CHAPTER VIII

GOSSIP

Much credit must be given the early newspapers for their effort to help in the matter of passing on known and tried remedies for the public benefit. While this was not even then orthodox medicine, it served a purpose and some good was derived from such sources.

Although many of these newspaper articles are of a serious nature, some are unique and amusing and are worthy of being quoted.

One article in the *Telegraph and Texas Register* published in Columbia, February 21, 1837, gives an advertisement of Dr. Sharp’s Thompsonian Infirmary with a list of medicines for sale there and the prices, and closes with this line. “Wanted, to purchase invalid slaves for whom the highest price will be paid.” This leaves one quite in doubt as to what will be done with the slaves.

“We have been informed by a Medical gentleman of this place that a doctor arrived today from Matagorda, having in his possession Vaccine matter, which he refuses to furnish our Physicians unless they will pay one hundred and fifty dollars for a single scab; and also that he charges five dollars for vaccination. We are not in the habit of being personal in our remarks, but we think such imposition at the present crisis ought to be held up to the public notice.”—*The Texas Republican*, Mar. 14, 1835.

“Dr. Adamson, from Edinburgh, Scotland, respectfully begs leave to offer his services to the citizens of Matagorda and its vicinity for a short time. He has, also, on hand a fresh and well selected assortment of medicines, suitable for warm and changeable climates which can be sent any distance in the country with proper directions. He is to be found at his house, corner of Fisher and Mobile Streets.” Matagorda, Dec. 13, 1837.—*Matagorda Bulletin*, Feb. 14, 1838.
“Of course any one at all conversant with Texas affairs must have heard of Deaf Smith, the celebrated spy. Smith, though not a doctor, had a remedy for consumption, which he believed almost unfailable. This remedy was to live upon the skunk or pole cat (the Mephitis Americana.) He learned its use from the Indians, and strongly recommended it to those afflicted by pulmonary complaints. The liquor ejected by the skunk for defense is known to possess highly medicinal qualities; its offensiveness has prevented its having a fair trial. The meat, when properly prepared, is delicious. It is necessary immediately after killing the animal, to remove the glands secreting the pungent fluid. Roast the meat upon a stick before the fire; divest yourself of prejudice; taste a bit, and you will never refuse an opportunity to feast upon what, if placed unawares upon the plate of an epicure, would be pronounced exceedingly savory. Of the merits of this edible, as a remediate agent in consumption, nothing positive is known. In the case of Deaf Smith, a wild life among the Indians, fresh air and exercise may have effected what he so earnestly attributed to the meat of the pole cat.

“The region between the Nueces and the Rio Grande will, without doubt, prove to be an advantageous one for the resort of consumptives. The climate is equable and genial. Snakes are found during the winter months. The air a short distance from the coast is dry and invigorating. The northers are mild. The constant breezes rob the summer months of their sultriness and much of their heat.

“All parts of that region are healthy. The uplands and the coast present no difference but in the amount of humidity contained in the atmosphere. An invalid from diseased lungs would do well to spend a few months on the Nueces. Should he not fancy the rich, juicy meat of the skunk, he can luxuriate upon the choicest game and fish that ever greeted the gaze of a hungry man. Between the excitement of hunting, fishing, and chasing mustangs, one at all fond of such sport can live quite a brisk life, and withal a healthy one.”—S. W. American—Texas Ranger & Lone Star, June 2, 1853.

This account of a philandering doctor is quite shocking:
In the year 1838 a party of some twenty-five Lipan Indians visited Victoria, as was their custom, to barter dressed deer pelts, buffalo robes, etc. Among them was a Dr. H. formerly a practicing physician of Matagorda, where he had a wife who was an intelligent and accomplished lady. He had deserted his wife, however, under the siren blandishments of a pretty Lipan squaw, with whom he lived.

"The Indians visited my store, and I purchased much of their peltry. Dr. H. bought a jar of preserves, and he and his bonne amie, the pretty squaw, sat down on the doorstep to partake of the same. Being well acquainted with H——, I could not refrain from asking him how it was possible that he could gain his own consent to desert the haunts of his civilized species and adopt this mode of life, so radically different from all that he had heretofore been accustomed to.

"He wished me to believe that he was doing so in a quest for scientific knowledge in regard to medicinal roots and herbs, and stated that he was acquiring a vast repertory of such knowledge. I made no reply to all this, but was satisfied that in the balances of his desires the squaw would vastly outweigh his thirst for knowledge. After disposing of their skins, which the Lipans dressed much better than any other tribe of Indians, they departed for another hunting expedition. Near the present site of the town of Cuero they encountered a party of Comanches when a fight ensued, in which the Lipans were the victors. One Comanche warrior was slain. The squaw of Dr. H—— cut off one of the hands of the defunct brave, and brought it to her Aesculapian Adonis with the suggestion that they should prepare it for their evening repast, stating that it was a delicious morsel. Cannibalism the doctor could not subscribe to, and he left the Indians at Gonzales and ultimately returned to Alabama."—Reminiscences of Fifty Years in Texas—Linn.

This quotation from an Englishwoman out to see the world is enlightening. Her illustration of Houston as it appears in her book is very clearly a matter of imagination by some one. It looks more like the highlands of
Scotland, but was considered of such value that it was copied in Germany with some variations.

TEXAS AND THE GULF OF MEXICO
or
YACHTING IN THE NEW WORLD
by
MRS. HOUSTOUN, 1844

“I confess, I should not much like to trust a serious case in the hands of the Texan doctors. Some of them may be clever and well educated, but the medicine in general I believe to be bad, in spite of their frequent announcement as cargo, and the words, drugs and chemicals, appended to so many of the stores.”

She cited an instance of an injury to the eye of one of their deck hands who was struck during loading with a large iron hook. The injury was treated by a Galveston doctor in the absence of the ship’s doctor, who was ashore; and like many others of the profession the Englishman did not approve of the Galveston doctor’s treatment. The seaman did lose his eye.

“Cure for a Lady’s Sore Throat—The following valuable remedy affords a new illustration of the adaptation of science to the wants and uses of ordinary life; and on account of the existing prevalence of the disease, it is hoped it may find a place in the Register, even to the exclusion of other important matter. It is an improved formula of the distinguished Dr. Onderdonk, who has applied it extensively and with great success, in his immense practice. The well-known modesty of the worthy doctor, has impelled him (as we are informed) to disclaim the honor of the invention and to content himself with the more humble merit of having tested its infallible virtues by a series of skillful and interesting experiments, made in innumerable cases where the symptoms seemed to indicate the propriety of this, his favorite prescription:

“Embrace the neck of the patient closely, yet tenderly, in a gentleman’s coat sleeve; and be sure there is an arm in it.”—M. D.—Texas National Register, March 22, 1845.
“Purely Vegetable?—‘My dear sir,’ said a vegetarian to his patron, whom, on entering the house, he was surprised to find a widower, ‘did your wife suffer at all in the dying struggle?’

‘Why, no, I rather guess not,’ said the bereaved husband, with apparent resignation.

‘Thank heaven!’ exclaimed the botanic, ‘for the light that science imparts,’ throwing back his head and turning his eyes towards the concave horizon, and at the same time thrusting his hands into his breeches pockets: ‘this is truly an age of discoveries! I knew she could not suffer; for I had given her the proper medicine to make her die easy. I always do that for my patients. It is a discovery of my own—it is purely vegetable!’”—Nacogdoches Times, June 17, 1848.

A physician writes the San Antonio Herald, August 5, 185— that he thinks it his duty to pass on to other sufferers his experience in favor of hoop skirts.

“A lady who had for years suffered very much from pain in the back, and several other uncomfortable feelings in the regions adjacent, was induced to adopt hooped and light skirts instead of the heavy ones which she had formerly worn. After the use of the former for a few weeks, she said that she was nearly entirely free from backache and other uncomfortable feelings, and that she could be about the house, on her feet all day, and feel less fatigued than she had felt by the middle of the forenoon. She says that she had the curiosity, upon one occasion, to weigh the set of skirts formerly worn and those lately adopted, and that the former weighed over four times as much as the latter. This difference in the weight with the greater freedom of motion and exemption from an oppressive heat about the loins, might be sufficient of themselves to convince any one that those suffering in the way referred to must experience relief from the adoption of hooped or light skirts of any other pattern. This presumption in their favor has been greatly confirmed in my own mind by the results of several cases similar to the above. I hope many of those who now find it tiresome and painful work to be long around the house upon their feet, and who suf-
fer from weakness in the back, etc., may be induced to lay aside heavy skirts and adopt some lighter kinds. If you think the brief statement above given at all likely to promote this desirable change, neither patient nor physician will object to its being submitted to your readers.”
—San Antonio Daily Herald, Aug. 5, 185—?

This appeal to Dr. Massie was most timely:

"Chapel Hill,

"Dr. J. C. Massie,

"September 14, 1852.

"Dear Sir:

"The profession is much in need of a work on the Theory and Practice of Medicine, and such a work written by one of their own members, and presenting the various modifications which disease assumes in Texas, has long been needed. You, being an eclectic in its broadest sense, and enjoying an enviable reputation both as a Physician and Medical Correspondent, and from our knowledge of you personally, we are confident there is none better qualified by enlarged reading and ample experience to supply this desideratum than yourself. We, therefore, hope that you will present to the public at as early a period as possible, the result of your reflections and experience in this interesting department of Medical Literature.

"Entertaining the hope that you will oblige your friends by embarking in this undertaking, we have the honor to be, with high appreciation, very truly your friends,

"W. R. Smith, Galveston,
W. S. Rogers, Chapell Hill,
W. Leigh Turnstall, Chapell Hill,
R. J. Swearengen, Chapell Hill,
J. Randolph Weir, Chapell Hill,
J. Black, Fort Bend,
J. S. Woolfork, Texana,
J. L. Irvin, Montgomery,
D. C. Dickson, Grimes Co.,
F. T. Well, Texana,
Wm. S. Minnock, Spring Creek,
Louis S. Bryan, Houston,
Sim Hopkins, Leon Co.,
W. C. McGowan, Frelsburg."
Eclectic Southern Practice—We are indebted to Mr. Massie, of Houston, for a copy of his recently published work on the Eclectic Southern Practice of Medicine. The work is published by Thomas Cowperthwaite & Co. of Philadelphia, and as far as its external appearance is concerned, there is nothing left to desire.

"We do not pretend to be much versed in the science of the healing art, and consequently are not fully qualified to judge of the intrinsic merits of a work of that kind; but from the well-known ability of the author, and the impression created by a hasty perusal of some of its chapters, we have no hesitancy in saying that it will prove a valuable household work, and be particularly appreciated by our planting community, who are frequently living at a considerable distance from their medical attendants. Through its aid they will be enabled to treat all ordinary cases in a proper manner, until a medical man can be procured.

"We wish the gifted author all possible success in his enterprise."—Galveston News, Sept. 18, 1853.

Dr. Massie's book, the first of its kind published in Texas, was a credit to him, and it contained many valuable remedies, but two are so unusual that they are quoted. The tape worm is rarely mentioned now in polite medical circles. We might well believe that if the remedies he quotes from German authorities were really used, they have practically exterminated the species.

"Mare's milk is asserted to have been used with great advantage by Germans."

"Hufeland associated a decoction of garlic in milk with castor oil and tin filings."

Health of Houston—"This city continues remarkably healthy. There are now probably fewer cases of sickness here, than there have been at any time, in the summer season since the city was first settled. If proper precautions are observed by our citizens a few weeks longer, there is little doubt, that they will entirely escape disease. It has generally been noticed that fevers are more frequent just after the excitement of the September election. We hope all will bear this in mind, and endeavor to avoid all un-
necessary excitement; neither giving way to passion nor intemperance."—The Morning Star, Aug. 29, 1843.

Health of Matagorda—"Our town continues to enjoy uninterrupted good health. We would scarcely deem so common an occurrence worthy of remark, were it not from the fact that there are rumors of some sickness prevailing just now in many of the adjoining neighborhoods. It is a singular fact, that when the cholera was prevailing in almost every section of the county some two years ago, Matagorda entirely escaped its fearful visitation—not a solitary case occurring in this vicinity. Indeed, there has been no sickness of consequence since 1837. This advantage over other places, in point of health, may be attributed, we suppose, to the elevated and clean position of our town and the uninterrupted exposure to the breeze.”
—Colorado Tribune, May 27, 1852.

Cranberries—Cure for Erysipelas—"A writer in one of the newspapers, in reply to the question 'Will cranberries cure erysipelas?' says: 'A lady visited our family a few days since, and stated that her daughter had the erysipelas quite bad. We called to mind the remedy recommended by the New Haven editor. On returning home in the evening she found the disease was spreading rapidly and had assumed a frightful appearance. She immediately applied a poultice made of cranberries, which seemed to arrest it at once, and the second poultice effected a complete cure.'
—Texas Ranger, November 28, 1855.

"How Many Quack Doctors Have We in America?"
"From the Evansville Reform we find that we have 60 medical schools in America, 44 of which teach the ordinary method or regular method, 8 the eclectic, or new method, 2 Homeopathic method, 2 teach dentistry and 2 teach treatment of female diseases. Every school has five to eight professors and one teacher of Anatomy. According to the best estimation, 18,000 students and doctors come from these medical schools, of which 2,000 of the doctors have
died. The census of 1850, however, showed that 40,564 people practice in the United States. To these we must add 191 surgeons, 2,923 dentists and 59 Patent medicine manufacturers. When one adds to the 16,000 graduates from medical colleges here in our country the 4,000 real doctors from foreign countries, we have still 20,000 quack doctors and only professional quack doctors not those who practice medicine as a side line.

“State authority should examine doctors who practice medicine as well as engineers, ships and railroads, as surely many are murdered each year by these quack doctors.”
—Neu Braunfelser Zeitung.

Cure for T. B.—“Dr. Cartwright, of New Orleans, communicates to the Boston Medical and Surgical Journal an article entitled ‘The Sugar House Cure for Bronchial, Dispeptic, and Consumptive Complaints.’ It is stated that a residence in a sugar house, during the rolling season, far surpasses any other known means of restoring flesh, strength and health, lost by chronic ailments of the chest, throat or stomach. The rolling season is the harvest, when the canes are cut, the juice extracted and converted into sugar. In Louisiana it commences about the middle of October, and ends at Christmas, but is sometimes protracted into January. Dr. C. says the vapor is most agreeable and soothing to the lungs and in his own case entirely removed a distressing cough. He stood for hours in the sugar house inhaling the vapor and drinking occasionally a glass of the hot cane juice. This is a fact interesting to invalids.”—Texas State Gazette, October 16, 1852.

“If I were seriously ill of consumption, I would live out of doors day and night, except it were raining or midwinter, then I would sleep in an unplastered log house. My consumptive friends, you want air, not physic; you want pure air, not medicated air; you want nutrition, such as plenty of meat and bread can give, and they alone; physic has no nutriment; gasping for air cannot cure you. If you want to get well go in for ‘beef and out of doors air’ and do not be deluded into the grave by advertisement and unreliable certificates—Dr. Hall.”—San Antonio Herald, Aug. 5, 1858.
To Cure a Cold—"The following is from Hall's Journal of Health:

"The moment a man is satisfied that he has taken cold, let him do three things—first, eat nothing; second, go to bed, cover up in a warm room; third, drink as much cold water as he can, or as he wants, or as much herb tea as he can, and in three cases out of four he will be well in 35 hours. To neglect a cold for 48 hours after the cough commences is to place himself beyond cure until the cough has run its course for about a fortnight. Warmth and abstinence are safe, certain cures when applied early. Warmth keeps the pores of the skin open and relieves it of the surplus which oppresses it, while abstinence cuts off the supply of material for phlegm, which would otherwise be coughed up."—Dallas Herald, Dec. 12, 1868.

Croup—"At a recent meeting of the Paris Academy of Sciences, the disease of Croup—so common among children—formed the subject of very important remarks. Dr. Judin stated that it was a parasitic affection, and of all simple remedies capable of removing these parasitical growths the perchloride of iron is by far the best. It penetrates through the fungus, modifies the hemorrhagic state which always exists in the affected parts, and in their neighborhood, and lastly, obliges the patient to expectorate, by which means the false membrane is expelled and an immediate cure effected."—Belton Independent, Feb. 19, 1859.

"The Transfusion of Blood—The case to which we have referred, as a remarkable instance of preventing death by transfusion, has continued to exhibit the most satisfactory results from that treatment. The patient was a lady in whom the yellow fever had reached the usually fatal stage when hemorrhage takes place from the mouth. She would have soon expired from loss of blood in that way, when Dr. Benedict determined to try transfusion as a last recourse.

"The blood which he injected then and afterwards into her veins, he was careful to draw from the arm of a person (a volunteer) who had just recovered from the yellow
fever. This, we believe, is the only known case of transfusion in this city, but it is not likely to be the last. Indeed, it would not be surprising if that ‘heroic’ practice should become as popular, in time, as the opposite practice of phlebotomy (blood letting) was at a former period. It is obvious, however, that none but the most scientific and skillful should ever be suffered to undertake so delicate an operation.” —Harrison Flag, November 19, 1858.

“A Card—On Solidad Street, between the Post Office and the Plaza, may be found this sign:

“San Antonio Medical Office.

“In it may be found remedies for every disease to which the citizens of this community are liable; and these are compounded from the very best materials, and in strict accordance with the rules now followed by our most reliable Druggists and Physicians. There are no cure-alls in this establishment. Each remedy is accompanied by printed directions so explicit that no one can fail to understand them.

“The object of this office is to place within the reach of all, at a small expense, just such remedies as may be needed.

“No charge will be made for advice given in the office, and where the proof is positive that the patient is not able to pay for such remedies as he may need, they, too, will be furnished gratis.” —Daily Ledger & Texan, San Antonio, April 27, 1860.

“Treatment for Infant—‘You have lost your baby, I hear,’ said one gentleman to another. ‘Yes, poor little thing! It was only five months old. We did all we could for it. We had four doctors, blistered its head and feet, put mustard poultices all over it, gave it nine calomel powders, leched its temples, had it bled, and gave it all kinds of medicines, and yet, after a week’s illness, it died.’ ” —Tri-Weekly State Gazette, June 1, 1868.

“Cure for Diphtheria—A French physician in a paper presented to the French Academy of Medicines, asserts that lemon juice is one of the most efficacious medicines
which can be applied in diphtheria, and he relates that when he was adresser in the hospital his own life was saved by its timely application. He got three dozen lemons and gargled his throat with the juice, swallowing a little, at the same time, in order to act on the more deep-seated parts.” —Texas Republican, April 13, 1866.

“Asparagus for Rheumatism—A medical correspondent of an English Journal says that the advantages of asparagus are sufficiently appreciated by those who suffer from rheumatism and gout. Slight cases of rheumatism are cured in a few days by feeding on this delicious esculent; and more chronic cases are much relieved, especially if the patient carefully avoids all acids, whether in food or beverage. The Jerusalem artichoke has also a similar effect in relieving rheumatism. The heads may be eaten in the usual way, but tea made from the leaves of the stalk, and drunk three or four times a day, is a certain remedy, though not equally agreeable.”—Western Stock Journal, Pleasanton, Tex., May 27, 1873.

“Uses of Chloroform—At the late National Medical Convention in Boston, Dr. Nathan R. Smith read a long report from the Committee on Surgery, most unequivocally defending the use of chloroform. The report says: ‘It has been administered to millions of subjects and we have but fifteen cases of authenticated deaths supervening from its use. Alarm, therefore, on the subject, is needless. Much more cause is there for alarm, much more reason to apprehend a fatal termination in taking an ordinary railroad journey than in inhaling chloroform at the hands of a judicious and careful practitioner. ‘It is inadmissible to proceed with a surgical operation in dangerous cases without the use of chloroform. It should not be used where there is a disease of the heart; and, in inhalation, care should be taken that atmospheric air be mixed with the chloroform. Inhalation should stop the moment that insensibility is attained. Professor Simpson has published his opinion that one hundred lives have been preserved by the use of chloroform, where one has been lost by it. He further says that the mortality where
chloroform is used, is much less than in similar cases where it is dispensed with."

"The committee on obstetrics also reported decidedly in favor of the use of chloroform, and the wonderful advantages obstetric practice has gained through the introduction of anaesthetic agents. Etherization has now been used in thousands of cases and in no one instance has the slightest injury resulted to the mother."—The Texas Republican, June 8, 1849.

Vital Statistics—The Spanish attempted to keep records of births and deaths, and many editorials in the early American newspapers urged the necessity of keeping these records. Perhaps the most amusing one is in the Texas Monument, October 8, 1857. The editor says there has been some difference of opinion as to the propriety of announcing births in a public journal; that he "has given the matter due consideration, has endeavored to deliberately weigh the merits and demerits of the case and has arrived at the following conclusions. First, There is nothing immoral in it. Second, There is nothing irreligious in it. Third, There is nothing immodest in it. Fourth, It is a matter of interest to distant relatives who have not kept up a regular epistolary correspondence. Fifth, It is a well-known fact one of the highest tests of the salubrity of any climate is the number of children born and raised in that county." Beside these five reasons, the editor elaborates on the fact the newspapers in two continents have been announcing the births of sons and daughters to Queen Victoria and he considers the Texian ladies as virtuous, as honorable and as deserving of consideration as Her Royal Highness."