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THE COAL BIN

Pre-Bomb Radio-Activity

"Birmingham News"

By Henry Vance

WITH NO THOUGHT WHATEVER of barging into the realm of Diagnostician Bill Kitay, the chief shoveler thought it was up to him to explain in a rather feeble way a rather powerful cure brought to light by a discovery of Dr. Saul Hertz, of Boston, working originally in conjunction with Arthur Roberts, Ph.D., physicist of Harvard. Dr. Hertz was treating patients suffering a hyperthyroid condition and those suffering goiter with radioactive iodine in the days when the atomic bomb wasn't even a dream.

So many persons have asked me about the treatment, and so many of my friends thought that my eye trouble was caused from the eyes alone that I thought perhaps I should correct the idea I went to Boston for a huddle with Dr. Hertz for the eyes alone. Hyperthyroidism had clutched me, and the tablets that cure nine persons out of ten, while reducing the metabolism count, seemed to help aggravate an eye condition. My pituitary went haywire.

The earliest short short story is likely familiar to all of you: "Algy met a bear. The bear was bulgy. The bulge was Algy."

Well, my eyes had grown more bulgy than the bear and were about as red as any stop signal you ever saw. Propo-Thyro-Urisil tablets were out. Drs. Leon Smelo and G. S. Graham said radioactive iodine was seemingly the only answer, and with very little warning they had bundled me up and shipped me off to the daddy of treatment for hyperthyroidism through radioactive iodine. Dr. Hertz was long on the Harvard Medical School faculty and Dr. Graham was his student before graduating to the practice of medicine himself.

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FOR 15 YEARS DR. HERTZ was head of the thyroid department at Massachusetts General Hospital. It was while there with laboratories at his disposal, funds also, that he began and completed the experimentation that was to lead to a recognized cure. For three years he and Dr. Roberts carried on the experimentation in the animal realm. They effected such wonderful cures—cures that stayed put—that they figured the treatment was now ready, safe and sure for human beings.

In 1941, four years before the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima and long before the public was aware that such a devastator was in the making, the two tried their first treatments on human beings.

"How in the world did you get radioactive iodine before the bomb made its debut?" I asked Dr. Hertz.

"It was a slow process," smiled the doctor, "but we made radioactive iodine in those days on the Harvard cyclotron. I had grown interested in such things early, as my great-uncle discovered Hertzian waves long before even radio was in the book.

"Somehow, I knew what was coming when I joined the Navy and went off to war regarding the atomic bomb. Yet, when the bomb was actually

dropped I was at sea with Uncle Sam, and it was some time before I knew such a thing had really materialized."

Of course, the cyclotron is no longer depended upon by Dr. Hertz, or the 59 places in the United States which are now equipped with machines for the treatment he discovered. The Atomic Energy Commission ships isotopes containing radioactive iodine to the hospitals where the treatment is available.

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DR. HERTZ TOOK 29 CASES of hyperthyroid and goiter when the green go signal was given to put the treatment in operation on human beings. That was back in 1941. Checks since then, a period of eight years, have shown that the "20 successes" have apparently been complete cures, as there has been no recurrence in a check up over an eight-year period.

A newspaper guy is always asking questions. I was interested in why there had been "nine failures." His answer to that was that in the first days of the cure, they had been groping largely as to dosage. The treatment was in its infancy and its discoverers were not too sure about how to measure doses for individuals. "Knowing what I know now," said the physician, "I feel sure that had we known the extent of doses to give in each particular case we would have come up with 29 successes instead of only 20."

The chief shoveler is not depending upon hearsay on this, as it is a matter of record in the Journal of the American Medical Association for May 11, 1946, when the 29 cases and the record obtained therefrom were included in a resume by Hertz and Roberts covering 10 or 12 pages of that publication.

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THE CHIEF SHOVELER will say this: I had the pleasure of talking to a Mrs. Beck, who had come up from Washington, D. C., for a final treatment in the laboratory. The original helping of radioactive iodine had been administered by Dr. Hertz in Boston just a year ago.

Mrs. Beck is the wife of a Washington physician, and she had photographs with her showing that she was afflicted with a goiter as big as a goose egg before receiving her first treatment. "I go slow while dealing with a goiter that large," said Dr. Hertz, "that is, as to dosage. I figured that it would take three treatments in her case. She received the first from me, the second in New York where there is an accredited physician with radioactive machine for the count, and here she is for the final dosage." Mrs. Beck's neck was completely smooth and symmetrical, there being no sign that the goiter had once marred the lines of her neck. She told me that the past year had been the happiest of her life because she had been feeling so wonderfully well. Tomorrow the chief shoveler will go into more detail about the actual treatment and how its results are counted even before the cure gets under way.