The Propaganda for Reform

IN THIS DEPARTMENT APPEAR REPORTS OF THE COUNCIL ON PHARMACY AND CHEMISTRY AND OF THE ASSOCIATION LABORATORY, TOGETHER WITH OTHER MATTER TENDING TO AID INTELLIGENT PRESCRIBING AND TO OPPOSE MEDICAL FRAUD ON THE PUBLIC AND ON THE PROFESSION

SULPHURB

"Sulpherb" or "Sulpherb Tablets" is another of the multifarious nostrums sold by the Blackburn Products Company of Dayton, Ohio. In common with their class, they are advertised by the "fake prescription" method, a scheme which gives the reader the impression that the advertisement is really a newspaper "health department." The individual used by the Blackburn concern to carry out this deceit is Lewis Baker, whose activities in this connection we have previously noted. The advertisements appear under the general title, "The Doctor's Advice, by Dr. Lewis Baker." Here are samples of the method by which the public is deceived:

"L. W. writes: 'My blood is in bad condition. I suffer with constipation and my tongue is always coated. My skin is dark and I have pimples. I feel tired all the time, but I am too nervous to sleep. Please prescribe.'

"ANSWER: Get a tube of three-grain sulpherb tablets (not sulphur) and take according to directions. They will clean your blood, aid digestion, and relieve constipation. When you get your blood pure, the other symptoms disappear."

"George asks: 'For several months I have not been feeling well. My skin is sallow, my tongue coated, have headache, am sleepless, nervous and bothered with chronic constipation. Please help me.'

"ANSWER: You need a laxative blood cleansing treatment in the form of three-grain sulpherb tablets (not sulphur). Overcome the tendency to constipation and gradually your good health and pure blood will return."

"Orrie writes: 'I have been taking salts to purify my blood and cure my skin of itching and pimples, but don't get much benefit. Please prescribe for this.'

"ANSWER: I advise three grain sulpherb tablets (not sulphur tablets), composed of sulphur, cream of tartar and vegetable extracts that remove constipation and purify the system. Take this treatment for several months for best results."

The package in which "Sulpherb Tablets" comes bears on the label one of those noninformative, alleged formulas that the shrewd "patent medicine" faker so delights in. No quantities are given, but the public is told that the tablets "contain the extracts or concentrations of Cascara, Aloes, May Apple, Nux-Vomica, Black Cherry, Capsicum, Ginger, Sarsaparilla. Also Calcium Sulphide, Sulphur and Cream of Tartar."

"Sulpherb Tablets" were examined in the A. M. A. Chemical Laboratory, and the chemists report as follows:

"Sulpherb Tablets" are sugar coated, yellow, and weigh about 7.3 grains each, coating and all. The package states that they are three grain tablets; this probably refers to the medicament only. A qualitative examination shows the presence of emodin-bearing drugs, the taste suggesting aloes. Sulphur, calcium, sulphid, traces of alkaloid, potassium, and tartrate are present. The chemical examination shows that "Sulpherb Tablets" are probably compounded from calcium sulphid, sulphur, cream of tartar, and vegetable extractives. Of the vegetable extractives claimed to be present, aloes was indicated and a trace of some alkaloid, the amount of which was too small to permit its identification. If this alkaloid is strychnin, the quantity is insignificant, certainly not more than 1/1000 of a grain to each tablet.

Here we have, then, a simple laxative tablet, consisting essentially of drugs that have been known and used for generations, both by the medical profession and by the public. It is advertised in a way that is doubly deceitful. First the public is deceived by being led to infer that "Sulpherb Tablets" are extraordinarily efficacious; then it is further deceived by the fakish "health column" and the concealment of the "patent medicine" character of the nostrums that are recommended. Newspapers that accept such advertisements commit more than an offense against the public health; they are, for a consideration, guilty of imposing on the public's confidence by leading their readers to suppose that the "Health

Talk" or "Doctor's Advice" is a department of the paper, presenting unbiased information on health subjects. The whole "prescription fake" scheme is a disgraceful combination of nostrum exploitation, quackery and low-grade advertising.

Correspondence

ALKALIS IN THE TREATMENT OF INFLUENZA

To the Editor:—It is universally agreed that in perverted metabolism by bacterial invasion, it is the acidosis that is fatal.

When the system is saturated with alkalis, there is poor soil for bacterial growth. The baneful acids may be neutralized by harmless alkalis, and these seem to act almost specifically. I have uniformly employed, and always with good results, potassium citrate and sodium bicarbonate saturation by mouth, bowel and skin.

For the past three weeks, in the present influenza epidemic, I have seen an average of 100 private patients daily. There have been all degrees of frequency and severity, and in some houses as many as six patients.

As is well known in this epidemic, there has been a very high mortality in cases occurring in pregnant women. I have seen three instances of bronchopneumonia, or "lung patches," in pregnant women, two at term, with complete recovery.

Incidentally, I have made the use of the bed-pan imperative, and have absolutely refrained from administering any of the coal-tar series.

I explain to the afflicted persons that they must be patient, and that the fever, aches and pains are inevitable for a few days, and that they must be willing to forego the seductive relief afforded by acetylsalicylic acid (aspirin), acetanilid and other heart depressants. I employ cold applications and the ordinary stimulation by strychnin, aromatic spirits of ammonia, digitalis, quinin, etc. I have always withheld all depressants.

My very successful experience in this epidemic with the saturation of the system with harmless alkalis cannot be dismissed as accidental or unique. It seems to represent an important new medical fact, or one apparently forgotten or generally overlooked. It is so simple and without any possible objection that I urge its immediate trial empirically. Further investigation in laboratory and clinic may follow later.

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PRECAUTIONS ON THE PART OF PHYSICIANS TO AVOID INFLUENZA INFECTION

To the Editor:—I believe THE JOURNAL would do service by suggesting precaution that should be practiced by physicians and others in the sick room with influenza patients.

Large numbers of Pennsylvania's physicians are sickening, I am sure, because they are indifferent to danger and careless about protecting themselves from the spray of moisture from the mouth of the patient.

I am getting stories every day by the score of physicians examining the chests of influenza patients in the old careless fashion, leaning over the bed with the patient talking constantly and with no attempt to have the patient cover the cough or sneeze with a towel or handkerchief. The sick rate among physicians and the death rate are appalling, and I believe physicians are needlessly sacrificing themselves because of their failure to fully appreciate what they ought to do.

I have not had time to prepare an article and have only had time to glance over the series of splendid articles illustrated in THE JOURNAL.

Masks if properly used do offer a certain degree of protection apparently and yet the every-day precaution that we practice in handling the tuberculous should be practiced at all times by careful physicians.

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