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ANESTHESIOLOGY REFLECTIONS FROM THE WOOD LIBRARY-MUSEUM

Paine's Celery Compound: Celery Seed Bracer or Cocaine Elixir?



Around 1874, a Yale medical graduate and Dartmouth professor, Edward Elisha Phelps, Sr., M.D., L.L.D. (1803 to 1880), compounded a remedy based on the celery seed (note the head of celery in the logo above). He eventually allowed his favorite compounding pharmacist, Milton Kendall Paine (1834 to 1896) to market the popular panacea as “The Best Remedy in the World—Paine’s Celery Compound.” In 1887 Paine sold his rights to Wells, Richardson & Company of Burlington, Vermont. That firm may have “enhanced” the compound with traces of cocaine and marketed it as “The True Medicine for Lost Nervous Strength.” After regulations in 1906, the compound likely joined Coca Cola in dropping cocaine from its formulation. Besides celery seed, the manufacturer’s later booklets listed Paine’s botanical slurry as comprising calisaya bark, cascara sagrada, senna leaves, prickly ash bark, hops, black haw, and chamomile flowers—all of which were added to the roots of sarsaparilla, ginger, dandelion, mandrake, gentian, black cohosh, and yellow dock. The American Medical Association categorized Paine’s compound as belonging “to the ‘bracer’ type of nostrums; that is, it is a preparation whose most potent and active drug is alcohol.” (Copyright © the American Society of Anesthesiologists’ Wood Library-Museum of Anesthesiology.)

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