

# THE PHILOSOPHICAL RESEARCH SOCIETY

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## GREETINGS:

**M**y esteemed Grandmother had her own private convictions about the practice of medicine. Nearly every family had favorite remedies of proven efficacy and these were kept in a small cabinet. In the area of preventive therapy, Grandmother depended on treacle (a mixture of sulphur and molasses) and the always reliable boneset tea which was bitter as gall. These were taken annually in early spring to prepare the constitution for a change of weather. Next in importance was the mustard plaster and, if this was not sufficiently strong, there was always a poultice of Spanish flies. Sniffles were common, especially during the spring thaw, so a small bottle of genuine oil of eucalyptus was on hand. A few drops on a handkerchief cleared the head, and a drop or two on a lump of sugar cleared the throat. If fever developed, sweet spirits of niter were expected to bring down the temperature and relax the nerves. If la grippe set in the patient inhaled the steam from boiling water to which eucalyptus or camphor had been added. Indigestion was treated with baking soda fortified by soft soups and milk toast. If an abscess formed, medicated mud was applied hot.

When folks felt poorly Quassia Bark-nine was a formidable tonic which could be taken along with Scott's Emulsion. The latter was an emulsified form of cod-liver oil, and far from tasty. In those days barns had their walls and roofs decorated with ads for patent medicines. If the farmer permitted this he usually received a generous amount of the remedy advertised. Grandmother rather liked Dr. Pierce's little pink pills for pale,



"THE APOTHECARY"  
An etching by Daumier.

puny people. Incidentally, I met a granddaughter of Dr. Pierce who assured me that the pills were almost miraculously successful. Another builder-upper was quinine, strychnine, and iron; and this concoction has survived to this day and is recommended by many physicians.

Grandmother's collection of laxatives was formidable. For children she prescribed Fletcher's Castoria. If this failed citrate of magnesia was administered. In some cases she preferred Pluto Water. The ultimate laxative was castor oil, often given with a sarsaparilla chaser. For aches and sprains there was Sloan's Liniment, good for man and beast. Olive oil was often a successful remedy for kidney stones, and she usually combined this treatment with regular dosages of Carter's Little Liver Pills.

Among the sundries she favored was the Sutherland Sisters' shampoo. On the front of each package the sisters were presented photographically, each one with her hair hanging down to the ground. Lavender was the only fragrance suitable for a lady. Anything stronger indicated the possibility of corrupted morals. Grandmother always cleaned her teeth with powdered pumice applied with a wad of cotton on the end of a toothpick. She scoured each tooth separately and had all her own teeth when she died. Occasionally her feet hurt, so she sprinkled Allen's Footease in her shoes. She never attempted to cure her rheumatism because it would have required giving up several of her favorite foods. She realized that it was a calculated risk, but if something disagreed with her she had recourse to ipecac. Occasionally, Grandmother developed a slight cough which she liked to call a phthisic. She recovered quickly by chewing the bark of slippery elm. She also considered it mandatory to fumigate the house each year with a sulphur candle.

If these remedies were ineffective, she would have a consultation with the local druggist. He did not charge for his advice but usually made a sale. In those days the druggists not only filled the prescriptions for local physicians but were happy to share their most secret remedies with the sick. Grandmother had quite a reputation and, if she had to call in a doctor, he always asked for a detailed description of her medical procedures. He then followed her advice with his other patients.

Grandmother departed from this mortal sphere before the modern concept of nutrition became popular. She knew nothing about vitamins or the tragedy of carbohydrates. She believed in good food and plenty of it, and followed the formulas of her New England ancestors. She never had to face the consequences of soft living. Daily walking was not regarded as exercise, but no one bothered to harness a horse for an eight or ten block trip. Children often walked a mile to school. Everyone was busy and hungry. Most persons ate as much for breakfast as we would for three hearty meals. The flour might be stone-ground, the vegetables fresh from the garden, and the eggs were delivered while still warm. There were no preservatives, adulterants, or artificial coloring and--what might be more important--all produce was eaten in the area where

it was grown. No one thought of importing beef from the Argentine or clams from Japan. Sprays had not come into vogue; there was no water or air pollution; milk was not pasteurized, but was delivered at the house and poured in a bucket provided by the customer. High thinking was more important than high living, and gourmets like Diamond Jim Brady died young from their overindulgences. In short, we are now in constant need of food supplements in order to survive ailments unknown to our ancestors.

The family remedies are now an elaborate array of health foods which, incidentally, are substantially more expensive than Grandmother's medications. I am moderately enthusiastic about supplementary nutrition, but a number of authorities on the subject are now advocating moderation. If we would eat simple food prepared from healthy ingredients, relax during meal hours, avoid television dinners, and secure mild exercise from odd jobs around the house, we would all feel better. It is not necessary to prepare a dietetic defense against tension, anxiety, frustration, or neurosis. Learn the habit of happiness, live within your means, and hope for the best. It's much cheaper.

Always most sincerely,

*Manly P. Hall*

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