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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Release Monday, March 8, 1937

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "POISON!" Facts from the Federal Food and Drug Administration, United States Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C.

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Homemakers, we start the week with a warning, from the Federal Food and Drug Administration. A warning -- and two items from the daily news. I shall read the items first; the warning will come last.

Here's the first piece of news, which our correspondent clipped from the daily paper:

"DRINKS BOTTLE OF IODINE, THINKING IT COUGH CURE. Man Then Runs to Police Station and Gets Antidote." And here's the rest of the story:

"John F. ran into a police station about 8 o'clock Saturday, scared and in pain. As he was walking along the street, he said, he began to cough, so he took a vial from his pocket and drained it. He thought, he said, that he had slipped a small bottle of cough medicine in his pocket when he left home, and it was not until he had swallowed the contents that he looked at the label and discovered he had taken iodine by mistake. While waiting for an ambulance, the matron at the police station beat up some eggs in milk and made Mr. F. drink the mixture. It had a good effect on him and when the doctor arrived from the hospital, he said it would not be necessary to take the man to the hospital."

So much for the first item. It has a happy ending. I wish I could say as much for this second item, from the same paper, incidentally, as the first:

"WOMAN MISTAKES POISON FOR MEDICINE AND DIES. Picks Wrong Tin From Shelf in Dark Bathroom." And here are the facts:

"Mrs. Florence Y., thirty years old, reached for a tin of sodium bicarbonate late Saturday afternoon in the dark bathroom of her home, and by mistake took down a container of sodium fluoride, used sometimes as an insecticide. She took only a swallow of the poisonous solution before she discovered her error, but it was fatal, in spite of antidotes administered by neighbors and a physician. A police emergency squad tried unsuccessfully for forty minutes to revive her."

And that's the second story. Now, quoting our correspondent directly: "When I showed these two clippings to Doctor Dunbar of the Federal Food and Drug Administration, he shook his head sadly, and reminded me that a bottle of poison in a bathroom medicine closet or in the kitchen is just as deadly a weapon as a loaded gun. And as for poisonous insecticides --

"Several Christmases ago, Doctor Dunbar told me, a woman who carried

on a small local trade in baked goods baked nine fruit cakes. Two of the cakes were cut and eaten, and the people who ate them were very ill indeed. Their illness was promptly reported to the Food and Drug Administration, which immediately investigated and found that the fruit cakes were heavily seasoned with arsenic. Further investigation disclosed the fact that a bag containing an insecticide had been left in the cellar, within easy reach of the woman's children. The true inside story of how the arsenic found its way into the flour bag will probably never be known, but all the clues indicate that one of the children, wanting a bag to play with, emptied the insecticide, which looked like flour to him, into the flour bag in the pantry.

"This story has a happy ending, for the Food and Drug inspector was able to locate the seven fruit cakes that were shipped out of town -- one to Canada -- before any one opened them.

"And then there was the poisoned-sugar episode. The poisoned sugar, which killed two people and made thirty others violently ill, acquired its deadly load of arsenic in the local grocery store, where a clerk accidentally emptied a package of arsenical rat poison into the sugar bin. But you've heard enough," concludes our correspondent, "to put you on your guard if you have any insecticides about the place. Just take nothing for granted -- if poisons of any kind are within the reach of children, get them out of reach. If you're keeping any poison substances in the medicine cabinet, see that they can be identified, even in the dark. Better yet, don't keep them in the medicine cabinet where they can be confused with ordinary remedies. An old-fashioned method of calling attention to a bottle of poison is to stick a pin in the cork. And -- to use the man who swallowed iodine instead of cough medicine as an example of what not to do -- read the label on your medicine before you take a dose of it. Mr. F., you will remember, took a vial from his pocket and drained it. . . and it was not until he had swallowed the contents that he looked at the label and discovered he had taken iodine by mistake." Labels are to be read before taking," observes our correspondent.

"I promised to end this report with a warning," she concludes. "It seems superfluous, after the facts you've just heard, to add a word of caution. But I'd rather be superfluous than sorry -- so if you have any poisons about the house -- see that they are hidden from children, and from careless adults who will not read the labels designed to protect them."

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