

Fraud Fighters

RKO PATHE, INC. PRESENTS
THIS IS AMERICA

FRAUD FIGHTERS

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Buried here is a man who died before his time. His grave, a monument to ignorance and fraud. There was little to be done about John Martin's stupidity, but ultimately, there was an answer to another man's deceit. John Martin, who clipped an ad and sent away for a bottle of medicine, died of a common disease. And yet, you might also say he was murdered. Murdered as surely as (if) the deed had been done by a bullet or knife.

But John Martin (deceased) was not the only one who had seen that ad. It also came to the attention of some interested people in the Food and Drug Administration in Washington, operating under the Federal Security Agency. Its aims: to combat filth and fraud in our food products, and to guarantee as best it can that medicines and cosmetics not only contain what the makers say they contain, but do what the makers claim they'll do.

THE TRUTH ABOUT REDUCING DRUGS

And so, to a bureau official, comes an ad clipped from a newspaper. "Relief, at last! A remedy for diabetes, arthritis, kidney disorders and..." Well, it was a suspiciously long list of guarantees, and a matter for the nearest regional office to check into. A network of 16 district stations covers the country, and from the New York office, inspector Kennedy, starting out with only a small advertisement, launches the chain of events which will determine how much validity, if any, there is in the claims of a preparation called "Elixirex".

In a small industrial city, inspector Kennedy locates the manufacturer. But his wife says he's out of town. Be gone two weeks, perhaps. Maybe a month. Sure! She'll show him where the Elixirex is made. It's right back in the garage.

The Food and Drug Administration, FDA, is constantly ferreting out products manufactured under filthy and unsanitary conditions. But at that moment, this is not Kennedy's primary objective. He subsequently asks the woman for a list of her husband's customers. But she insists that she knows nothing about any such list. Wouldn't even know where to look for one.

But Inspector Kennedy doesn't wait for his man to return. Like skinning a cat, there is more than one way to round down evidence. So Kennedy sets out on some tedious legwork. Starting with a local trucking company, he tries to uncover shipping orders to distributors, or even individual orders, which, to avoid postal involvements, often are sent a bottle or two at a time by express.

After going through mountains of records, his patience is finally rewarded. He finds half a dozen orders, three of which are in his own district.

Now begins the second phase of Inspector Kennedy's task: the gathering of evidence that will stand up in court, if necessary, proof that Elixirex was bought and used.

Yes, she has used it regularly, this lady told him in another town. Best thing she'd found yet for her arthritis. Matter of fact, she's just finished the bottle, and has to send away for another.

ENTERING ELMSFORD

Two days later, Kennedy makes a real strike.

Her husband had been using Elixirex regularly, said Mrs. John Martin. But Mr. Martin had died three weeks ago. He'd been taking Elixirex for diabetes, had given up his insulin injections for this simplified sure-shot cure-all. He hadn't consulted his doctor, of course.

Kennedy, sealing the remnants as evidence, assigns a sample number, and identifies the seal with his initials. But the word of the wife of a deceased is not enough. A chain of evidence must then be linked to include a Photostatted copy of a death certificate. The official cause of death: diabetes.

And now, the Food and Drug people want to know: what is Elixirex? What's in it? In every district station is a battery of crack chemists and micro analysts who fight the battle against filth and fraud. To one of these comes Elixirex.

FEDERAL SECURITY AGENCY FOOD & DRUG ADMINISTRATION

The magic formula to relieve sickness and pain turns out to be nothing more than a mixture of water and an alcoholic extract of certain herbaceous weeds that grow in profusion in the maker's backyard. It is instantly clear to the district chief that Elixirex is a flagrant violation of the law. But it must be decided officially. Before he can issue a citation against the manufacturer, the evidence must be weighed by medical officers in Washington.

Here, Food and Drug physicians consider the matter from a purely medical view. What, according to a consensus of the group, will this mixture do for any of the following: diabetes, arthritis, or any of the aches and pains it guarantees to cure? The answer is a flat, unequivocal "nothing".

The law moves swiftly. The maker had a chance to show cause why he should not be prosecuted. But there is little he can do to refute the evidence. The maker receives a year in jail and a stiff fine. Too late to help John Martin, but not too late to protect the lives and health of others.

And so, another result of bureau vigilance rests among the rogues' gallery of typical frauds brought to book. To look at this display you would think, the nation is susceptible to anything. Unfortunately, there is opportunity to prey on the ignorant and unsuspecting. People who cannot afford or who spurn a doctor's advice are easy marks for extravagant claims or weird devices. They have as much effect as a spell cast by a witch doctor.

The inventor of this electrical gimmick claims great healing qualities for colored lights. Just bask in the glow your misery calls for and you're as good as new. It's almost unbelievable that he sold thousands of these.

A cheese distributor did a brisk business in imported Swiss. Or at least the label said it was imported. He wound up getting a longer trip than the cheese took.

Now, curbing violations takes a lot of coordination of department forces. The planning division in Washington plots investigations on a geographical and time basis, so that representative plans are checked regularly in every area. Even such things as economic trends play a part. A crop failure due to weather, for example, puts the agency on the alert against inferior products going into canned or bottled goods.

OFFICE MEMORANDUM – UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

FREEZING CONDITIONS REPORTED IN CITRUS AREA

Inspectors are authorized to enter without advanced notice a Food or Drug plant doing interstate business. Virtually all have college degrees in a science such as chemistry, bacteriology or biology. At fishing ports, the distributor never knows when his frozen fillet line will be tested. A single whiff will tell the trained inspector if this is one that should have got away.

Nothing takes precedence over FDA in deciding what shall enter the country from abroad.

A sample of every shipment is examined. Here, olives are being selected at random.

If there is anything foreign besides the rum in these bottles, this candling process will reveal it.

Expert tea testers who have devoted a lifetime to their work set minimum standards for all brands.

In Washington, meanwhile, is a tremendous laboratory, which not only backs up the corps of inspectors, but constantly pursues projects of its own.

FOOD & DRUG ADMINISTRATION DIVISION OF MICROBIOLOGY MICROANALYTICAL SECTION

Here, in the division of microbiology, are samples of virtually every growing thing known to man, through which analysts can determine to almost fantastic lengths what foreign elements may be in a suspected product. Literally anything can be detected. From a microscopic fragment of a fly's wing down to a wispy miniscule of a dandelion puff.

Here, too, they decide on standards for such things as surgical sutures and adhesive tape, how sticky it should [...] be.

Now, one of the marks of our so-called enlightened civilization has been the development and interest in vitamin products. But big time promotion has resulted in possible abuses, which the vitamin division seeks to control. It is important, therefore, to determine whether a product is what it alleges to be, and will do the job it claims.

Constant experiments are made, not only to certify commercial products, but to probe theories of the department scientists. Here is a test made on white mice from the same litter. Those which have been getting a certain vitamin grow large and strong. Those deprived of it are weak and puny.

Consider, now, the life-saving drugs that deserve the label of wonder or miracle products. Penicillin and the newer streptomycin. These must never be allowed to waver from the knife-edge path of purity and potency. Every pharmaceutical house that manufactures them must submit for analysis a sample of each batch made before they can be distributed.

And it is almost a full-time concern of the division of food control. To what length? Well, there's a man who's interested in how tender a "top grade" garden pea should be. If his teeth won't tell him for sure, he's got a gadget that will. If it's too hard, it isn't top grade, and may not be sold as such.

Because the war greatly advanced synthetic chemistry, new compounds for crop or soil improvement are in wide use. Department experts want to know if flavor and nutritional safety are affected.

With American women spending millions of dollars yearly on cosmetics, FDA is intent on preventing the price of beauty from becoming tragically high. The files in Washington offer a mute testimony and painful proof that despite their lovely packaging and glowing claims, some of the bland and innocent looking pastes and powders not only are worthless but health hazards. There is no attempt to disclaim that a product will improve upon nature. It is just that every beauty preparation in the interstate market must pass a rigid safety test.

As long as their country cousins don't see them, these bunnies have nothing to worry about. Seems someone has an idea for a hair coating preparation, and FDA wants to study it. Of great importance is the work done by the color certification division. A large percentage of our food, drugs, and cosmetics are colored by dyes, and it is vital to know their derivations. Coal tar dyes and certain mixtures can be extremely dangerous if not pure or used properly. Every manufacturer must submit samples for certifications before using them. Here then, is where the real ingredients of satisfaction are determined, where men of science provide fact or fallacy for claims and labels that read "best by test" or "finest available". Not a day goes by when we do not profit by their zeal and watchfulness, our standard of living waving higher and higher. For certainly, it can be said that nowhere in the world can people buy with more confidence or use with greater safety the thousand and one products which go into their daily lives.

So let these tireless feet be a symbol. A symbol of a nation's concern for its consumers. An assurance that all its ramparts of safety are ably defended. For this too, is part of our heritage. This too, is a battle that must be waged and won. A battle against deceit and fraud and sometimes, Nature. This is vigilance at its attentive best, safeguarding the health and welfare of a nation.

THE END

THIS IS AMERICA

Transcript: Thibault Noailhat