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1.9 HOUSEKEEPERS' CHATS  
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NOT FOR PUBLICATION

Subject: "Read the Dentifrice Label." Approved by Food and Drug Administration, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

Publication available: Mimeograph of talk itself. "Your Child's Teeth."  
Order from the Children's Bureau, U. S. Department  
of Labor.

--ooOoo--

Bill, the food and drug inspector, has been monopolizing a lot of Uncle Ebenezer's evening time lately at that funny chess game of theirs. When Uncle Ebenezer settles slowly but certainly to the bottom of the easy chair after dinner and announces it's too hot to go anywhere, I know Bill will be along -- just by chance --- in half an hour, and that he and Uncle Ebenezer will sit like two bumps on a couple of logs gazing with a glassy, fixed stare at the chess board until after midnight.

Last night I intercepted Bill at the front door and demanded payment for my forbearance in not practicing on the harmonica while their chess game rushed along at the rate of 3 moves an hour to the usual draw. "Bill," said I, "you haven't given me any facts on 'how to read the label' for months and months. Pay up, now, or I'll take all your chess knights off their horses."

"Aunt Sammy," Bill answered, "I do love to talk about myself and my work... You flatterer. ... You daughter of Eve. ... Sit right down here on the porch and I'll tell you a read-the-label yarn that's fresh in my memory. Here's what Bill told me....."

"We (Bill meant the food and drug inspectors of the Federal Government) once happened on an interstate shipment of 12,000 dozen tubes of toothpaste labeled as an 'adjunct in the treatment of pyorrhea and pus-discharging gums, which cause loose teeth!' The labels also bore statements to the effect that the toothpaste would 'protect teeth from acids which cause decay, and would also make bleeding gums firm, strong, and sound.'

"Aunt Sammy, there are no drugs nor combinations of drugs known to dental science which will, of themselves, perform the services and produce the effects claimed for this product by its label. Aunt Sammy, we made a chemical analysis of a tube of toothpaste from this shipment of 12,000 dozen tubes. The analysis showed that its composition was much like the composition of the usual toothpaste. Therefore, we knew that there was nothing in this lot that would combat the mouth conditions referred to on the label.



"As a matter of fact, Aunt Sammy, the product was essentially worthless for any purpose except as a cleansing agent.

"As a second matter of fact, we seized the shipment.

"As a third matter of fact, that particular toothpaste now has a new label. A new label that is entirely free of claims of curative value."

I broke in on Bill's story to comment that I had seen many claims for dentifrice preparations. I named some of these claims --- that the dentifrice preparations were cleansing agents, could whiten or beautify the teeth, could preserve teeth, could remove film, tartar, or mucin, could correct bad breath, prevent tooth decay, neutralize acidity, harden the gums; that they possessed antiseptic properties that would prevent such diseases as pyorrhea, trench mouth, Vincent's disease, etc.

"Bill," said I, "answer me some questions about those claims. First, do dentifrice preparations of themselves have any value at all in the treatment of pyorrhea, trench mouth, bleeding, spongy, or receding gums, or mouth disorders of that sort?"

"Aunt Sammy, they do not, and this is the concensus of present-day dental opinion."

"Bill, do dentifrice preparations possess any important antiseptic properties?"

"Aunt Sammy, they do not. Their method of use makes it essentially impossible for them to be effective as antiseptics. Even though they should contain an antiseptic, its effect would be very transitory, for they are applied only briefly in the daily cleansings of the teeth."

"Well, then, Bill, what about anti-acid properties, power to prevent tooth decay, to correct bad breath, and so on?"

"Aunt Sammy, the anti-acid properties, if any, are just as transitory as the antiseptic properties. The way a tooth paste can correct bad breath is by masking an unpleasant odor with a more pleasant one. The latter soon disappears and the former reasserts itself. Of itself, no toothpaste can prevent tooth decay. As a cleansing agent it can help mightily."

"Bill, what is there left for dentifrices to do?"

"Some mighty important jobs, Aunt Sammy. They are cleansing agents, as I said. They help to improve the appearance of the teeth by keeping them clean. Cleanliness of the teeth is a proper matter of pride to anyone. And the flashing beauty of white teeth is a distinct asset to any person. Dentifrices can, and do contribute to our personal pride and pulchritude by cleansing the teeth."

"Bill, you mean dentifrices will whiten badly discolored teeth?"

"Not safely, Aunt Sammy, not safely. No preparation can whiten seriously discolored teeth safely and quickly. A few preparations claim on their labels and claim truthfully that they will make yellow teeth white.





But some of these are dangerous for they may contain hydrochloric acid. You will use tooth-cleaning preparations containing hydrochloric acid at your peril, for the acid may injure the delicate enamel of the teeth. Unfortunately, you won't find the presence of hydrochloric acid, in a preparation claiming to whiten teeth, declared on the label, for such use is not covered under the Federal caustic poison act. But my advice to you is that you investigate the composition of a substance, claiming to be a tooth-whitening preparation, before you use it. If your teeth are dark or brown, use a cleansing dentifrice, but do not expect to find a dentifrice that will safely keep them white and pearly like those of your more fortunate neighbor."

"Bill," said I, aggrieved, "I have mighty good teeth and you know it."

"Yes, Aunt Sammy, yes," Bill hastened to apologize, "but I was just saying that 'you' in order to emphasize the dangers of indiscriminate use of tooth-whitening preparations without first knowing their composition. You, Aunt Sammy, won't be tempted to use them. But some of your friends may."

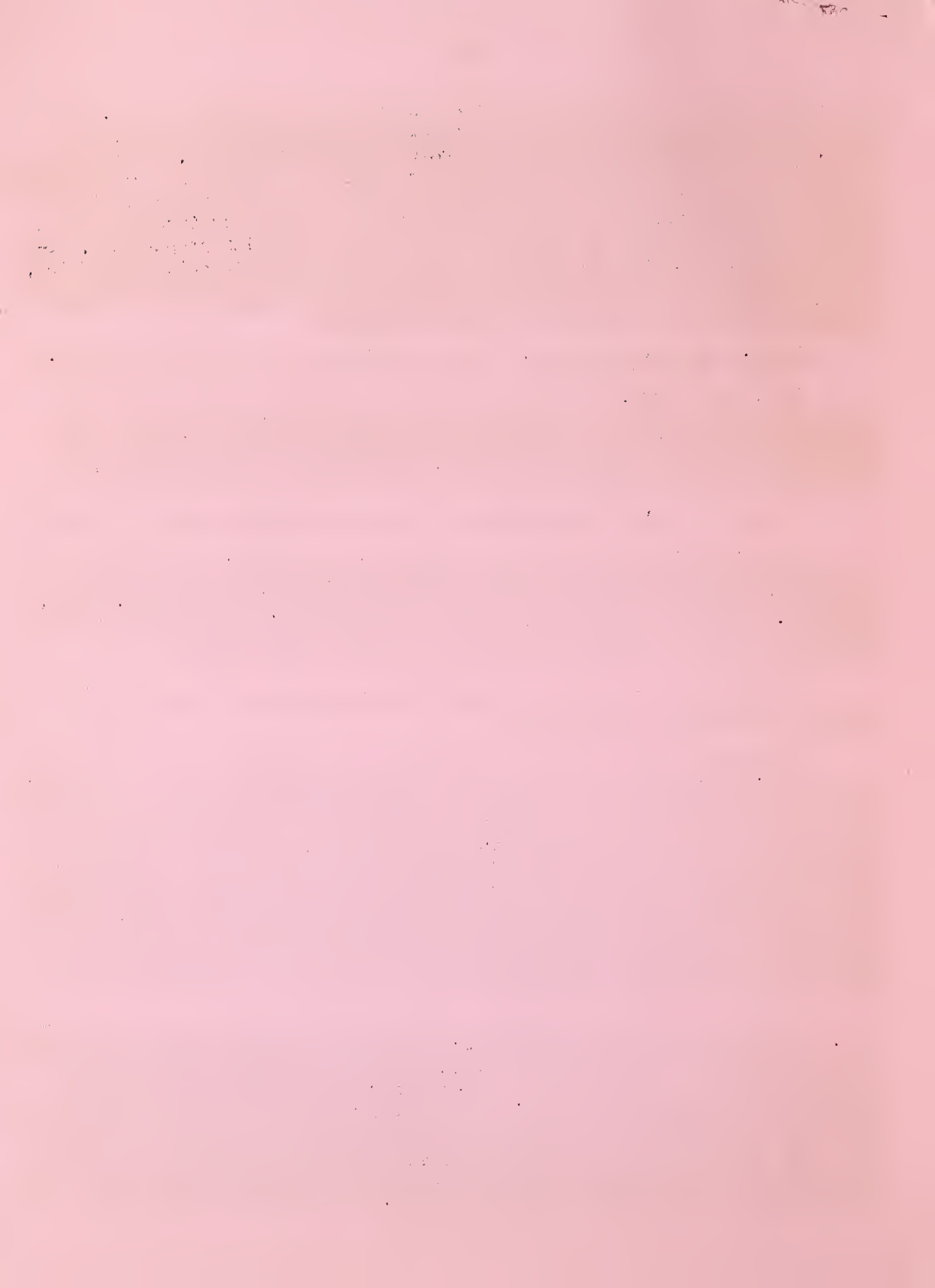
"Bill, tell me," I interrupted, "what are toothpastes made of anyway?"

"Of ingredients quite common in commerce, Aunt Sammy. Such things as precipitated chalk, soap, salt, baking soda, borax, magnesia, glycerine, alcohol, saccharin for sweetening, flavors and medicinal oils for taste, water, and color. Some have a medicinal taste, but that doesn't mean that they have therapeutic merit in treating diseased conditions of the mouth."

"Well what am I, Bill, as a label reader, supposed to remember about labels of dentifrice preparations?"

"Remember, first, that such preparations are valuable only to keep the teeth clean. Remember that they have no magic composition; they are compounded of ingredients ordinary in commerce. Remember that some products may from time to time elude the vigilance of the small staff of food and drug inspectors trying to safeguard your food and drug supplies, and reach the market misbranded with false and fraudulent claims of curative value. Remember that while the Federal Food and Drugs act controls the statements made upon labels or in printed circulars accompanying the products at the time of sale, it does not control statements in advertisements not accompanying the packages. Do not expect any product to produce benefits which it cannot possibly perform. Learn to read the label, Aunt Sammy.

"Your teeth are very valuable assets to your health and pride and comfort. No one knows this fact better than those of us whose grinders have begun to play us false. We wish that we had heeded the sound advice so lavishly given nowadays to eat the proper tooth-building foods. This advice applies especially to children and it can't be repeated too often. By all means, too, keep your teeth clean and by all means use your favorite dentifrice to that end. But don't rely on a dentifrice to correct disease conditions. Your dentist knows how to take care of your teeth and he knows better than anyone else how to treat cases of tooth and mouth disease."





"Bill, that's a great speech," I applauded. I'm proud of you. And grateful to you. Now you go ahead and fritter away your time on that dumb chess game while I try to learn my read the label lesson on dentifrice preparations."

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Tomorrow: Some news about the runabout child.

