

PUBLIC HEALTH

Bill Would Prevent Sale Of Poisons in Disguise

Proposed Pure Food Act Contains Teeth Where Present Law Is Helpless, and Regulates Sales of More Articles

EDITOR'S NOTE: *This is the first of two articles discussing the New Deal's proposed Pure Food and Drug Law. They are written by Dr. Frank Thone, Science Service staff writer.*

ONE OF the outstanding items of "New Deal" legislation which will come before Congress when it convenes in January is the new Pure Food and Drug Bill, which will be introduced into the Senate by Sen. Royal S. Copeland of New York. Committee hearings are scheduled to begin on Dec. 7, and already the forces pro and con are being mustered, and preliminary skirmishes of words between advocates and opponents have taken place.

Since it is an open secret that Mrs. Roosevelt is actively crusading for the measure, which was written at President Roosevelt's direction in the office of Dr. Rexford Tugwell, Assistant Secretary of Agriculture, support both formidable and colorful can be expected, against the strong opposition which has already shown itself in some quarters.

The bill goes far beyond the pioneer law obtained at the hands of Congress in 1906 by the veteran crusader, the late Dr. Harvey B. Wiley. Among other things, it provides for the establishment of standards for all food products, it directly forbids the offering of medicines as "cures" for certain diseases, it penalizes false or misleading advertising as the present law penalizes false or misleading labels.

Cosmetics Included

But perhaps the most marked innovation in the Copeland bill is the inclusion of cosmetics along with food and drugs. These were omitted from consideration in the 1906 act, as of insufficient importance to merit legislators' attention. Yet it is worthy of note that in spite of the chances for humorous treatment of this section of the bill very few jokes have yet been offered. The cosmetic trade has got into the billion-dollar class since the simple, unrouged days of 1906, and important money like that isn't a joking matter now.

Besides, as defined in the bill, cosmetics include a great many things besides powder, lipstick, eyebrow pencil and suchlike aids to feminine charm. The term includes "all substances and preparations intended for cleansing or altering the appearance of, or promoting the attractiveness of, the person." That is, for the purpose of the new bill, soap and toothpaste and shaving cream and face lotion and a lot of other things used by the masculine half of the household are cosmetics. It is to protect the interests of the public along this very extensive front, as well as to safeguard the legitimate manufacturers of toilet articles against "chiselers" who invade their industry, that the cosmetics section has been added, to make the legislation a Pure Food, Drug and Cosmetics Bill.

Poisons on Dressing Table

Depilatories that make you bald, eyelash dyes that make you blind, hair restorers that make you lingeringly sick with lead poisoning. These are some of the perilous stuffs that you can have on your dressing table now, but which you will be protected against, if the new bill is enacted into law.

Such deadly drugs are not at all universal among cosmetics. The older, more reliable cosmetic manufacturers realize that it is not good business to have their customers poisoned or disfigured, and strongly reprobate the "chiseler" concerns that enter the market with poisonous beautifiers, sell a lot of them by means of a powerful campaign of advertising, and then fold up and vanish with their swag, leaving the more decent firms to bear the burden of public disapproval and suspicion for acts of which they were never guilty.

Some of the poisons used in illegitimate cosmetics are little known and seldom used; others are as old as the Borgias and return to the market again and again under different aliases.

Among the less known of these harmful substances is thallium acetate. It was used not long ago in a depilatory

cream, which is no longer manufactured or advertised, although stocks of it still exist on drugstore shelves and jars still stand on dressing tables. It was a most effective depilatory; it not only removed superfluous hair, but it got into the blood stream and attacked hair wherever it found it. Many of the unhappy users of this preparation lost every hair they possessed. Before a flood of damage suits, the manufacturers of this disfiguring stuff hastily quit business, leaving no assets against which judgment could be levied.

Dangerous Compounds

Another poison, even worse in its effects, is a certain aniline dye, still used in one type of eyelash stain. If it accidentally gets into the eye, it may peel off the first coat of the eyeball, and perhaps also the second, even causing total blindness. It may also cause horrible disfigurement of the skin around the eyes.

More familiar and more commonly used poisons are lead compounds, used in hair restorers, and mercury salts, used in skin bleaches. These may work their way through the skin and enter the blood stream, which carries them to the internal organs. Lead and mercury both cause extremely stubborn and highly distressful poisoning, which may result fatally in aggravated cases.

Chemists at the Food and Drug Administration of the Department of Agriculture smile a bit grimly over the irony of warning motorists against letting even a small quantity of lead-containing gasoline get on their skins, only to have them go home and put a lead-containing hair remedy on their heads.

When the Copeland bill comes up for hearings before the Senate committee and for debate on the floor, the hottest

THE LIVING CELL

an address by

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York University

Wednesday, December 6,
at 4:35 p. m., Eastern Stand-
ard Time, over Stations of
the Columbia Broadcasting
System. Each week a promi-
nent scientist speaks over
the Columbia System under
the auspices of Science
Service.

bombardment will come from certain sectors of the proprietary medicine trade. They have already trained their guns on Assistant Secretary Tugwell, taking full advantage of the opportunity for sarcasm offered by the fact that he is a professor.

The crux of the fight will turn largely on the "misrepresentation" question. At present, misrepresentations are forbidden on the actual labels of the products, but makers can make any claims they wish over the radio, on billboards, in direct-by-mail or printed advertising. The new bill would forbid all that, with stiff penalties for violations.

Inadequate Legal Means

The proprietary-remedy opponents of the new bill claim that such additional precautions are unnecessary, that there are legal means at present adequate to punish makers of false claims. There are legal means, but they are hardly adequate, for the courts have ruled that to prove fraud in a claim for curative powers in a preparation offered as a remedy, it must be proved not only that the stuff is not a remedy, but that the maker knows that it is not, and that he has made his claims with the deliberate intention to deceive and defraud. In practice, it has often taken years of watchful waiting and tedious litigation to make a case against the baldest kind of fake "cures" for tuberculosis, cancer, diabetes and other incurable diseases. The record hardly bears out the claims of the bill's opponents as to the adequacy of present legal redress.

There are many teeth both sharp and long a-bristle on the jaws of the bill, to snap up predatory medicine-men who fatten on the pathetic faith of sick folk, but perhaps the neatest row is one clause that simply classifies as automatically false "any advertisement of a drug representing it directly or by ambiguity or inference to have any effect in the treatment" of a long list of diseases, including such favorites of drug-vending quacks as: blood poison, cancer, diabetes, dropsy, paralysis, "sex weakness," tuberculosis and tumors. If the supporters of the bill can get that section through the gauntlet it will undoubtedly have to run, a lot of fake medicine men will find their occupation gone!

The bill also provides that if a preparation is merely a palliative for a disease, it must be so mentioned, plainly, in the advertising. Furthermore, if a preparation contains any habit-forming drug, a warning to that effect must appear on the label. Finally, names of in-

gredients used in all preparations must be given, and they must be given in plain English. The great American privilege of self-medication will be preserved, but you are going to get a chance to know what you are swallowing.

Science News Letter, December 2, 1933

AERONAUTICS

Stratosphere Flight Successful for Science

THE STRATOSPHERE flight of Lieutenant-Commander T. G. W. Settle and Major Chester L. Fordney was a complete success from the scientific standpoint, a preliminary examination of the data indicates. In a statement to Science Service, Prof. Arthur H. Compton of the University of Chicago, gives high credit to their efforts and skill, and also to the painstaking preparation of the cosmic ray apparatus by Dr. R. J. Stephenson. Definite results are not yet ready for announcement, Prof. Compton said. Considerable time will have to be devoted to the study and analysis of the data before their full significance can be put into form for publication.

The altitude reached on the Settle-Fordney flight is about 8,000 feet more than that of the August, 1932, Piccard ascension and about 1,000 feet less than that reported recently from Russia. (*SNL*, Oct 14, '33, p. 245). The latter figure, however, has not been approved under international requirements, while the other two have been approved.

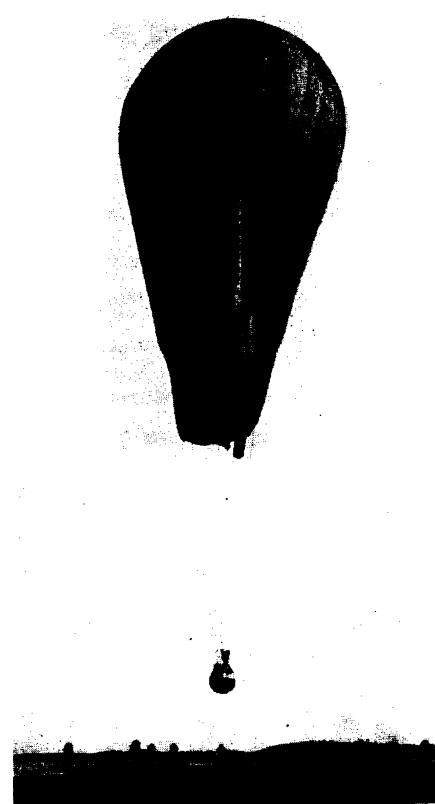
Science News Letter, November 18, 1933

SEISMOLOGY

Earth Shakes Severely In Region Usually Quiet

THE EARTHQUAKE that kept seismographs throughout the country trembling Monday evening, Nov. 20, was centered under water in Baffin Bay between Baffin Island and Greenland, an unusual location for so severe a shock which would have been very destructive had it occurred on populated land. History does not record previous severe quakes in that area.

Location was determined by the U. S. Coast and Geodetic Survey, using reports wired Science Service from seismological observatories in this country, Canada, England and India. The epi-



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GOING UP AT AKRON

The Century of Progress stratosphere balloon is shown taking off from the Akron airport Monday morning, Nov. 20, on its successful flight. The first flight, attempted Aug. 5 in Chicago, resulted in an unexpected landing a few minutes after the take-off when a valve failed to work. After leaving Akron, the balloon reached an official height of 61,327 feet and returned to earth near Bridgeton, N. J., in the late afternoon on the same day of the take-off.

center was at about 73 degrees north latitude and 69 degrees west longitude and the time of origin was 6 hours 21.5 minutes p. m., Eastern Standard Time.

The shock was so severe that it was recorded on sensitive magnetic instruments at the U. S. Coast and Geodetic Survey Observatory, Cheltenham, Md., even though these instruments are not designed for recording earthquakes.

Earthquake experts at Kew Observatory, London, suggest that there must have been an immense slippage of submarine rock to cause the disturbance.

Science News Letter, December 2, 1933