**Yesterday’s sweetmeats**

There were two distinct brands of candy in my day: the candy you bought in the drug store on Sunday, when the candy shops were closed, and the weekday, or Colored Corrosion, brand, which, according to all present-day standards of pure food, should have set up a bright green fermentation, with electric lights, in the epiglottises of nine-tenths of the youth of that time.

We can dismiss the Sunday drug-store candy with a word, for it was bought only once a week and then only for lack of something better. Its flavor was not enhanced by the fact that it was kept in tall glass jars, like appendixes, down at the end of the store where the prescriptions were filled, and consequently always had a faint suspicion of spirits of niter and sod. bicarb. about it.

It was on week days that the real orgy of poisoned and delicious candy took place, a dissipation which was to make a nation of dyspeptics of the present generation of business men and political leaders.

The one which haunts my memory most insistently is a confection called the “wine cup”, a cone-shaped bit of colored sugar filled with some villainous fluid which, when bitten, ran down over the chin and on the necktie. It was capped by a dingy piece of marshmallow which was supposed to be removed with the teeth before drinking the ambrosia within, but usually at the first nibble the whole structure collapsed, with the result that inveterate “wine-cup” consumers had a telltale coating of sugared water down the front of the coat, and, on a cold day, a slight glaze of ice on the chin. What went on in the stomach no one knows, but it does not make a very pretty picture for the imagination.

Another novelty was an imitation fried egg in a small frying pan, the whole sticky mess to be dug out with a little tin spoon which always bent double at the first application and had to be thrown away. The procedure from then on was to extract the so-called “egg” with the teeth, with the chin jammed firmly into the lower part of the “frying pan” as a fulcrum. This, too, left its mark on the habitué, the smear sometimes extending as high up as the forehead if the nose was very small, as it usually was.

The little mottoes, in the shape of tiny hearts, which carried such varied sentiments as “I Love You,” “Skiddoo,” “Kick Me,” and “Kiss Me Quick,” were probably harmless enough in their make-up, but transporting them from shop to school and around the town loose in the pocket soon rendered them grimy and covered with “gnirs” (a “gnir” is a little particle of wool found in the bottom of pockets, especially constructed for adhering to candies) and unfit for anything involving an aesthetic sense.

Worst of all was the “prize package,” a cone of old newspaper containing the odds and ends of the day’s refuse—hard marshmallows with enough thumbprints on them to convict the candy dealer ten times over, quantities of tired popcorn which had originally been pink, strange little oddments of green and red sugar, and, as the prize, either a little piece of tin in the approximate shape of a horse or a button reading “Bust the Trusts.”

And so, regardless of the present generation’s freedom and reputed wildness, I will take a chance on their stomachs being in better shape at forty than mine is, for bootleg alcohol, whatever its drawbacks, takes away that craving for sweets which was the ruin of my generation.

Robert Benchley