

Food Preservatives and the Benzoate Question

In the December, 1909, number of *The Quarterly Bulletin* of the Northwestern University Medical School, Chicago, Professor J. H. Long writes an entertaining article on Food Preservatives and the Benzoate Question. This question is of special interest to us in Canada at the present time, when arrangements are being made in the Canadian Parliament to introduce standards of food, under the Adulteration of Food Act. Benzoate of Sodium is one of the "chemicals" introduced by manufacturers in the preparation of catsups, etc. As the result of objections to its use in foods, experiments were made on a poison squad by the United States Bureau of Chemistry of the Department of Agriculture. The conclusion was reached and published in a bulletin, that the benzoate of sodium is a dangerous substance, capable of producing a long train of ills in those who use it with foods. Protests having been made to the conclusions expressed in this bulletin, the Referee Board of Consulting Scientific Experts at President Roosevelt's request, was appointed by Secretary Wilson to study certain phases of this question, and, in particular, to determine whether or not benzoate of sodium and certain other "chemicals" are in reality injurious to health in the manner in which they are employed in the preparation of foods. The Referee Board, of which President Remsen of Johns Hopkins University is chairman, carried out lengthy experiments on the benzoate question, and, in Report 88 of the United States Department of Agriculture, published conclusions differing decidedly from those advanced by the Bureau of Chemistry. It is contended, in Report 88, that benzoate of sodium is a comparatively mild substance which, when used in the relatively small quantities called for in catsups and several condimental foods, must be harmless. It is also stated that its ultimate behavior and fate is not unlike that of the aromatic principles of cloves and cinnamon, which were formerly used as preservatives of perishable foods, such as apple butter, etc.