

cerning mineral salts and vitamins would be exploited to the public by manufacturers who would not hesitate to exaggerate the qualities of their wares in order to increase their sales, the Committee on Foods was established to do a similar work in this field.

Unquestionably this philanthropic work on the part of the American Medical Association has meant vast savings in health and life, and a saving of money to the American people. Much of the work of the Consumers' Research and similar organizations is based on this pioneer work by the American Medical Association. It should again be emphasized that no manufacturer is permitted to pay one cent in relationship to the examination of his product and that no member of the public is ever charged for the information that is supplied. The money necessary to carry on this work is made by the publications of the American Medical Association, including principally *The Journal of the American Medical Association*.

Moreover, from the first, the work of these councils and bureaus has been given adequate support through the publicity department of the American Medical Association, through all of its periodicals, and through the absolutely consistent refusal to accept the advertising of any products that could not meet the standards of the various committees and councils.

It must be realized that the Food and Drugs Act protects the consumer so far as the package of the product is concerned, but bears no relationship to advertising separate from the package. This arrangement has made necessary the work of these councils. It is conceivable that the passage of new food and drugs legislation like that now proposed, which plans to control claims made in advertising as well as claims made on the package, will give the consumer the protection needed.

## THE WORK OF THE BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

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The Bureau of Investigation of the American Medical Association is an outgrowth or by-product of the Council on Pharmacy and Chemistry, although the Bureau has no connection with the Council. The Council on Pharmacy and Chemistry was brought into being in 1905 for the purpose of subjecting to scientific scrutiny the innumerable proprietary medicines that were offered to the medical profession for prescription purposes and passing on to the profession the results of such investigations. As the medical profession awoke to the way in which it had been deceived and humbugged by the exploiters of unscientific proprietaries, they began also to take an interest in those crude proprietary medicines known colloquially but incorrectly as "patent medicines"—that is, package medicines, usually of secret composition, sold to the public for the self-treatment of self-diagnosed ailments. Repeated and insistent requests for information coming first from physicians and later from the

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public brought into existence the activity of the American Medical Association that is now known as the Bureau of Investigation.

Twenty-five years ago it was a rare thing for the Bureau to receive an inquiry from a layman. Today letters from laymen run into thousands annually. During the past few years the authors of certain school and college text-books on such subjects as General Science, Civic Science, Biology, Hygiene, etc., have incorporated in their publications material dealing with the nostrum evil and quackery as one of the health phases of community life. Some of these text-books urge the student to write to the Bureau of Investigation for information and to obtain supplementary reading and study the books and pamphlets prepared and issued by the Bureau. Each letter received is answered and, whenever possible, informative material sent to its writer.

In addition to receiving letters from individual laymen asking for information about specific nostrums or quacks, and from college and high school students seeking data for use in their classes, there is another phase of the Bureau's work that one hears little about, but which is having a far-reaching influence. For years those interested in truthful advertising have kept in close touch with the Bureau of Investigation and have sought from it information that could be obtained from no other source. The National Better Business Bureau and affiliated local Better Business Bureaus have been in close coöperation with the Bureau of Investigation since its inception. Many advertising managers of newspapers and magazines seek information from the Bureau of Investigation in an attempt to keep the advertising pages of their publications as free as possible from objectionable medical "copy." Requests for information from such sources come in daily. The influence that the Bureau of Investigation is exerting in this way will never be generally known and is appreciated only by those who are thoroughly familiar with its daily work.

Another class from which the Bureau receives many inquiries is laymen who have written municipal, state, or federal officials for information that they assumed these officials could furnish. Instance: Some widely-advertised fake is exploited, we shall say, from Chicago. A layman reading an advertisement wishes to make some investigation before parting with his money, and he writes to the Department of Health of the City of Chicago. That department notifies him that it is not in a position to answer his inquiry and refers the letter to the Bureau of Investigation of the American Medical Association, which sends the information requested, if it has such information—and it usually has.

Again: A group of quacks is operating in a certain state and a resident of that state, impressed with the plausibility of the advertising but still skeptical, writes to his State Board of Health for information regarding the quacks. The board replies that it has no information regarding these people and suggests that the correspondent write to the Bureau of Investigation of the American Medical Association. Or: A "patent medicine" swindle, national in scope, interests a layman who writes to the federal authorities at Washington for information about it. He is told

that they cannot give him any information but that the American Medical Association has a department that investigates questions of this sort, and it is suggested that he write to the Bureau of Investigation.

Then there are letters that come directly to the Bureau of Investigation from municipal, state and federal officials themselves seeking information on products or individuals coming within the scope of the department's activities. Conversely, the Bureau plays an important part in bringing to the attention of state and federal officials schemes and methods that seem to be a menace to the public health, a violation of the law, or both.

The Director of the Bureau prepares articles on "patent medicines," quacks, medical fads and fakes and other phases of pseudo-medicine, and these are published weekly in *The Journal of the American Medical Association*. The material is reprinted in inexpensive pamphlet form, each pamphlet dealing with a group, such as "Consumption Cures," "Cancer Cures," "Epilepsy Cures," "Cosmetics," etc. More than two million pamphlets have gone out to the general public and the medical profession. Later the same material is incorporated in the book "Nostrums and Quackery," of which two volumes have been issued. The first volume had two editions, the first edition appearing in the latter months of 1911 and the second edition coming off the press in December, 1912. The second volume was issued in the latter part of 1921. It is a book of some 800 pages, containing none of the material that appears in the first volume, but having a comprehensive cumulative index giving references to articles in both volumes. It is not too much to say that Volumes I and II of "Nostrums and Quackery" together comprise a veritable encyclopedia on the nostrum evil and quackery.

In addition to the books and pamphlets, a number of educational posters, dealing with various phases of the nostrum evil and quackery, have also been prepared. The first of these were prepared at the time that the Bureau had an exhibit at the International Congress on Hygiene and Demography in 1912. Health officials, recognizing their educational value, immediately began making requests for copies. As a result of this demand, many additional posters have been prepared, covering practically every phase of "patent medicine" exploitation and quackery. They are being used today at health exhibits, county fairs, state fairs, health expositions, "health weeks," and are also used in schools and colleges.

Supplementing the posters, there are a number of stereopticon slides, originally prepared for the use of the Director of the Bureau in giving illustrated talks on quacks and nostrums. A demand for such slides on the part of physicians, health officials and others interested in the public health resulted in a collection of slides being made, so arranged that they themselves tell the entire story ("legend slides" being interpolated between "illustrative slides") or, without the use of the "legend slides," for lecture purposes. These slides are available either for rental or purchase at or below cost. In addition, the Director of the Bureau gives a limited number of

illustrated talks on the "patent medicine" problem and on those cosmetics whose use may involve some health hazard.

The Bureau collects its information through (a) original investigations often supplemented by analytical work done in the Chemical Laboratory of the American Medical Association or in other high-class laboratories; (b) data received from federal sources (the Food and Drug Administration of the United States Department of Agriculture, post-office fraud orders, Federal Trade Commission, etc.) as well as from state and municipal boards of health; (c) information published in technical and other journals, both domestic and foreign and (d) reports of special commissions, etc.

In brief, the Bureau of Investigation is a clearing house for information on the nostrum evil, quackery and allied subjects. It is doing a work that is done by practically no other agency, a work that theoretically belongs to the state, using the word "state" in its broadest sense. Unfortunately, the exigencies of politics make it well-nigh impossible for health agencies to tell unpleasant truths when these involve huge vested interests. Nevertheless, if the public's health is to be served, these truths must be told. The medical profession of America, recognizing this fact, has assumed this responsibility and is discharging it through the Bureau of Investigation.

Naturally, the work of the Bureau arouses widespread opposition on the part of certain proprietary medicine interests and of quacks and charlatans whose methods may be dealt with in the Bureau's articles. Such opposition not infrequently expresses itself in libel suits. Many such suits have been brought against the American Medical Association, demanding amounts that total many millions. In the more than twenty-five years of the Association's work, both through its Council on Pharmacy and Chemistry and its Bureau of Investigation, only two of the many suits that have been brought against the Association have come to trial. In one—that involving a large "patent medicine" concern in a southern state—the suit resulted in what has sometimes been called a contemptuous verdict in favor of the plaintiff. The American Medical Association was assessed one cent damages and the plaintiff had to pay his own costs. In the other case, that of an individual exploiting an alleged cure for cancer who sued the Association because he had been called a quack, the jury decided that the American Medical Association was quite justified in its characterization.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Both these cases were tried in the federal courts, the first in Chicago and the second at Davenport, Iowa.