REPORT ON AN EXAMINATION OF "FACE
POWDERS."

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At a conference of the hairdressers of Paris it was stated that the face powders commonly employed for the complexion no longer consisted of powdered rice, but were combinations in various proportions of chalk, white lead, bismuth, common starch, and alabaster. It was pointed out that if this were generally known it would be followed by a decreased sale, and would be prejudicial to the interests of the trade. It was mentioned incidentally that there was reason for believing that paralysis had been known to follow the use of these preparations. The matter being of medical interest was deemed worthy of investigation.

On inquiry it was found that the powders used for the complexion might be divided roughly into two categories.

In the first place, there were the face powders sold by chemists in packets bearing no distinctive name or trade mark. They were either prepared extemporaneously on the premises or were obtained in bulk from wholesale houses. Many specimens of these were examined, and were found to consist of potato starch or maize starch tinted with a vegetable substance and scented with orris root. No metallic ingredient was detected, and it was obvious, in the words of a retail trader, that "the price at which they were sold did not admit of sophistication."

In the second category came the powders packed in boxes and sold under some fancy name. Most of them were delicately scented, and were put up in an attractive form. Many of them were of French origin. In price they ranged from 18. 6d. to 10 francs. Eight specimens were examined, and for their chemical analysis I have to express my indebtedness to my colleague Dr. Wilson Hake, Lecturer on Practical Chemistry at the Westminster Hospital. The results are shown in the accompanying table.

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.
Starch	75	80	80	15	50	—	40	40
Precipitated chalk and carbonate of magne- sium	15	—	—	—	—	—	—	10
French chalk	10	12	—	45	36	75	18	18
Zinc	—	7	20	40	14	25	40	30
Bismuth	—	1	—	—	—	—	1	1
Lead	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

The starch in specimens 1, 3, 4, and 5 was rice starch, whilst 2, 7, and 8 contained maize starch only. The starch was readily recognised under the microscope, and gave the iodine reaction. All specimens were carefully examined for mercury and arsenic, but none was found. Alabaster was also absent.

Respecting the preparations themselves it may be well to say a few words:

1. This was described as a rose leaf powder. It had a faint odour of rose, but was certainly not made from rose leaves.

2. This was sold as a rice powder prepared with bismuth. It contained no rice powder, and very little bismuth, certainly not more than 1 per cent.

3. This was a rice powder free from bismuth. The analysis proved the correctness of the statement, but it also showed the presence of 20 per cent. of zinc, probably in the form of calamine.

4. This was sold without any guarantee of purity, which was perhaps fortunate, as it contained 40 per cent. of zinc.

5. This was described as "Poudre Rosée." It contained 36 per cent. of French chalk and 14 per cent. of carbonate of zinc.

6. This was sold as "Poudre de Riz d'Java," but no rice starch could be detected in it.

7 and 8. These were similar in composition, and were re-

markable for containing three metallic ingredients—zinc, bismuth, and lead.

Another specimen examined gave very unexpected results, for it consisted solely of finely powdered boracic acid. It was entirely and completely soluble in water, and corresponded in all respects to this substance when examined chemically, microscopically, and with the spectroscope.

The question of how far the habitual use of these different powders might prove injurious to the health requires some consideration. It was ascertained on what is believed to be good authority that most women have their own particular or favourite powder to the use of which they adhere. It is often employed very freely, and is used as a medium for diffusing various agreeable and characteristic odours. A powder which rubs off is considered inartistic, so that preparations containing zinc or bismuth are much in demand.

It is well known that the susceptibility of different individuals to the influence of lead varies enormously—a very small quantity taken systematically, or even applied locally, may induce symptoms of chronic lead poisoning. Water containing one-twentieth of a grain to the gallon has been known to induce wrist drop, whilst most authorities would reject as unsafe a drinking water containing one-fiftieth of a grain in the gallon. A powder containing 1 per cent. of carbonate of lead, if used to any extent or for a prolonged period, might readily give rise to serious symptoms.

Zinc salts are, as is well known, capable of producing a condition similar to chronic saturnism and zinc colic, analogous to lead colic. The chief symptoms are constipation, loss of appetite, nausea and vomiting, and a metallic taste in the mouth. Preparations containing from 25 to 40 per cent. of the oxide or carbonate can hardly be regarded as desirable additions to the toilet table.

Preparations containing bismuth are apt to turn black when brought in contact with sulphuretted hydrogen, so that ladies who employ cosmetics containing the substance find it desirable not to frequent mineral springs which evolve this gas. The "bismuth breath," which resembles the odour of garlic, is probably due to the presence of a trace of tellurium, and might be induced by the external application of the drug.

Boracic acid is undoubtedly a most undesirable substance to use as a face powder. When borax is used internally in the treatment of epilepsy, it produces large red desquamating patches on the forehead and at the angles of the mouth.

Taking it on the whole, it may fairly be said that even if the French hairdressers have not fully established their case, they have, at all events, succeeded in demonstrating the necessity for considerable care in the selection of a powder for the complexion.

THE PREVENTION OF MEASLES.—The sanitary authority of the city of Glasgow have issued a circular on the subject of the prevention of measles which, bearing the well-known initials "J. B. R." contains, as might be expected, good and important advice expressed with characteristic lucidity. We are not aware whether this is the first time that a circular of this sort has been issued in Glasgow, but our readers will recollect that several similar circulars, issued in other places, were reproduced in Dr. Theodore Thomson's recent report to the Local Government Board. Probably, like many other health officers, Dr. Russell has issued previous circulars from time to time. The leaflet now issued leaves little to be desired in point of clearness, brevity, and the admirable selection of the information to be conveyed. Glasgow is one of the few towns that ventures to attempt, on anything like a large scale, the hospital isolation of cases of measles.

THE FIFTH YEAR.—It has been decided by the Barony Parish Council that the appointment of clinical clerk at the Woodilee Asylum at Lenzie near Glasgow, shall be open to fourth and fifth year students who have taken out classes in practical pathology. Two such clinical clerks will be appointed for six months each, three months on the male and three on the female side, but in special cases an appointment for three months may be made. The clerks will be boarded in the asylum, and will be provided with railway season tickets between Lenzie and Glasgow, to allow of their attendance on special classes in Glasgow if they so desire.