

OIL-NON-BELLIGERENT

(Written for "The Listener" by DR. H. B. TURBOTT, Director of the Division of School Hygiene, Health Dept.)

OIL is the topical, the burning question of the time. Will lack of oil finally defeat Hitler, or will the end of the present titanic struggle of men and weapons come otherwise? Who knows? Tucked far away from the warring world, another struggle over oil has been going on in the laboratories. This has to do with use of oil that mobilises armies, not in man-made machines, but in the human body.

It costs the same as petrol in the United States of America, about 4 cents a gallon to produce. It is a by-product. It is called liquid petrolatum, or mineral oil, or more simply, paraffin, and has widespread use as a purgative. Back in 1930 an argument went on in that English medical journal *The Lancet*, that paraffin shouldn't be used in the body machine. It should not replace other laxatives, and in any case, diet, exercise, and proper habit were the most important weapons against constipation. But doctors held that the case against easy, pleasant paraffin was not black enough. They went on prescribing it freely, and the doubtful rumblings died away.

Some Disturbing Factors

Paraffin in the human body, according to pharmacologists, softens the waste products, makes a kind of soap, hurries the bowel contents along and generally acts as a lubricant. At first glance this all seems to the good. But the doubts of the medical men were taken up in the laboratories, and many investigations have had oil in the body as their theme. Some disturbing things have come to light.

Paraffin is used as a solvent for many things in commerce. In the body the laboratories have found that carotene, the forerunner of Vitamin A, is taken up into solution by paraffin, after which it cannot be absorbed. So paraffin users will go short in Vitamin A. It still interferes with the use of this vitamin if you take it as Vitamin A concentrate. Vitamin D gets into trouble too, being soluble in fat, and therefore interfered with by the paraffin. It doesn't matter whether you take the paraffin straight, or as some emulsified preparation. It hurries the bowel contents along the small intestine by several hours, so in addition to interfering with absorption of Vitamins A and D, paraffin shortens the time during which food remains in the body. Less nourishment is absorbed, and if daily addiction to oil prevails there often occurs a loss of weight with indigestion, fatigue, and flatulence.

Cease Daily Dosings

The laboratories have gone further. It used to be held that paraffin oil was not absorbed from the bowel, acting only as a lubricant. Now even this is doubtful, for rabbits, guinea pigs, and rats fed for months on mineral oil do absorb some. Chemical analysis proved that the oil found in the liver, spleen, and other organs was the same paraffin that had been given to the animals. Next post-mortem examinations proved the same facts true for human beings.

Whether or not this oil in the body organs works us ill has yet to be investigated. Certainly no such oil is there normally and the laboratories will have to struggle further over the pathology of oil in the body. Common mortals will be wise meanwhile to cease daily dosings of oil.

Balanced Diet Is Best

The paraffin oil laxative regime totters on its throne. It had a huge kingdom of self-medicators, lulled to frequent and even daily use by the generally held medical and lay opinion of harmlessness. Medical opinion is now revised. Paraffin has its proper place in the medical world, but for indiscriminate use by lay people it no longer has a safe role. Paraffin addict! Quit, and give heed instead to diet, exercise, and good bowel habit. A good, well-balanced diet keeps most folk right, but you may have to get back to simpler foods, or adopt a special diet for a time. This means effort and trouble. Oil, as far as ordinary folk are concerned, should be left to belligerents.

(Next week: "The King's Evil," by Dr. Turbott.)

Slacks Or Skirts?

UNITED States women by the million, according to the news-magazine "Time," have renounced skirts in favour of slacks. And the women pants-purchasers are not just the perfect 36s, but 40s, even 42s. Unbelieving manufacturers, who up to now had made slacks mainly in Garbo and Hepburn sizes, were caught unprepared by unprecedented orders for large sizes.

Not since Mrs. Amelia Bloomer created an international uproar in 1849 by appearing in public in voluminous Turkish trousers has such a feminine trouser sensation swept the country. High School girls in Brooklyn struck for the right to wear slacks. In Detroit the mayor grudgingly admitted that a female employee of the city, forced to bicycle to work, might do her job in slacks. Pants make good sense for war time. Lieutenant-Commander Roy R. Darron ordered women employed in the machine shops of the Alameda Naval Air Station in California to wear pants to work.

To reassure nervous pants-prospects, "Vogue" printed a "Primer on Pants", specifying: When to Wear Slacks (in the country, war service duty, other hard work); How to Buy Them (snug-fitting or closely-woven fabrics to hold shape; with fly front to camouflage depth through middle); How to Wear Them (with simple jewellery, low-heeled shoes, and unselfconsciously); then destructively summed up: "Slacks look wonderful when they're right, incredibly bad when they're wrong A skirt is never wrong."

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