

The Poetry of Pills

The muse of Poetry motivated more than one suffering pioneer to burst forth in poetic ecstasy. No one could have been more appreciative of unsolicited endorsement than was Dr. A. G. Bragg, compounder of Bragg's Sugar Coated Pills.

On August 18, 1847, the *Iowa Standard* of Iowa City contained the following eulogy.

Addressed to Dr. A. G. Bragg, by a gentleman who was cured of a chronic disease of many years standing, by the use of his Sugar Coated Pills:

Hear me, in simple measure,
My gratitude rehearse,
And sing this new found treasure,
Of medicine, in verse.
Disease attacked my shivering frame,
A yellow, frightful hag—
'Twas then I learned to bless the name
And pills of Doctor Bragg.

A miracle preserved my life
Physicians could not save,
And death and nature held their strife
Beside my yawning grave;
A raging fever dried my blood —
Life's powers began to flag,
And I had laid beneath the sod,
But for these pills of Bragg.

'Twas like a charm — the agony
Of my disease was past —
When all around had looked to see
Each hour of life my last;
And when bowed down with sorest ills,
I scarce my frame could drag,
Some "Vegetable Tonic Pills"
I bought of Doctor Bragg.

Through all the wide creation,
Where struggle death and life,
Man needs some medicine like this
To help him through the life.
From the swelling Alleghanies
To the Rocky Mountain crag,
No matter what your pain is,
Buy your medicine of Bragg.

His pills no "*champion*" require
To help them win the day;
In ague's chills or fever's fire,
They're sure to *work their way*;
Prepared with an unerring skill,
Their virtues never flag —
So Bragg has all the patients,
And all the patients *bragg!*

To purify the stagnate blood,
Restore the flush of health,
A medicine to do this good
Is worth a monarch's wealth;—
Though chills and fever make you feel
As limber as a rag,
You'll soon become as smart as steel,
By the pills of Doctor Bragg.

Millions now take the sugared dose
With pleasantness and ease,
And cry no more "the medicine's
As bad as the disease;"
No more disgust the sick ones fill —
No more they stand and jag.
But take the "*Sugar Coated Pills*"
Grateful to Doctor Bragg.

Not to be outdone, the same Iowa City editor
printed the following in the *Standard* of September 22, 1847.

PARODY

Air—"De Floatin' Scow."

The physic and drugs that we used to take,
In large doses from day to day,
For fevers and chills, and the other complaints
Which caused us so much dismay;
Have now quite old and feeble become,
We don't take them any more;
Wright's Indian pills are now all the cry,
From Maine to Virginia Shore.

Oh! if I were but young again,
Or could take a new lease of my life,
I would never incur any Doctor's bills,
Except on account of my wife.

But though old age now holds me tight,
Yet when I get sick or sore,
I take nothing else but *Wright's Indian pills*
And a Doctor ne'er enters my door.

Oh, when I am dead and gone to my rest,
Put a box of *Wright's Pills* in my coffin,
Let doctors and druggists my pall-bearers be,
For I've borne with them very often.

Then in soft repose I'll take my sleep,
And I'll dream for ever more,
That an earlier use of *Wright's Indian pills*
Would have kept me safe on shore.

Oh! carry me back, &c.

It should be noted that the well-known song, *Carry Me Back to Old Virginny* (On the floating scow of old Virginny), became the subject of a patent medicine parody. Composed by James A. Bland and made famous by E. P. Christy, it became a parody for *Wright's Indian Pills* shortly after its appearance.

Even the most "infallible" pills could have failures in some instances. Thus, on June 29, 1844, the *Iowa Territorial Gazette and Burlington Advertiser* contained an advertisement of Gauby's Compound Lotion which was described as an "infallible" cure of "Tetter, Ringworm, Itch and all cutaneous affections." Two months later, the same paper announced the death of Dr. Jacob Gauby at Burlington. When the "Grim Reaper" appeared to call Dr. Gauby, his infallible "Compound Lotion" failed to save him from his entry into a better world.

It would be well, indeed, to seek out the straight and narrow path, avoid the pitfalls of sin, and be assured a place with the Heavenly Choir in the Celestial Home. A good way was pointed out by the *Warren County (Indianola) Leader* on August 20, 1874.

Sin is often the result of physical ill health and feeble stomachs. During one-third of our time the process of digestion continues. To be dispeptic is to be miserable. Dyspepsia is the foundation of fevers and all the diseases of the blood, liver, skin and kidneys. Dyspepsia yields to the virtues of the vegetable ingredients in that great purifier of the blood and restorer of the health, Dr. Walker's Vinegar Bitters.

Walker's Vinegar Bitters had more than one enthusiastic proponent. On July 18, 1872, the *Lyons City Advocate* declared:

KILLED BY A FALSEHOOD.—"He is dead," said a friend of ours the other day, in answer to an inquiry after the health of a mutual acquaintance. "Dead! you don't say so. Of what did he die?" "Of credulity" was the reply. "He believed in a patent medicine of which the chief ingredient was forty-rod rum, and it proved the death of him." This was true; the unfortunate man had taken for liver complaint, a compound of fiery alcohol and root juice, and it had killed him. Now did that misguided invalid require a tonic? He did: but not a spirituous excitant. The writer of this brief statement is confident, from his own experience, that if the Martyr to Drugged Alcohol had resorted to Dr. WALKER'S VINEGAR BITTERS, instead of the *poison with a medical name* which proved fatal to him, he would to-day be in the land of the living. The justly proper vegetable specific contains no destructive element. It is a tonic that does not excite, a cathartic that does not weaken, an antiseptic that neutralizes the seeds of disease in the blood and other fluids of the body, and a general alterative which arrests diseased action in the secretive organs, and restores the functional regularity indispensable to health and vigor. We are no friend of indiscriminate praise, and

believe that many patent medicines are merely poison, but the experience of thousands has proved the VINEGAR BITTERS to be all they claim.

The *Warren County* (Indianola) *Leader* of June 15, 1871, expressed contempt of medical quacks.

"DOCTOR CAMERON.—The individual who sports this patronymic hails from St. Louis. However, as Iowa physicians are dolts and blockheads, he has the benevolence to spend a majority of his time in our fair State to minister to such afflicted ones as are beyond the reach of all skill save the sort that comes out of his saddle-bags. As this "renowned physician," to use his own words, is drifting in this direction and may appear in our city at any time, we deem it advisable to speak of a few of his "specialties." He cures, then, every disease, human and inhuman, between a hang-nail and natural death of two weeks standing. Amputate your leg and he will make a new one grow from the stump in two-and-a-half visits. "Pluck out your right eye," and under his magic skill a new one, better than the first, instantly appears, to the utter confusion of the sacred pages from which we quote. He cures sleeplessness without the use of the knife and tight boots without calomel. The ferocious and agile tapeworm is left without a habitation or a name within eight seconds after the Doctor gets in position. Hair restored to bald heads of all desired colors—colors warranted to wash in any climate; and death circumvented, whether by accident or disease, by this Ajax of the medical profession. But to enlarge on his merits would be a work of supererogation. He is no farther off than Oskaloosa and will doubtless soon be here to tell the rest himself.

WILLIAM J. PETERSEN