Physiologic Clinkers

One reason why the professional study of science in general, and medicine in particular, has failed to win public applause and gather popular support in larger measure than it does at present lies in the distortions and misrepresentations to which this department of learning has all too often been subjected. The quack and the impostor make no sincere pretense of adhering strictly to the known in heralding their claims; the pseudoscientist usually dresses his propaganda in a variety of raiment that may include ignorance, erroneous belief and mere conjecture. All too often, even the reputed scientist is found supporting a doctrine that is dangerously near uncertainty of demonstration, or rests at best on the basis of inadequate investigation.

When the out-and-out fraud is perpetrated we do not hesitate to assail the perpetrator. The Propaganda for Reform supported by the American Medical Association is frank and unrelenting in its attacks on such persons as nostrum venders and their ilk. Even the public can usually appreciate the propriety and benefit of these efforts to eradicate a harmful evil. Criticisms of the food faker, the health faddist and similar types of pseudoscientists usually find a less sympathetic hearing, possibly because the man in the street is unable to distinguish between the language of these uncritical if not unscrupulous propagandists and that of the honest devotee of science. As for the unweighed or unguarded statements of the latter, they are often received as the dictum of “authority.” Who among us can always discriminate between the offhand remark and the well reasoned belief of an “expert” in science?

The time has come when those interested in the dignity of science should protest, wherever it seems desirable, against any semblance of finality or any assumption of authority in unwarranted statements of those who trade on scientific investigations…. Let us not overlook the more subtle forms of questionable information such as recently appeared in the alleged remarks of a president of one of the prosperous medical cults. Attacking what he termed “food drunkards,” he was quoted widely as saying:

“The American diet of bread and meat and potatoes, topped off with sweets, is the cause of more spinal curvature and joint deformation than any other one thing. If congress would place a tax of a dollar a pound on sugar, the national health would show an immediate improvement. As for bread and meat and potatoes, they are too heavy and concentrated, and form clinkers in the system.”

It is, of course, true that bread and meat are “concentrated foods” when compared with fruits and vegetables in general. However, few foods in the entire dietary of man show as high a coefficient of digestibility as do the items which the “drugless” food “expert” has so glibly condemned. What, then, is meant by “clinkers in the system” in the case of these foods? Surely not indigestible residues. Studies in nutrition belie such an answer. Or are there perhaps “clinkers” in the metabolism—some half oxidized fragment of an amino-acid or glucose? Bread, the backbone of our national dietary, produces physiologic clinkers? Bosh! And, yet, a little physiologic knowledge is a dangerous thing—in the hands of a clinker expert.

Carbonated Waters

A press sheet just received, issued by the Publicity Bureau of the American Bottlers of Carbonated Beverages, is a plea for the giving of soft drinks to young children and an attempt to combat “a prejudice held by some persons” against this product:

“Carbon dioxid, used in the manufacture of carbonated beverages, long has been recognized as an aid to digestion and as having valuable germicidal qualities. A fact not so well known is that mother’s milk also contains 10 per cent. carbonic gas by volume—proof that Nature realizes the health-giving qualities of CO₂.”

Reasoning from the fact that mother’s milk contains sugar, water and carbon dioxid, the inspired publicist man continues:

“Thus it is seen that three—and the main three—component parts of a carbonated beverage are in accordance with Nature’s own formula for infant food. To these the manufacturer of carbonated beverages adds a fruit flavor with its vitamins and cell-building elements.”

This paragraph and the one that follows are noteworthy not only for their absolute disregard of proved fact, but for their dangerous implied recommendations:

“A carbonated beverage is a food. It is recognized and regulated as such by law. An average bottle gives more food value than a slice of meat or a slice of bread—its energy immediately available with no tax on the digestion.”

How preposterous that it should be necessary to advertise such a staple as ordinary soda water, not on its merit as a sweet, cool drink but as a stimulating, nourishing food substance! Is there no limit to the extent to which the public is to be deluded, misguided and exploited by uncontrolled and selfish commercial propaganda?