

The Era of Eclectic Medicine



by Suzanne White Junod, Ph.D.

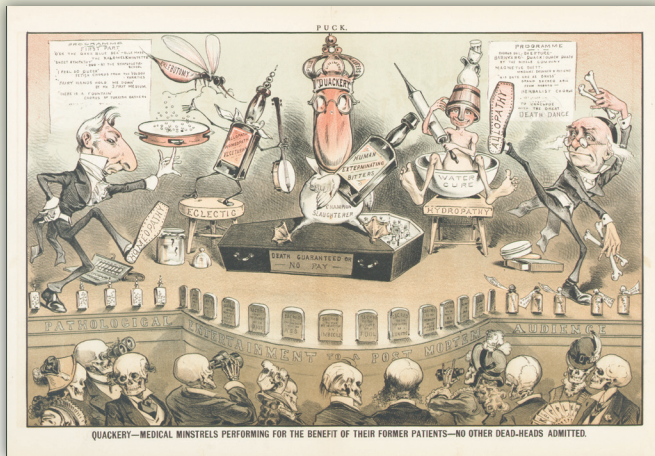


Fig. 1. *Quackery—Medical Minstrels*, PUCK (Nov. 19, 1879). Morphine (once an hour), quinine (4 times a day), Laudanum (teaspoon at times), Calomel (early and often), and arsenic (take often) are joined frontstage by the idiots, asses, fools, imbeciles, lunatics, noodles, and flatheads depicted on headstones as having taken them. Performing on stage are the major medical sects of the day: Allopathy, Hydropathy, Eclectic, Homeopathy, Phlebotomy, and Spiritualists. Print courtesy of William Helfand.

Quack is a pejorative term, disparagingly, albeit sometimes defensively, applied by a member of the establishment, the orthodox, regular, professional, credentialed and accepted class to describe the unorthodox, unlicensed, disapproved member of a fringe or irregular group. ... Above all, the term has become associated with the sellers of medicines and the marketers of medical systems, those with the “true” method of curing specific ills or, in an earlier day, *all* the ills of mankind.¹

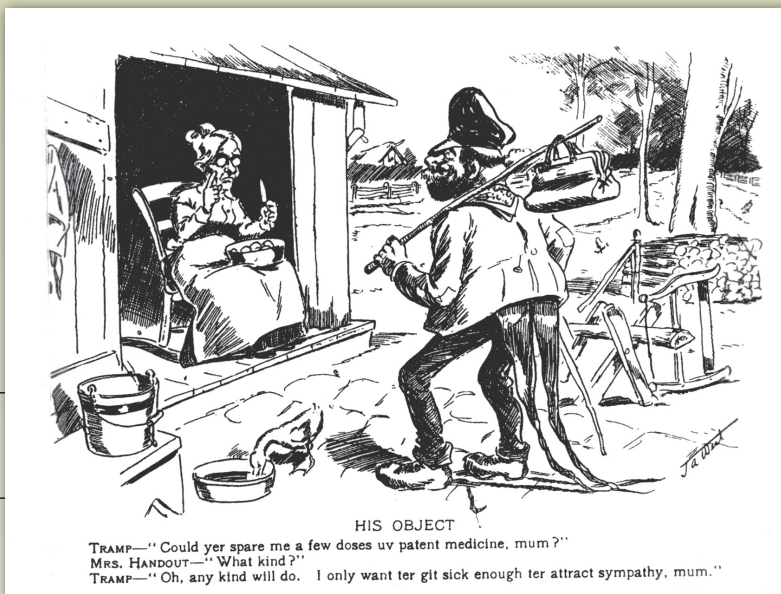


Fig. 2. *The Advertising Craze*, JUDGE (Dec. 23, 1893). Outdoor advertising was becoming quite an eyesore and this caricature satirizes some of the best known proprietary products, including Bromo Seltzer, Braindeis’ Pills, Fletcher’s Castoria, Carter’s Little Liver Pills, Hoods Sarsaparilla. Note Maltine at the top left. Print courtesy of William Helfand.

From the pages of *Puck* and *Judge*, around the turn-of-the-century, certainly it is clear that consumers of the day had an astonishing array of medical choices—and they were not particularly keen on most of them—at least for long. As the medical minstrels of the 19th century (see Fig. 1) gave way to the advertising alleys of the 20th century (see Fig. 2), skepticism was the cornerstone of the early 20th century’s medical culture. Homeopaths, allopaths (conventional doctors), and chiropractors vied with patent medicines and their promoters for their turn to be portrayed as “quacks” in the pages of the magazines. Poems such as *Samantha Peterson’s Faith-Cure* testified to the “common sense” knowledge that the magazines promoted on issues of health. The underlying message: *Samantha’s* marital misery had a cause and a cure, and it did not take a doctor to diagnose and treat it.

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His Object: This tramp is seeking patent medicines to make folks feel sorry for him!
46 JUDGE no. 1181 (June 4, 1904).



Samantha Peterson's Faith-Cure

When Mis' Samantha Peterson arose one night in meetin'
An' said her former trust in patent-medicines were fletin'
An' she proposed to try, instead, the faith-cure for a spell,
A sort of solemn hush upon the congregation fell.

There were things about the faith-cure which we couldn't
recommend,

An' we didn't know Samantha's plan nor how it all would end;
Still, when our first surprise wore off, a few of us confessed,
That, after all was said an done, it might be for the best.

Whatever else that we could say, we couldn't make denial
She'd given patent-medicines a fair an' thorough trial;
She kept them in a closet an' upon its spacious shelves
Stood bottles big an' boxes small which we had seen ourselves.

We had often read the labels: there was "Perkins's Purple Pills,"
An "Elder Jones's Elixir and Emollient for Ills";
There was "Fosdick's Hypo-Phosphate made to Fortify
the Feeble,"
An' "Potterbury's Panacea for Pale and Ailing People."

Though Samantha threw them all away she didn't seek her bed;
She made a resolution she would go to work instead;
An' she hadn't tried her faith-cure long when folks' began
to think

Samantha's face was actually growin' plump and pink.

We went an' told her husband, in a manner kind of sly,
She was growin' so good-lookin he might loser her by-an-by;
Samantha overheard us an' it pleased her, too, a lot,
An' she come to wear a look as though she'd rather laugh
than not.

There isn't any doubt but what Samantha's really well,
An' about her wondrous faith-cure, now she often likes to tell;
Of the good of other faith-cures, we've our doubts, we
must confess,
But we think Samantha's faith-cure was a glitterin' success.²

He Found Them So

Competition in the patent medicine industry was increas-
ing and health "crazes"—including health foods—began to
divert the attention of potential patients.

"And you say these substitutes are injurious?"
asked his friend.

"Very injurious," replied the patent-medicine man,
emphatically;

"they raise Cain with my business."³ Δ

¹ WILLIAM HELFAND, QUACK, QUACK, QUACK: THE SELLERS OF NOSTRUMS IN PRINTS, POSTERS, EPHEMERA & BOOKS 13 (Grolier Books 2002).

² 43 PUCK no. 1105 (May 11, 1898).

³ *Id.*



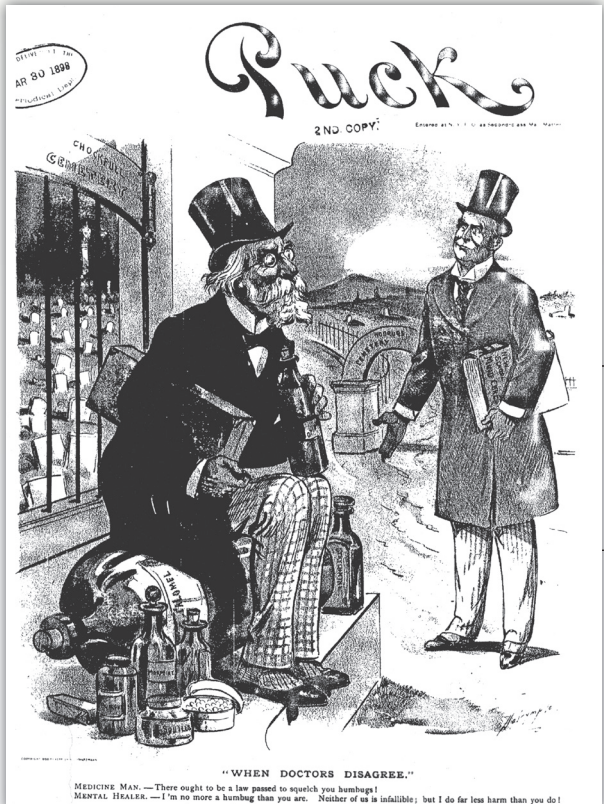
A Reason for Delay: This patient is proud of his past—spent avoiding doctors. 50 Puck no. 1281 (Sept. 18, 1901).

•A REASON FOR DELAY.
 SILAS.—If I ain't better by Monday week I 'll send for a doctor.
 SAMANTHA.—What 's the sense of waitin' till Monday week?
 SILAS.—Well, on Monday week it 'll be jest forty years since I had a doctor. I 'd like to make it an even forty years, Samantha.

Maltine Bottle: Note the label statement: "Accepted by the Council on Pharmacy and Chemistry of the American Medical Association." In an attempt to fight what they perceived as the "nostrum evils," the American Pharmaceutical Association and the American Medical Association had joined forces in 1905 to form a federal bureau to certify pharmaceuticals, funded by what we would now refer to as user fees. The Drug Division in the Bureau of Chemistry (forerunner of CDER) worked with the Council performing analyses until the council received a lab of its own, and there was ongoing Bureau representation on the Council. *Print courtesy of FDA History Office.*



Accepted by the Council on Pharmacy and Chemistry of the American Medical Association.



Puck Frontispiece: A new doctor comes to town. Subscribing to the "new school" of "mind cures," he draws the reader's attention to his "no drugs" cemetery, while the "medicine man" (allopath) perched on the steps to the city next to the "chockfull" cemetery is quite defensive and protective of his "turf." 43 Puck no. 1100 (Apr. 6, 1898).

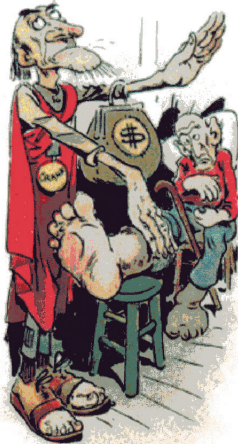
"WHEN DOCTORS DISAGREE."
 MEDICINE MAN.—There ought to be a law passed to squelch you humbugs!
 MENTAL HEALER.—I'm no more a humbug than you are. Neither of us is infallible; but I do far less harm than you do!



The Hudson-river frappe cure for consumption.



The dry-feet remedy for chronic asthma.



Curing everything by the laying on of hands.



DR. QUACK—"We must find a way to kill off these crank treatments, or our legitimate patent-medicine business will go to the dogs."



The barefoot treatment for rheumatism.



The "all-fours" treatment for appendicitis.



The metropolitan mud-cure for any old thing.

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Sesler & Williams Litho & Pig Co. New York

THE HEALTH-CRANKS' CURE-CRAZE.

Dr. Quack "We must find a way...": Again, drugs, whether patent or prescription, were being questioned by the public. This patent promoter makes the point that his patent medicine business was being threatened by an assortment of nondrug "health crazes" such as "the barefoot treatment for rheumatism," the "all-fours" treatment for appendicitis," the "Hudson-river frappe cure for consumption," and the "metropolitan mud-cure for any old thing." 47 JUDGE no. 1190 (Aug. 6, 1904).