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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Thursday, November 19, 1931.

(NOT FOR PUBLICATION)

Subject: "Read The Labels On Food Flavors." Information from the Federal Food and Drug Administration, U.S.D.A.

Publication available: Mimeographed copy of this Housekeepers' Chat.

Bachelor Bill, Uncle Ebenezer's constant chess companion, served warning on me last night.

"Aunt Sammy," Bill announced as he breezed in for the first chess game of the fall season, "you are now a chess widow. I have got a chess uniform and Ebenezer and I are really going into this chess business seriously from now on."

"What on earth is a chess uniform," I wanted to know.

And Bill promptly replied, "A two-pants suit."

"Well, Bill, if I'm going to be a chess widow," I threatened, "you're going to pay for it. You're going to tell me a lot more about how to read the label on the foods and drugs I buy."

Bill, you know, is an inspector for the Federal Food and Drug Administration. He has been at it for some years and he knows the food and drug standards that Federal law requires up one side and down the other.

Well, Bill capitulated and agreed to give me half an hour of information on any sort of food products I named.

I named food flavors.

"A wise choice, Aunt Sammy," Bill told me. "I suppose that you women who buy the family food for all the 120,000,000 people in the United States can be misled more easily in buying food flavors than in buying any other class of food products."

From here on I'm going to try to boil down for you in my briefer period what Bill told me with many a side excursion into the neighborhood gossip during our half hour chat.-- Now then:

"You know, Aunt Sammy, we people in the scientific work of the Government get to be fiends on classification of everything. So I guess we had

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1. The first part of the report deals with the general principles of the theory of the atom.

2. The second part deals with the experimental results obtained by the author.

3. The third part deals with the application of the theory to the spectrum of hydrogen.

4. The fourth part deals with the application of the theory to the spectrum of helium.

5. The fifth part deals with the application of the theory to the spectrum of mercury.

6. The sixth part deals with the application of the theory to the spectrum of sodium.

7. The seventh part deals with the application of the theory to the spectrum of potassium.

8. The eighth part deals with the application of the theory to the spectrum of calcium.

9. The ninth part deals with the application of the theory to the spectrum of strontium.

10. The tenth part deals with the application of the theory to the spectrum of barium.

11. The eleventh part deals with the application of the theory to the spectrum of cesium.

12. The twelfth part deals with the application of the theory to the spectrum of rubidium.

13. The thirteenth part deals with the application of the theory to the spectrum of lithium.

14. The fourteenth part deals with the application of the theory to the spectrum of magnesium.

15. The fifteenth part deals with the application of the theory to the spectrum of zinc.

16. The sixteenth part deals with the application of the theory to the spectrum of cadmium.

17. The seventeenth part deals with the application of the theory to the spectrum of lead.

18. The eighteenth part deals with the application of the theory to the spectrum of bismuth.

19. The nineteenth part deals with the application of the theory to the spectrum of antimony.

20. The twentieth part deals with the application of the theory to the spectrum of arsenic.

better start by classifying food flavors according to the way you may find them on the shelves at your grocery store. Here is the classification:

"(1) Flavoring Extracts. These are proper strength alcoholic preparations of flavoring materials. (2) Terpeneless Extracts; these are made from the concentrated flavoring materials from which certain constituents have been removed, thus permitting of the manufacture of an extract with less alcohol than would be required otherwise. (3) Imitation Extracts; these are solutions of synthetic products which produce a flavor similar to the genuine. (4) Compound Extracts; these are mixtures of genuine extracts with imitation flavors. (5) Powdery substances, such as powdered sugar, in which flavoring material has been incorporated; and (6) Essential Oils, or the products themselves from which genuine extracts are made.

"A standard extract must contain a definite percentage of the appropriate essential oil or other basic material; and you may assume that when a product is labeled on 'Extract' that it is a standard product with the proper amount of flavoring material in it. It is invariably made with alcohol as the solvent and it may, or may not, contain glycerine. On the other hand, if you find a product labeled as a Terpeneless Extract, as is the case only with certain flavors made from the various citrus fruits, you will know that the product is a dilute alcoholic solution of an essential oil from which the terpenes have been eliminated before manufacture into an extract. Federal regulations require these extracts to meet their own particular standard of purity and strength. For the purposes for which they are best fitted, they are desirable products.

"You'll often find the term 'Flavor' on labels of preparations. Generally the word 'Non-alcoholic,' accompanies it. When this word appears either alone or with the word 'extract' it means an alcoholic extract. On the other hand when it appears in conjunction with the term 'non-alcoholic' it defines preparations made with solvents other than alcohol. These may be liquid solvents, oils, glycerine or other products. You must not misunderstand the term 'non-alcoholic' since this expression, when used on labels, just describes the solvent used in making the preparation and has nothing to do with the quality of the finished article. You need ascribe neither superiority nor inferiority to a product labeled 'non-alcoholic'; though in general for most flavoring purposes most housewives think that the alcoholic extracts produce superior results.

"We have a class of flavoring preparations known as 'Emulsions.' Labels sometimes declare products to be emulsions, but such products need not necessarily be so labeled, since if they are called non-alcoholic flavors you have the appropriate basic information. The labels of such products occasionally declare the names of gums or other emulsifying agents used.

"You will find flavoring materials labeled as 'Imitations,' and, as I have already said, the flavoring principles used in these preparations resemble the true flavors, but the flavoring principles consist generally of imitation or synthetic materials made up into various forms with the use of alcohol, or sugar syrup, or mixtures of oils, or water solutions. For example, Vanilla Extract is often imitated. Products such as Vanillin, made synthetically from coal tar, or derived by a chemical process from oil of cloves, and coumarin, a synthetic coal tar product. These are dissolved together in proper proportions and amounts, and a flavoring material similar to Vanilla Extract results. Such a product would be the color of water if it were not artificially colored,

so caramel or burnt sugar color is added to give it the proper color. Such products must be labeled as imitation, ingredients must be stated on the label, and, if artificially colored, a statement to that effect must be made on the label.

"Again, Lemon Extract may be imitated by preparing a solution from the flavoring principles of a grass grown in the East Indies known as lemon grass. This material is called citral, and such an imitation extract must be labeled as an imitation. The fact that it is made from citral must be stated, and, if it is colored, this fact must be shown on the label. Imitation flavors are wholesome products and they serve their own purposes well, but they can be made much more cheaply than genuine flavors and consequently you should be able to buy them at much reduced prices. You must read labels to determine whether you are getting a compound product, that is, a mixture of a real extract with materials which constitute an imitation. For example, a product labeled 'Vanillin, coumarin and vanilla extract' should owe its flavoring character predominatingly to the synthetics, vanillin and coumarin, whereas, if labeled 'Vanilla, vanillin and coumarin extract,' it should have a predominating flavor of true vanilla. In other words, if Vanilla Extract is stated first, you will know the flavoring principle is derived in the larger part from Vanilla Extract.

"If you buy powdery flavoring substances, read the label to determine the nature of the product. It may be ground vanilla beans incorporated in powdered sugar; or it may be a mixture of powdered sugar, or either vanillin or coumarin, or both, which are crystalline substances. If for any of your flavoring purposes you use essential oils, read the label to determine whether they are represented to be pure essential oils or mixed with oils of no flavoring value.

"There is still another class of preparations. They are called 'True Fruit Flavors.' There are some fruits, especially the small fruits, from which it is difficult to secrete the concentrated flavoring principle. Hence for a long time strawberry flavoring material, raspberry flavoring material, and banana flavoring material were made of substances not originating with the fruits at all but wholly in imitation of the flavoring of these fruits. These products were, as you perhaps remember, poor imitations of the real flavor of the genuine fruits. Some of these are still sold. Lately, however, new processes have been developed for the concentration of the general flavoring from these fruits and these concentrate preparations are being made up into liquid household preparations which are sold to you as true fruit flavors.

"Sometimes flavoring labels declare products superior to the product of the legal standard in quality and strength. My advice is, not to pay more money for such a product, for a product of standard quality and strength will meet all your requirements for flavoring purposes. Again; you may find on labels a continuation of the old practice of multiplying the letter 'X'. In the days before food laws were enforced, it became a practice in the flavoring material industries, for certain manufacturers to refer to their various quality of products as double X, triple X, etc., as representing varying degrees of strength; and I have seen sometimes as many as six or seven X's in a row on containers holding flavoring material. These X's do not mean anything, so whenever you see them you may disregard them.

"Aunt Sammy, I warn you again to watch carefully and compare the quantity of contents statement on flavoring material labels. There are some flavoring extract labels on which a declaration of the volume is made in terms of drams,

instead of fluid ounces. Everyone knows that 16 fluid ounces make a pint; but no one is expected to know how many drams make a pint, and so when a manufacturer puts on a label that his product contains, for example, six drams -- and I have recently seen several extract labels so marked -- it is my opinion that he wishes to keep from the buyer the knowledge as to just how much material is in the product. Six drams, Aunt Sammy, is only three-fourths of one fluid ounce, for each dram is only one-eighth of a fluid ounce. Consequently, if you buy a bottle of flavoring extract labeled as 6 drams, you will be getting less than one-half of the standard amount usually sold, which is 2 ounces. And, moreover, at the present time very small packages, that is, packages containing less than one fluid ounce, are not actually required to be marked with the quantity of contents. If the quantity of contents is declared inconspicuously, or if any essential statement on the label appears to have been printed in such fashion as to indicate an attempt to hide it, you will be justified in concluding that someone is trying to deceive you."

Well, I could tell by the way Bill was getting restive when he reached this point of handing out good stiff advice to me that I really should turn him loose for the chess game. Which, as little Benny says, I did.

Tomorrow: "New Ways with the Sunday Vegetables."

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