

## The Jones County Lizard Case

[The following story of a tragic case in Jones County in 1867 is typical of many such incidents, only a few of which actually appeared in the press. Four physicians attached their names to the report in an effort to persuade unwary Iowans to beware of quack physicians as well as quack patent medicines. Incidents of this kind were rarely recorded in such detail but they played their part in alerting Iowans to the quackery of the period. See Anamosa Eureka, April 11, May 23, 1867. The Editor]

EDITOR OF THE EUREKA.—Dear Sir:—  
We herewith present you with the history, given us by Mr. Parker, of his wife's case, also the notes taken at the post mortem examination held by the physicians of this town and Dr. Russell, of Monticello, in presence of a number of our citizens.—  
The problem has been actually solved, whether or not there was a snake or lizard in Mrs. Parker's stomach, by her death and by a post mortem examination.

This case has occasioned much interest at home and abroad, and been the topic of discussion for a number of weeks. The report that Mrs. Parker certainly had a vile snake or a hateful lizard in her stomach has been extensively disseminated through public journals, and a variety of opinions expressed in relation to the cause of the patient's illness and suffering; therefore it is due to the medical profession and the community generally, that a brief history of the case and notes of the post mortem examination be published.

This suffering lady was prostrated by pain and disease; her person reduced to a skeleton, her mind enfeebled. Her disorder bid defiance to remedies and would, of necessity, destroy her. Her physicians had acted their part with honesty and frankly informed her that a cure was impossible.

Most all consumptives are hopeful to the last, and she was ready, "like a drowning man, to catch at a straw," and any promise or encouragement gave her favorable anticipation for the future restoration of health. Here was the earnest appeal of a suffering, dying woman, ready to confide with the fullest faith in the statements made by any one that would promise her a cure.

All her former physicians had been frank and true. Could any fiend in the shape of man now betray this poor enfeebled woman for filthy lucre and starve and torture poor suffering humanity in this age of civilization? Aye, such a demon came in human form, and she gave her confidence to the heartless imposter and underwent three weeks starvation, prostrate as she was, and suffered the horrid belief that there was a snake in her stomach, and for money he practiced this base, vile deception until death claimed its victim.

We hear of cases every day just as treacherous. It seems to be his night and day dream to obtain the root of all evil, by betraying the confidence bestowed upon him by poor, deluded, dying victims. He fabricates a story and seeks whom

he can plunder. This case should be another warning to those who expect promises to be performed that are impossible of being accomplished. We owe it to society and to ourselves to exercise a proper degree of vigilance to see that we are not deceived, and to elicit the truth by our most strenuous efforts.

Mr. Parker says: My wife's age was 49, the 8th day of last August. She had an attack, something like quinsy, nine years ago last November, that resulted in ulcerations and was attacked with a disease of the lungs in three or four weeks, and raised from them over two pints of fluid every twenty-four hours. Dr. Hemmingway, of N. Y., called a council on her case the same fall, and pronounced it consumption. After three months, the discharge from the lungs grew less and she was about the house quite smart for three years, still complaining of soreness and weakness of lungs and then got worse.—She went to the water cure at Binghampton about four months, got better, went home and felt relieved and she thought she would get well. After being home two months she was taken, quite sudden, with what was called diphtheria, and her throat became ulcerated, and kept ulcerating until it ate out the palate three years ago. During all this time she was supposed to have catarrh and grew worse of it afterwards.

Next spring she bled quite profusely from the lungs. By times, for the past five or six years,

she has raised from her lungs two quarts in twenty-four hours. Has been complaining of severe headache since last fall.

Dr. Matson saw her about three months ago. He decided that one of her lungs was gone and the other badly diseased. Said he could do her no good farther than advise palliatives.

A German from Lisbon, calling himself Doctor (who?) saw her about eight weeks ago, and, after an examination, pronounced the disease a snake, tape worm or lizard; said her lungs were just as good as his lungs and no disease in them; said he could take away the animal from her in three or four days, and she would be as fat and hearty as any one.

1st process of operation, to eat salt herring, just taken out of the brine, with vinegar, and crackers soaked in vinegar, for food, the first week; and put on her stomach a poultice of garlic, also fish oil and lard simmered together, and give her a teaspoonful morning and night, and bathe the throat and chest with the same—the garlic poultice to drive the creature out of the stomach, so that, putting hot milk before the patient's mouth when she bent over like a hoop, he could induce the vile "sarpent" to approach near enough her mouth so he could get hold of him with his tweezers and draw him out.

She must not drink anything but whey and sour wine and a tea of Elder blows and Chamo-

mile, and to be sweat over sour whey. At the end of the first week could not get snake; would have to try another week; thought he had not gone quite thorough enough.

The second week, did not allow her to drink anything but sour wine and not to *eat anything at all*.

At the end of two weeks, came to try snake again; milk heated and put in a pan as before; said that the snake's head was so large that it could not come up that way; no food yet.

The third week, he said he would kill the snake and have it pass the other way, and gave her a teaspoonful of each Castor Oil and Turpentine, morning and night, and *not to eat anything yet*.

Said in three days the snake would be dead. She took turpentine and oil over a week; when he came back and said the snake was dead, and would pass away from her in twenty one days, which was five or six weeks ago. Said the bones of the skull and the skin would not digest and that they would pass off so she could see them. Gave her permission to eat, but the turpentine had irritated the stomach, so she could not take much nourishment.

After the 21 days had expired he said the meat and skin of the animal would not pass off for three or four weeks and perhaps longer. Two weeks ago, said it was there yet and would not come away for a month or two, and might stay

for months for the reason that the outside had become coated like the stomach and the *acid of the liver* would not act on it; that it had been there so long it had become as a part of her being. The following was prepared by the Doctor's directions, and ordered by him to be worn the whole time.

1 pint each elder bark, slippery elm, flax seed and bran, put in a flannel bag and covered on both sides with *black sheep's wool*.

Before he commenced doctoring her she was up and around the house quite comfortable. Last Friday she was gaining strength a little and went a few steps to her brother's. When she came home and got on the first step she fell from it and bruised her temple. She became unconscious the next morning, and remained so until she died on Sunday noon.

On Monday a post mortem examination was held, by request of Mr. Parker, to decide the question whether his wife had been the victim of a miserable quack or had been treated by a scientific man.—Mrs. Parker had often made the request that an examination should be made, as she was convinced that some monster inhabited her internal organs.

In the examination an incision was made, commencing just below the chin and reaching the whole length of the abdomen, and all the internal organs were exposed to view and subject to a

thorough examination. The mucous membrane of the throat (the pharynx and larynx) were found ulcerated their entire surface; the heart was in a healthy condition.

Upon attempting to remove the lungs, which in the healthy subject hang loose in the thorax so that they are easily removed by severing their natural connections, it was found that by disease they were firmly attached to the walls of the chest. The left lung for its whole extent was a diseased mass, and had to be dissected from all its surrounding organs with care, to remove it entire. The lower portion of the left lung was entirely gone, and its place occupied by a large abscess which had formed adhesions to the ribs, stomach and liver. On the inside of the abscess small particles of tubercular deposits were found. The upper portion of this lung was congested, and tubercular deposits found through it. The right lung was also congested and the same tubercular concretions were found scattered through the upper portion and had begun to soften and destroy the lung.

Then came the search for the monster "reptile with four feet, large head, and coated like the stomach so that the *acid of the liver* would not dissolve it." No one appeared afraid, as the monster "was dead" and a good many present to assist if one of us should be pounced upon.—With caution and carefulness we carried on our examinations through the large and small intestines up to the

stomach, another detachment down the throat to the other end of the organ; then with a bold rush the snake's hiding place was cut open, and nothing of "skull or skin," tracks, marks or indications that showed such an animal had ever visited that much-secluded spot; and the *fast believers of snake in the stomach have come to the conclusion* that they never did really believe any thing about it.

EDWIN BLAKESLEE, M.D.

WM. M. SKINNER, M.D.

S. G. MATSON, M.D.

CLARK JOSLIN, M.D.

Three of the four doctors named above were well-known in their profession in Jones County. Dr. Clark Joslin was born in Ohio in 1816, received his education in Ohio and Michigan, and came west with his father, settling in Jones County on September 22, 1838. Dr. Joslin became interested in medicine at the age of sixteen. He studied for three years under Dr. H. Wright and Dr. Moses Rider and began the practice of medicine at Fairview upon his arrival in Jones County in 1838. He was the first regular medical practitioner in that County. After several years at Fairview, Dr. Joslin removed to Anamosa where he practiced medicine for over forty years. It is said his practice extended over sixty miles and that many times he came near freezing to death while attending his patients.



Dr. Sylvester G. Matson was born in Middletown, Vermont, in 1808. He gained his early education under the most difficult of circumstances. In 1829, he began the study of medicine under Dr. Eliakim Paul of Middletown, after which he entered the University of Vermont Medical College at Burlington, from which he graduated in 1832. He practiced in New York State before coming to Jones County in the Territory of Iowa. Dr. Matson was elected a member of the Constitutional Convention of 1846. He was also elected a Representative to the First Session of the General Assembly from Jones County. Dr. Matson was active in the "practice of medicine, surgery, dentistry" for over forty years. He shunned tea, coffee, tobacco and intoxicating drinks.

Dr. William M. Skinner was born in New York State in 1825. He studied medicine in Fulton and graduated at Woodstock, Vermont, in 1850. He was married that same year and came to Anamosa in 1856. Like so many doctors in Iowa, Dr. Skinner became interested in the drug business, with which he was always identified. Indeed, he was described in the Jones County history as a "physician, dealer in drugs and medicines," as well as in wall paper, toilet and fancy articles. In 1879 Dr. Skinner's drug store, which he operated in conjunction with his wife, was described as "one of the oldest business houses, without change, in Anamosa."