

IS THERE A DOCTOR IN THE AREA?

By the middle of the 19th century the patent medicine craze was in full bloom. The inadequacy of medical training and the lack of confidence in that training led many to self prescribe for their ailments.

As more people were able to read they were sure they suffered from the symptoms which Dr. Sage's Catarrh Remedy would cure. The hypochondriac of today is not new. The local physician usually had little time to spend catering to those who convinced themselves they were in ill health. These patients provided fertile ground for the proprietors of Townsend's Sarsaparilla, Dr. Adam's Wart Cure, Dr. John Hooper's Female Pills, etc. As the pioneer moved west these curealls were fetched along. Why call on Dr. Bingham when Roadway's Ready Relief was in the cupboard? Sour stomach, foul breath, indigestion, colic, dyspepsia, all, and more, were guaranteed to be cured by Dr. M. A. Simon's Liver Medicine.

Altho' the female settlers often worked beside the male in the clearing of land for a home and crops (as victims of hot flashes, prolapsed uteri, irregular and painful menstruation, ulceration of the womb, headaches, etc.) that gender was usually considered to be delicate. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound, which included 18% alcohol which made it "Pleasant to the taste", was strongly recommended as efficacious and as a good help in pregnancy and relieving pain during labor." (It is now strongly recommended that pregnant women eliminate all alcohol to help assure a baby's good health.) "Dry" states often sold as much of the compound to men, as to women, to ward off chills, snake bite and stomach trouble.

Madam Dean's French Female Pills could be taken for "Suppressed Menstruation". Married women who were pregnant were warned that a miscarriage would probably result if the French pills were taken. (Was this another means of birth control?) Of course the many perils to which settlers of both genders were subject - dyspepsia, tuberculosis, typhoid, 'general weakness' and other ailments related to their sex might cause anyone to turn to laudanum, alcoholic tonics, morphines, opium and cocaine.

Lest the impression is given that the female was the only vulnerable sufferer, we hasten to add that men apparently experienced poor blood, debility, kidney and liver complaints, exhausted nervous vitality, mental depression, trembling, sleeplessness and constipation to note a few symptoms. With an alcohol content high enough to keep it from freezing, Paine's Celery Compound usually relieved all these symptoms and more. A multitude of miracle workers appeared for those who felt the necessity for one. The male who suffered 'lost manhood' and its accompanying complications, or the lady who wished to become 'more of a pleasure to her husband' were early dupes for the huckster with elixers, pads, elastic belts, packs, salts and glandular extracts from various animals. One doubts if the public has changed. It seems only the means of advertising has been refashioned and supplemented to make use of modern commercial capabilities. (By Marieanna Bair. To be continued.)

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