

Medicine: Radium Drinks

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Eben MacBurney Byers, 51, popular Pittsburgh sportsman and ironmaster, fell out of an upper berth five years ago returning from a Yale-Harvard football game. He hurt his arm. His Pittsburgh physiotherapist, Dr. Charles Clinton Moyar, prescribed a patented drink called "Radithor." It was distilled water containing traces of radium and mesothorium (another radioactive substance). The dope eased the arm pain, braced Byers up. He enthusiastically recommended it to friends, sent them cases of it, even gave some to one of his horses. Last week Eben Byers died in Manhattan of radium poisoning. His close friend Mrs. Mary F. Hill of Pittsburgh died last autumn of the same cause. Other of his friends are gravely worried.

Byers' prominence made his death a great scandal. He was chairman of A. M. Byers Co., Pittsburgh makers of wrought iron pipe, was connected with coke, docks and banking. He was a fine, widely known sportsman. In 1906 he won the national amateur golf championship. For years he kept a box at Forbes (baseball) Field, Pittsburgh. In England and the U.S. he had racing stables. He won trophies at trap shooting. He maintained homes at Pittsburgh, Southampton, L.I., and Aiken, S.C., often visited Palm Beach.

Eighteen months ago, after hundreds of drinks of the radium tonic, he began having pains in his jaw, severe headaches. Dr. Joseph Manning Steiner, Manhattan x-ray specialist who had seen several of the young women poisoned in U.S. Radium Corp.'s factory (TIME, June 4, 1928 et seq.), recognized in Byers' condition symptoms of radium poisoning.

A cry went out to investigate "Radithor," made by Bailey Radium Laboratories at East Orange, N.J. Robert Hiner Winn, attorney for the Federal Trade Commission, interviewed Byers at his Southampton home last September. Last week Attorney Winn described the scene: "A more gruesome experience in a more gorgeous setting would be hard to imagine. We went up to Southampton where Byers had a magnificent home. There we discovered him in a condition which beggars description.

"Young in years and mentally alert, he could hardly speak. His head was swathed in bandages. He had undergone two successive operations in which his whole upper jaw, excepting two front teeth, and most of his lower jaw had been removed. All the remaining bone tissue of his body was slowly disintegrating, and holes were actually forming in his skull."

Byers did not know that his case was hopeless until two weeks ago. Autopsy last week revealed that he had only six teeth left. Both jaws were rotted. His brain was abscessed. Distributed through his bones, calculated Dr. Frederick Bonner Flinn of Columbia University, were 36 micrograms of radium. Ten micrograms is a fatal quantity.

William J. A. Bailey, the man who made "Radithor," last week was conducting a printing and advertising business in West Orange, N. J. He is a scholarly-looking man with no scientific or medical degrees, no learned connections other than membership in the American Association for the Advancement of Science, in which he claims a protean interest in medical sciences, chemistry and physics. For a period he worked for U. S. Radium Corp. According to the Better Business Bureau, he has been associated with the manufacturers of "Thorone tablets ... 250 times more radioactive than radium." He also was connected with "Arium tablets" and with a "radiendocrinator, a high-priced piece of hokum that sold

first for \$1,000 and later for \$150." His "Radithor" sold for \$30 per case of 24 2-oz. bottles, which contained altogether about \$7 worth of radioactive material. Investigators last week sought to identify this William J. A. Bailey with the William J. Bailey whom a Chicago court fined 14 years ago for exploiting "Las-I-Go for Superb Manhood," a quack aphrodisiac.

Mr. Bailey's defense last week was that he sold "Radithor" on doctors' prescriptions. Dr. Moyar, who prescribed the water for Byers, last week insisted that it was not harmful. Cried he: "I never had a death among my patients for radium treatment. I have taken as much or more radium water of the same kind Mr. Byers took and I am 51 years old, active and healthy. ... I believe that radium water has a definite place in the treatment of certain diseases and I prescribe when I deem it necessary." He "'knew," he declared, that Byers had died "from a combination of blood diseases which had induced gout."

Other physicians who, according to Federal Trade Commission information, have used their professional discretion to make use of "Radithor" include: Thomas S. Pitt of Pine Tree Health Resort, Highpine, Me.; Benjamin Franklin Bowers, St. Benedict, Pa.; Lillian Morgans, Middletown, N. Y.; Gustave Desy, Millbury, Mass.; J. Frank Small, York, Pa.; Mark Manley, Brooklyn. None of their patients is known to have died.

Radium Waters. The fad for radio active waters was for a short time valid. Investigators experimented by activating ordinary water. Their experiments took two directions: 1) to dissolve radium salts in water; 2) to expose water to radium emanation. Doctors thought that they had evidence that waters so treated would cure chronic arthritis, gout, neuritis, high blood pressure. The Bureau of Investigation of the American Medical Association soon found that quacks were selling the waters as cures for "anemia, leukemia, boils, blackheads and pimples." The A. M. A. Council on Pharmacy & Chemistry withdrew approval of devices purporting to make waters radioactive.

After the young New Jersey women who painted watch dials with radium preparations began dying, experts denounced the use of radium internally. Particularly vocal were Dr. Flinn of Columbia and Dr. Harrison Stanford Martland, medical examiner of Essex County, N. J. With radium applied externally and for short periods to destroy cancers they had no quarrel. But imbibed radium accumulated in the bones. It was certain death, because, before its ravages could be recognized, it had destroyed a fatal amount of bone.

The great fear of the experts is not for people who drink radioactive water under doctors' orders (there are no longer many of those), but people who buy the stuff on their own responsibility. There is usually something of the proselytizer in people who stimulate themselves with tonics. A notable one in the news last week was Mayor James John Walker of New York. One of his good friends, a Mrs. Clarabelle Walsh who lives in the Hotel Plaza, advised him to drink the stuff because "he was suffering so." Three times a day he squeezes the rubber bulb of a device called a "Radiumator," which supplies water with short-lived radium emanation. Experts say that aside from the psychological effect, the only good derived is from the quantities of water imbibed, none from the emanations. But Mayor Walker, with the persistence of a convinced self-medicator, declared last week: "I won't stop using it."

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