

Correspondence

Fatal Poisoning from Strychnin in the Nose

To the Editor:—September 6, about 11:00 a. m., a man in the habit of snuffing cocaine went to a drug store and called for a bottle of that drug. By mistake he was given a bottle of strychnin sulphate, of which, he said, he used about the amount of a pea before he left the drug store. At noon the same day, I was called to see him and he told me that he had just taken a dose of cocaine which was about to kill him; it had never had such effect before. While I was preparing a hypodermic injection, I received a message explaining that the substitution of strychnin for cocaine had just been discovered in the drug store. When I returned to the patient, he was having convulsions and continued to have them off and on until he died at 1:30 p. m., about two and a half hours after having used the poison. I do not remember having seen a report of any case of poisoning from strychnin sulphate in this manner, and I would like to have an opinion on it.

J. A. BURNETT, Marble City, Okla.

COMMENT.—Naturally the placing of a soluble salt of strychnin, like the sulphate, in the nasal cavity affords an opportunity for absorption as great as, or greater than, when swallowed. The dose given can be known only approximately, but must have been several times as large as doses which are known to have proved fatal. The fatal period was about the average. The unfortunate character of the accident needs no comment. In the reported human strychnin poisonings, the poison has been administered by the mouth or hypodermically so far as our observation goes except in two instances: In one case after the application of powdered strychnin to the eye, tetanus followed in three or four minutes (Schuler: *Gaz. méd. de Paris*, 1861, Series 3, xvi, 98). In another instance, the inhalation of steam from a hot mixture containing strychnin caused mild poisoning (Newbecker: *THE JOURNAL A. M. A.*, Jan. 30, 1904, p. 310).

"There's a Reason"

To the Editor:—On my return from an extended trip in the East I was much surprised to learn that *THE JOURNAL* of the American Medical Association, in its issue of August 19, had taken occasion to attack the *American Journal of Clinical Medicine* editorially.

In this editorial the reader is insidiously led to the conclusion that there was a carefully prepared plan on our part, in cooperation with Mr. Post, to collect testimonials for Grape-Nuts and Postum Cereal. That this inference is unjustified could easily have been learned by *THE JOURNAL*, if it had taken the trouble to communicate with me. However, I am glad to give the profession all the facts in the case, and these are as follows:

Some months ago I had the pleasure of a personal interview with Mr. Post. At that time I was impressed by his candor and evident essential honesty, and convinced that he had not for some time been receiving fair treatment at the hands of some of his critics. While I believed, and still believe, that he has made a serious mistake in the character of some of his advertising (and this I took occasion to tell him personally—and he admitted it) I was also convinced that he was being made the victim of unnecessarily bitter attacks. While I would not defend him for advertising his foods as "cures" for disease, I did believe and still believe that the foods themselves are good, and that in advocating simplicity in diet and showing the harmfulness of the caffeine-bearing beverages, he was rendering a real service to the people.

It was this feeling, with the desire to learn exactly how the readers of our journal felt toward Mr. Post and his products, that led me to send letters (we were quoted in *THE JOURNAL* correctly) to quite a number of our subscribers, their names being taken at random. I had decided that whether we should continue carrying the advertisement of the Post products or not was to depend on the character of the replies which we received from this straw vote. As a result of this vote it may interest you to know that we have received and have on file, subject to inspection, about 700

letters in praise of these products, about 500 which are non-committal or indifferent, and about fifty which are commendatory—but with no essential reasons given. We still carry their copy.

Your inference that the purpose of this campaign was to collect testimonials for Mr. Post was an unfortunate mistake. I am frank to say that a few (a mere bagatelle, proportionately) of these letters received were sent to Mr. Post for his inspection (but in every case with the writer's permission); and so far as we know, not one of these has been published.

I sent out these letters to our subscribers in the very kindest spirit, primarily with the purpose of securing the information asked for our own guidance, and with no thought of deceiving or misleading anyone. So far as I can perceive, no man has been injured, but rather the cause of fair dealing between man and man, and the advertisers and the public, has been enhanced thereby. The one mistake I may have made was in failing to make the language of my letters sufficiently "judicial"—or indifferent—in tone.

Your suggestion that we "wish some excuse for participating in the benefits of his (Post) million-dollar advertising campaign" needs no comment. We have carried their business for years and see no reason why we should not continue to do so. Under the circumstances, it hardly seems necessary to state that the question of profit to us was not a factor in this straw vote—not in any sense of the word.

W. C. ABBOTT, Chicago.

COMMENT.—We publish the above "explanation" for what it is worth. The point of our criticism—dismissed by Dr. Abbott in three lines—was that a medical journal, in seeking to learn the attitude of its readers toward certain advertised products, should submit to its subscribers a series of leading questions so worded as, practically, to preclude any but favorable replies. It is not surprising that the answers to these letters sent out by the *American Journal of Clinical Medicine* were favorable to the products; the surprising thing is that there were any letters that were otherwise! The fact that there were nearly as many indifferent and condemnatory replies as there were replies praising the product, would, in view of the wording of the letter, have given pause to anyone who had not prejudged the question. The wish was evidently father to the thought. The letter said, in effect:

We have been advertising Post's products for over ten years. We have always believed they were pure; we have used them and recommended them extensively.

Will you cooperate by giving us your opinion?

Is it any wonder that the majority of the replies were favorable? Would there have been any "cooperation" in an unfavorable reply? Can anyone believe that evidence collected by such means has the slightest value? Of course, as testimonials, these answers doubtless have a distinct commercial value and there is little question that Mr. Post will find a use for those physicians' letters that have been so generously collected and forwarded him. In the famous suit in which Post was condemned to pay *Collier's* \$50,000 for libel, Post was able to produce one favorable opinion of his products from a medical man—just one. Now he will have an abundance. As *Collier's* said, commenting on this, "It seems to us that, on every principle of give and take, the advertising of Postum and Grape-Nuts ought to continue to appear in the *American Journal of Clinical Medicine* for the next thousand years."

Treatment of Rhus Poisoning

To the Editor:—For many years I have known of a certain cure for poisoning from ivy and various species of rhus. This cure could be described briefly as the last thing that was put on. It was very much like the cures for vomiting of pregnancy. The last thing employed in any given case was a specific.

For something over forty years I have suffered from ivy poisoning, on an average, more than once a year. As a fisherman, hunter and horticulturist, no degree of caution sufficed to allow of my escape from ivy poisoning for an entire season when in America.