

June 9, 1936

Colonel Georges Thenault
Room 527
25 Avenue Victor-Emmanuel III
Paris, France

My dear Thenault:

I was happy to hear from you some time ago and I am very grateful to you for sending a copy of Dr. Valentin's thesis. I have gone over the thesis in a more or less cursory manner and although there are many minor points which might be discussed critically, it would seem that the general character of the thesis is fair and essentially correct. It is inevitable that the review of all the literature of the subject would result in including some material which is either of no consequence, or which is misleading in its implications. It is also inevitable that one who has not been in contact with this matter from the start should have some confusion of mind about the initial difficulties. The detailed history of this matter has never been written and probably never will be published for a variety of reasons.

You are quite right in your comment on the statement on Page 1. It would be better to clarify this entire matter by indicating that the poisonings and the fatalities were associated with manufacturing activities, and in early stage of the development of manufacturing methods. You are also quite right in questioning Dr. Valentin's reference to the work of Emileo Bonnet. Dr. Bonnet has had no first hand experience in the matter and knows very little about it. As to the work of Dr. Flinn, the less said about it, the better. Flinn's work on animals and his analytical work as well were unreliable. I know the details of the work and I know how badly it was done. I have neglected to make any reference to his work in my articles for the simple reason that I have not wished to get into a controversy which would have no point. Nor did I wish to flay a scientific colleague for no good purpose. No one else has been able to obtain the results which Flinn obtained, and that is enough to put the work in its proper place. Strangely enough, Flinn had so little confidence in his own results that he has never taken the position that the use of leaded gasoline was dangerous either to the public or to the handlers of gasoline. He contented himself with writing the article presenting his experimental work and drawing the most tentative sort of conclusions.

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Colonel Thenault

Obviously Dr. Valentin's thesis contributes no new ideas and no new information to the problem, and although it may be of some consequence in relation to the French point of view, it has no further significance. By this I do not mean to condemn it, but in general theses which are essentially reviews are not taken very seriously.

I am taking this occasion to call your attention to the fact that Dr. Willard F. Machle will be leaving here for Europe the first of July. You will be seeing him in Paris and it is his intention to see most of the mixing plants in France. I am not sure that you will have any other matters that will require his attention, but I feel quite certain that you will give him every assistance in getting about and in seeing how things are progressing in France.

With kindest personal regards,

Cordially yours,

RAK:is

Robert A. Kehoe, M.D.

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