



# CELEBRATING CHEWING GUM'S FIFTIETH BIRTHDAY

By ROBERT C. BENCHLEY.

*Just Half a Century Ago This Month  
Santa Anna of Mexico Hospitably  
Passed Around the Chicle, and  
the Great American Jaw  
Movement Began.*



The Humble Birthplace of Chewing Gum.

*Born, Commercially, in New Jersey,  
Chewing Gum Has Grown to a Point  
Where 300,000,000 Cravats Are  
Adjusted at the Slot-Machine  
Mirrors Annually.*

**F**OLD away the canopies of the Shakespeare Masque; break up the type in the special-feature stories of "Shakespeare's Heroines" and clear the stage of all the trappings incident to the Tercentenary, for the Big Anniversary of 1916 is at hand. Fifty years ago this month chewing-gum became an American Issue.

Among the honest proletariat of America Shakespeare has won his thousands, but chewing-gum has won its (or her) tens of thousands, and it is no more than right that it should have official recognition at this time.

There is a delightful little vagary of fate in the coincidence of the fiftieth birthday of chewing-gum falling in a year of personal unpleasantness with Mexico, for it was from Mexico that the United States received the first intimation of its national destiny. It was in the form of a little brown wad of chewable chicle, brought to New York in 1866 by that crafty political ring of Mexico, Santa Anna. If for nothing else than the memory of this importation, there would be sufficient ground for what one newspaper has so aptly termed "a delicate situation" on the border.

On one of his campaign tours for Revolving President of Mexico, General Santa Anna went in June, 1866, to confer with a friend at Snug Harbor, Staten Island. Little realizing what momentous results were to attend his action,

came one Thomas Adams, jr., to pay a social call on the distinguished thug. One word led to another and before the afternoon was half over they had reached such a state of familiarity that General Santa Anna had gone to his bureau-drawer and taken out a little chunk of something resembling overshoeing and, placing a piece of it in his mouth, began to chew it with apparent relish, at the same time offering a sector of it to Mr. Adams and his son.

With a nice regard for convention, Mr. Adams asked the general what it was before he placed it in his mouth, and was informed that it was the gum of the Zapote tree, known to its friends as "chicle."

Thus reassured, Mr. Adams took a chance, and was at once impressed with the substance's possibilities as a commercial rubber. He asked Santa Anna to give him a piece about the size of a man's fist, and took it home with him for experimental purposes, to see if it could not be vulcanized.

In conference with a chemist and a manufacturer of dental supplies, he tried to produce from it a substance that could be used as a base for artificial teeth, but the thing must have had some intuitive sense of what it had really been brought into the world for, as it successfully refused to be vulcanized and remained just what it was when it first came from Santa Anna's

bureau—a potential stick of health-giving, circulation-building, teeth-preserving, digestion-aiding, brain-refreshing, chest-developing, soul-tuning chewing-gum.

One day as they sat round the dissecting table gazing hopelessly at the defiant mass of chicle, some one said in a pet that the only thing the darn stuff was good for apparently was to be chewed. And Mr. Adams, being of that type of men pictured in the encyclopædia advertisements who have, without a college education, worked their way from a line-cut fadeaway in the background, representing a barefoot boy, to a half-tone picture of a man in a two-button sack-suit, with his hand on an open volume, immediately answered back with, "We'll fight it out on this line if it takes all summer," or "Millions for defence, but not one cent for tribute," or some such historical phrase, and the manufacture of chewing-gum from chicle was begun.

In a little house on Palisade Avenue, Jersey City, with a capital investment of thirty-five dollars, the Adamses, *pere et fils*, started what might be called the greatest national movement America has ever seen—the jaw movement.

The chicle was boiled on an ordinary cook-stove, like molasses candy, until it had the consistency of bread dough, when it was rolled into long strips and cut off in inch-sections. These were hardened in cold water and packed, a hundred in a box, and the thing was done.

The chewing of gum in the early days of its manufacture was more a matter of conscientious application to the work at hand than it is to-day, for there was no such thing as flavoring to help along the delusion of having a good time. It was just chewing for chewing's sake, and the pioneers who gave their time and energy without even a trace of spearmint or blood-orange reward deserve all the praise due to men and women who blaze the trail for those who follow in effete enjoyment of the fruits of their hardships.

It was necessary at first to give away the pieces of gum with purchases of candy, so that the children might have a chance to take it home and try it over on their piazzas, with the idea that they would soon come back for more, once they discovered what a source of annoyance it became to their elders. The psychology of this scheme was perfect, for the first retailer who tried it was besieged on the following day by youngsters from the neighboring school, clamoring for more gum. In sheer self-defence the parents took to chewing it also, and the habit was on.

It needs but a glance at current statistics to show to what tremendous heights it has risen. We have it on otherwise unimpeachable authority that if all the energy expended in chewing gum were to be converted into calories we would have a force sufficient to propel a ferryboat from Peck Slip, East River, eastward to Pier 19, North River, via Lisbon and Hong Kong, or, in electrical terms, a current powerful enough to lift a weight of 43,305,000 tons 34,000 miles per minute per second per kilowatt-hour. This sounds staggering. It is. But it is a development of the gum-chewing habit that we must face without flinching and without pussy-footing.

The beneficial effects of this national pastime must not be overlooked. Chewing-gum came into a nation of tobacco chewers and refined it and elevated its tone until Charles Dickens, the author, wouldn't recognize the old places were he to pay a visit to this country to-day.

It has contributed greatly to the neatness of the personal appearance of the nation, as it is estimated that in the mirrors on gum machines there are 345,659,256 cravats and 756,586,589 wisps of hair adjusted during the calendar year.

And one need only look at the car cards to see that the use of chewing-gum, especially when brought home in a box, has been the means of keeping the home life of the nation in a state of preservation. Were it not for chewing-gum what would there be for the little ones to run prattling to their daddy for as he appears at the gate? What would Christmas be without a crate of chewing-gum peeping from the top of each stocking? What would any dinner party resolve itself into had not the hostess sufficient *savoir faire* to place a stick of gum at each place as a delicate reminder to her guests that one can never be sure just what goes on in the kitchen, and that it is better to be safe than sorry?

It is for these benefits to our national life that we should at this time give some tangible evidence of appreciation. Granted that Shakespeare had talent. Granted that his lines have been more misquoted than the lines of any other author, and that whatever play of his you want from the library is always out. But these are no reasons why the anniversary of his death should be celebrated with special rotogravure sections and bowling matches while the anniversary of the birth of a truly American institution should go unnoticed. America for Americans! American celebration for American celebrities! At this time, when nothing but intense, fresh-every-hour patriotism will win the day, let us turn our plaudits to our native genius.

Plans for the celebration of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the birth of Chicle Chewing Gum are already under advisement in a Committee on Arrangements appointed by a Committee on Appointments which came as the result of a meeting of the Executive Committee last month. The Committee on Publicity has given out the following tentative programme as arranged by the Entertainment Committee:

On the first day there will be a pageant, participated in by all the school children of the country simultaneously in their respective school buildings. At the door to each school room will be a waste basket, suitably decorated with the school colors, and presided over by a teacher. The pupils will march in Indian file past the basket, each depositing a wad of gum therein and then pass on to their seats. This pretty little folk-step has been practised for many years by individual members of the classes, but this is the first time that the spirit of the thing has been crystallized into a community affair.

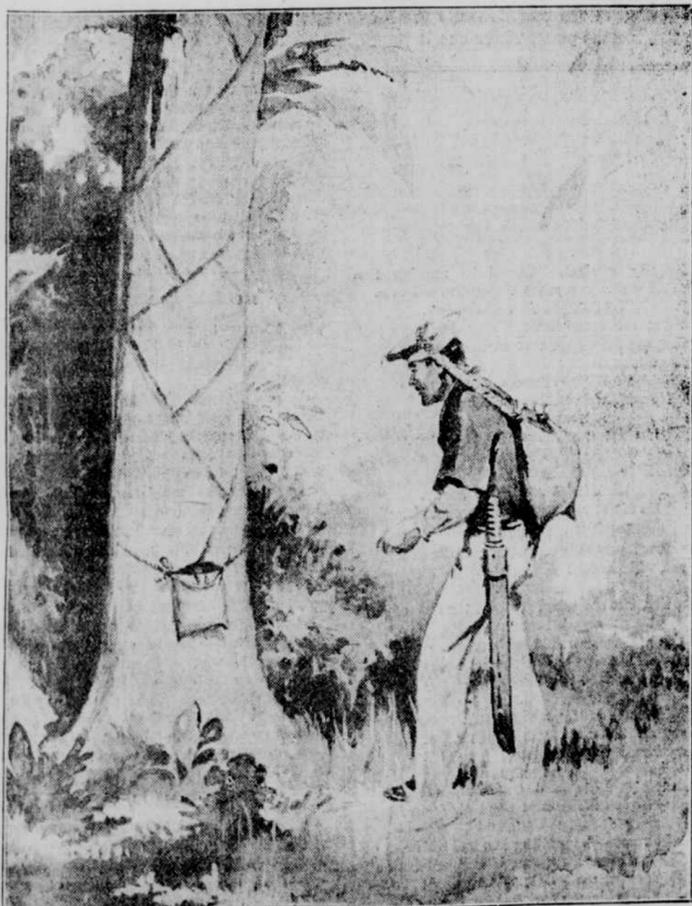
There will then be a masque of tremendous proportions, representing in historical form all the *casus belli* furnished this country by Mexico, beginning with the Alamo and working up in intensity of offence to the introduction of chewing gum by Santa Anna and the vogue of the Mexican war correspond-

ent. This masque is expected to stir public opinion to a sense of its national honor as nothing else could, and it is confidently expected that close upon the performance will come a declaration of war with Mexico and at last a maintenance of American rights.

Coincident with the masque will be solemnized the laying of the cornerstone of the new Seven Points Mission on the site of the old mission of the same name minus two.

A monster parade will close the celebration, and it is estimated that it will take three days for it to pass the reviewing stand. In fact, it is doubtful if it ever passes it, as the stand is to be located on a side street not on the line of march. Headed by the surviving gum chewers of 1866, some of them the very ones to whom, as children, the first chicle gum was given as a bonus for buying candy, the parade will include in its ranks representatives of every profession in industry, including baseball players. On being interviewed after the parade General Wood will say: "It was nothing short of inspiring, and only goes to show that every red-blooded American is back of this movement."

And if you doubt it, stand in the subway some night and watch the people opposite chewing gum. You will become so interested that you will forget to chew your own.



Gathering Chicle in Central America.



Gathering Chicle in New York.