

December 27, 1937

Mr. F. J. Schlink
Consumers Research, Inc.
Washington, New Jersey

Dear Mr. Schlink:-

Please accept my thanks for calling my attention to what appears to have been a news item in the "Northwest Fruitgrower", in which mention was made of the work of this laboratory and also that of Dr. Aub. I doubt if Dr. Cardiff said what was attributed to him, but that is neither here nor there. I have seen one or two similarly inaccurate and misleading articles in other trade journals, and although I deplore them, I do not see that there is anything to be done about them. If I were to attempt to correct all the statements which either misquote or misinterpret me, I should spend a great deal of time at it, and, I think, in vain. Our investigations, though extensive, have been of a rather direct and uncomplicated type, and I believe they have been described in simple and fairly concise language. Moreover we have made only such interpretations and such practical applications to clinical and hygienic problems as were justified by our own knowledge and experience. One of the curses of modern science is that almost anyone who has an ax to grind, an interest to serve, or a cause to advance, can usurp the functions of critic and expert, and in so doing can stretch and distort facts and ideas to suit his purposes. The result is the same, whether the cause is holy or obviously self-serving, in that there is confusion and emotional response instead of honest and productive thought. The confusion is only heightened when the investigator hurt or enraged by the prostitution of his work, takes the public arena in self defense, for from there on he too becomes embroiled in an essentially emotional justification of his work and his character. I trust I shall be able to maintain some degree of equilibrium and devote my time to the solution of practical problems and not to fighting windmills.

If I use the above expression in apparent relation to the problem of metals in food substances, it is to some degree deliberate. There has been a profusion of intemperate and ill-considered writing and talking on both sides of this subject in recent years and, too little sound clinical and experimental work. I share

the feeling of Dr. Monier-Williams, whose article you sent me, presumably for my instruction, that the public should be given the benefit of any doubt that may exist in the matter of potential hazards, and I am in sympathy with the establishment of tolerances for suspected toxic materials, which should err, if at all, on the side of safety. However, I am more interested in the careful study of the physiologic facts as to the behavior and the occurrence of these materials than I am in theorizing about them at my desk. Incidentally, it may interest you to know that I and my associates have been seeing most of the cases of lead poisoning or suspected lead poisoning in this immediate vicinity (as well as a variety of cases from more distant sections of the country), for a number of years. We have seen unusual and bizarre cases with various unusual causal factors but we have yet to see a case demonstrably deriving from the use of contaminated fruit. I do not from this fact deduce that there is no hazard from this source, but I know that this factor as a cause of lead poisoning in the community is unimportant, relatively, since occupational lead poisoning and lead poisoning in the general population (especially among infants and children) from other causes is not too infrequent. You will, doubtless, argue that there is a great deal of "sub-clinical" intoxication from certain of these materials, and especially from lead. May I anticipate this argument, by saying, out of a clinical and experimental experience that should exclude any considerable effect of either professional vanity or personal prejudice on my judgment, that I am better able to appraise the significance of that concept than you are, and I do not value it highly either in theory or on the basis of the available data in support of it.

I find that I have spoken somewhat more at length and in different vein than the information transmitted in your letter would seem to justify. Perhaps I may explain my reaction by pointing out that I am deeply sympathetic with the avowed purposes and functions of your organization and I have come to feel that its efforts were being diverted to an unfortunate degree into a propagandist twilight zone, instead of being carefully confined to such advisory fields as are clearly illuminated by adequate factual knowledge. Here, certainly, you need only suggest that the policy and the fate of your organization are your affair and not mine and I shall have additional evidence of the wisdom of keeping ones counsel to himself until it is sought. However, since your initial courtesy has put me under obligation, I have replied with that frankness which the situation seemed to deserve.

Sincerely yours,

RAK:is

Robert A. Kehoe, M.D.

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