i>Ferula species</i> , g. res. | Asafoetida. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | <i>F. Asafoetida</i> . | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | <i>F. fetida</i> . | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | <i>F. Narthex</i> . | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | <i>F. Scorodisma</i> . | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 215. <i>Ferula species</i> , g. res. | Galbanum. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | <i>F. galbaniflua</i> . | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | <i>F. rubricalis</i> . | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 216. <i>Ferula species</i> , rt. | Sumbul. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | <i>F. Sumbul</i> . | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 217. <i>Ficus Carica</i> , ft. | Figs. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 218. <i>Foeniculum vulgare</i> , ft. | Fennel. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 219. <i>Foeniculum vulgare</i> , v. o. | Oil of Fennel. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 220. <i>Foeniculum vulgare</i> , lv. | Fennel Leaves. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 221. <i>Foeniculum vulgare</i> , rt. | Fennel Root. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 222. <i>Fragaria vesca</i> , ft. | Strawberries. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 223. <i>Fragaria vesca</i> , rh. & rt. | Strawberry Root. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

* Continued from page 293, March issue.

