

MEDICINES ADVERTISED IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY BATH NEWSPAPERS

by

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The advertisements for patent and proprietary medicines in a sample of Bath newspapers, from 1744 to the end of the century,¹ have been examined to try to assess the importance of the medicines marketed in this way. A previous report, which described the sample in more detail, emphasized how deeply the proprietors of newspapers, circulating libraries and bookshops were involved as retailers of these products and suggested that the visitors to Bath represented a section of society which formed a major market for advertised medicines.² The sample contained advertisements for 302 different medicines, some of which could be further divided into varieties prepared by different makers. The present report is mainly concerned with the medicines themselves.

SOURCES AND DISTRIBUTION OF THE MEDICINES

Before discussing the medicines, a brief consideration of their manufacture and distribution to the Bath retailers is necessary. The advertisements in the sample named 108 proprietors or manufacturers of the medicines. For about half of these, no occupation or trade was stated, though some styled themselves "Dr." The occupations of the remainder were given in the advertisements or can be obtained from the patent literature.³ Two were clergymen⁴ and the rest were divided approximately equally between the following five categories (their numbers being shown in parenthesis): dentists, variously described (13), surgeons (12), practitioners of physic (11), apothecaries (11) and chymists or chymists and druggists (10). Some had patented their medicines and, despite vagueness and ambiguity in the advertisements, patents for 41 of the 302 preparations can be identified with a fair degree of certainty. A further four can be identified tentatively.

Some of the makers of proprietary medicines distributed their own products, but many relied on distributing agents to market their medicines for them. Some of these agents were chemists and druggists with nostrums of their own and some were printers or booksellers. Two well-known distributors, whose medicines were advertised throughout the whole of the present sample, both started in the provinces but later moved their headquarters to London. One was founded by John Newbery who had commenced business in Reading and became famous as a publisher as well as a dealer in medicines.⁵ After his death, the business passed to his son Francis.⁶ The other major concern derived from that of William and Cluer Dicey.⁷ At the beginning of the sample they advertised from their printing office in Northampton and their medicines were sold in London at Dr. Bateman's warehouse in Bow Church Yard.⁸ They were

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also associated with Benjamin Okell who was described as a chymist when he patented Bateman's Pectoral Drops.⁹ In 1770, advertisements referred to "Dicey and Okell's great original Elixir Warehouse"¹⁰ but, until the final years of the century, the long lists of medicines were commonly advertised as sold by Messrs. Dicey & Co., at 10 Bow Church Yard. At the end of the century, Dicey & Beynon were advertising from that address¹¹ and John Wye, who described himself as "late partners with Dicey & Co.," had established a medicinal warehouse in Coleman Street, London.¹²

Another active distributor was the London firm of Thomas Jackson who, in 1757, had an "Elaboratory and Medicinal Warehouse" in Wich Street.¹³ Later, Jackson & Co. operated from 95 Fleet Market¹⁴ and, late in the century, the business had apparently been taken over by James Barclay.¹⁵ Other London distributors of medicines appearing less frequently in the Bath advertisements were R. Baldwin of Pater Noster Row, Mr. Bacon of Oxford Street, J. Fuller of Covent Garden and Hilton Wray & Co. of Birchin Lane; and there were fourteen others, mostly in London, who appeared from the Bath papers to be agents for a more limited number of products.

THE MOST FREQUENTLY ADVERTISED MEDICINES

Ten of the 302 medicines were advertised more than 160 times in the present sample. As a total of 636 issues of newspapers were examined, and a preparation was rarely advertised more than once in the same issue, these ten medicines must have appeared on average in at least one issue in every four. They therefore merit individual consideration.

Scots Pills were advertised 256 times, usually as the familiar Anderson's Scots Pills. They had been in existence at least since 1635, and their early history is detailed by Wootton.¹⁶ In 1744, at the beginning of the present sample, Anderson's Scots Pills prepared by D. English "at the Unicorn, over-against the New Church in the Strand, London" were being sold in Bath and the advertisement described the elaborate seal in black wax.¹⁷ A rival preparation, also being sold in Bath, was advertised by R. Raymond and was called "Dr. Boerhaave's Aurea Medicina, or the Scots-Pills Improv'd". They also carried a seal in black wax but were packed in an oval box. Raymond's advertisement first warned that the medicine would not cure every disease but continued: "They are taken with wonderful Success for all Pains and Diseases of the Head, Stomach, and Bowels of Men and Women, but especially for the Head-Ach, Giddiness, Vapours, Phrensy, weak and sore Eyes, Deafness, Palsy, Loss of Appetite, Melancholy, Cholera, Phlegm, Worms, Ulcers, Rheumatism, Gout, Gravel, Scurvy, Dropsy, Cholick or Gripes, and all Obstructions whatever, either in Men, Women or Children."¹⁸ Anderson's Scots Pills were supplied by both Newbery and Dicey & Co., and a retailer might stock more than one variety. Thomas Boddely, printer of the *Bath Journal*, did so and announced that he sold Scots Pills in "both round and oval Boxes".¹⁹ Other proprietors of Scots Pills advertised in the eighteenth-century Bath newspapers included Kennedy and Anderson from Scotland, who were lodging in Bristol;²⁰ James English at the Unicorn;²¹ Thomas Irvine;²² and Robert Anderson of Bristol.²³

Though the proprietary rights to Scots Pills were contested, there was probably little mystery about their main ingredients. Recipes were given in popular medical books of

the eighteenth century: William Buchan described purging pills which would “answer all the purposes of Dr. Anderson’s pills, the principle ingredient of which is aloes”,²⁴ and John Wesley wrote that Scotch Pills could be made by warming hepatic aloes with a small amount of sweet oil and water, with or without the addition of liquorice powder.²⁵ Adair simply wrote that “Anderson’s Pills are aloes with oil of aniseed”.²⁶ Early in the nineteenth century, numerous formulae were published. Paris’s recipe for “Barbadoes Aloes with a proportion of Jalap, and Oil of Aniseed”²⁷ was quoted with many others in supplements to the pharmacopoeias, druggists’ recipe books and early issues of the *Lancet*.²⁸ None of these formulae was exactly like that of an official preparation but Cooley²⁹ quotes what is claimed to be Anderson’s original specifications and these are like those of *Pilulae aloes cum myrrha* (PL).

Daffy’s Elixir, mentioned 229 times, was the next most frequently advertised preparation. Its seventeenth-century origin and subsequent history were traced by Wootton who stated that it was still being sold in 1910.³⁰ It did not, however, figure in the analyses made for the British Medical Association in the early twentieth century,³¹ nor in Robert Hutchison’s list,³² so it could have been of little commercial significance by that time. But in the eighteenth century, Daffy’s Elixir must have been very well known. The Bath newspapers show that Newbery, Dicey & Co., Jackson & Co. and John Wye all distributed the elixir, and recipes appeared in popular books. Two were published by John Wesley³³ and two were quoted in *The Complete Housewife* with the statement that the elixir was excellent for colic, gravel in the kidney, griping of the guts or any obstruction of the bowels and that it purged two or three times a day.³⁴ An advertisement in 1790 made wider claims for True Daffy’s Elixir “in the cure of the Stone, Gravel, ulcerated Kidneys, the Gout, Rheumatism, Cholic, Phthisic, Dropsy, Scurvy, Surfeits, Convulsions, disorders peculiar to Women and Children, Consumptions, the Piles, Fevers, Agues, Fluxes, Spitting of Blood, Pains in the Breast, Limbs, Joints etc.”³⁵

Daffy’s Elixir was not patented but its composition was well known and there can be little doubt that it resembled an official preparation. Numerous medical authors³⁶ writing in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries equated the elixir with *Tinctura sennae* (PL) or *Tinctura sennae composita* (PE).

Stoughton’s Elixir, which was advertised 212 times, was patented in 1712³⁷ and the Bath advertisements were for preparations supplied both by Newbery and by Dicey & Co. It was sometimes described as a “Stomachic Cordial Elixir”, indicating its main suggested use. The various recipes published early in the nineteenth century agreed in suggesting that the elixir was a tincture of gentian with various additions: Paris, in a typically succinct footnote, said that it was “a tincture of Gentian, with the addition of *Serpentaria*, Orange Peel, Cardamoms, and some other aromatics”.³⁸ Rennie³⁹ equated it with *Tinctura amara* or *Tinctura gentianae composita* (PL) and the French Codex quoted “*Tinctura Amara, dicta vulgo Elixirum doctoris Stoughton*”.⁴⁰ It would, therefore, seem fair to say that the elixir was at least similar to an official preparation.

Hooper’s Female Pills, advertised 211 times, were patented in 1743 by John Hooper, man midwife and apothecary of Reading.⁴¹ He made both Newbery and the Diceys agents for distributing the product.⁴² The pills were advertised as a “most useful Remedy against those general Complaints the Female Sex are subject to. . . . Health is

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recover'd, and the Patient that looked like Death restor'd to a lively Complexion. They are the best Medicine ever discover'd for young Women, when afflicted with what is vulgarly call'd the Green-sickness, which two or three Boxes will certainly cure; and are also excellent for the Palpitation of the Heart, Giddiness, Loathing of Food, bad Digestion, Pains of the Stomach, a Beating of the Arteries of the Neck, short Breath upon every little Motion. . .".⁴³ Hooper's patent specifications did not disclose the composition of the pills but recipes were published in the early nineteenth century and Paris suggested that they were *Pilulae aloes cum myrrha* with the addition of sulphate of iron, and canella bark, with a portion of ivory black.⁴⁴ A formula quoted by Rennie suggests that each pill contained about 9 mg of iron as ferrous sulphate and 22 mg as the carbonate, the adult dose being four pills.⁴⁵ If this was so, the pills might well have contributed to the treatment of chlorosis and any iron deficiency underlying the anaemic symptoms suggested in the advertisement, though the purgative effect of the aloes, at about 2.2 gr. per pill, might have limited the dose of iron which could be tolerated. The iron content of several other of the quoted recipes was much lower and a large number of the pills would have been needed for any therapeutic effect in iron deficiency. It is likely that the pills would have been beneficial to some of the women who took them and this may be the reason for their persistence on the market. They were still being sold in 1907, at the same price per box as in 1790 and with advertising copy remarkably like that of 1744, many phrases being identical.⁴⁶

British Oil, advertised 200 times, was patented by Michael and Thomas Betton in 1742.⁴⁷ It was advertised as a versatile medicine "which cures by Bathing before the Fire all old Contusions and Contractions of the Nerves, or Contracted or Withered Limbs, Strains, Ulcers, old Sores, and all fixed and wandering Pains: It greatly relieves in the Palsy; cures Lameness, Swellings, Inflammations, St. Anthony's Fire, King's Evil. . .". Inwardly taken it "cures Ulcers of the Lungs, Shortness of Breath, Consumptions, Phthisick, Coughs, and almost all Pains and Disorders of the Breast or Lungs."⁴⁸ The patent specifications described its preparation from a rock lying over the coal in coalmines, but nineteenth-century recipes were mostly similar to that quoted in the *Lancet* which mentioned oil of turpentine, Barbadoes tar and oil of rosemary.⁴⁹ Such substitutes were probably in use in the eighteenth century, as was implied by William Lewis who wrote "some mineral oils, procurable among ourselves, are used by the common people, and often with benefit: the empyrical medicine, called British oil, is of the same nature with petrolea; the genuine sort being extracted by distillation from a hard bitumen."⁵⁰

Two further medicines in this widely advertised group were declared by their names to be purgative. Dr. Bostock's Purging Cordial Elixir, advertised 194 times, was supplied by the firm of Dicey and was mentioned throughout the term of the present sample. It differs from the other nine products under discussion in that numerous recipes for this medicine did not appear in nineteenth-century formularies. Dr. Radcliffe's Famous Purging Elixir, advertised a total of 191 times throughout the sample, was also a product of the Diceys and numerous formulae were published. That in the *Lancet* is fairly representative and shows the main ingredients as tinctures of aloes, jalap and gentian with powdered scammony, jalap and senna.⁵¹ The action of the medicine must have fulfilled the promise of its title.

The remaining three of these ten medicines all contained a substantial amount of opium. Bateman's Pectoral Drops, advertised 194 times, were not sold purely for respiratory complaints: they were "not to be parallel'd by any Medicine in the known World for curing and giving immediate Ease in all Colds, Coughs, Agues, Fevers, Fluxes, Pains of the Breast, Limbs and Joints; as also in all Fits of the Gout, Rheumatick Pains, Stone, Gravel, Cholick, etc."⁵² They were patented in 1723 by Benjamin Okell⁵³ and distributed by Dicey & Co. and, later, by John Wye. No patent specifications were enrolled but many formulae were published from early in the nineteenth century. Paris wrote that the drops consisted principally of tincture of castor with portions of camphor and opium, flavoured with anise seed and coloured with cochineal.⁵⁴ The amount of opium varied considerably among the published formulae and the recommended dose was not usually stated. The medicine did not match an official preparation in Britain but was eventually included in the American National Formulary as Compound Tincture of Opium and Gambir.⁵⁵

Squire's Grand Elixir, advertised 181 times, was "the Greatest Restorative in the World" and was offered for much the same set of complaints as the previous medicine.⁵⁶ There was general agreement among the nineteenth-century formulae that opium was the prime ingredient.⁵⁷

The final medicine of this group is Godfrey's Cordial. It was advertised 162 times and its widespread use brought numerous published warnings in the nineteenth century of the dangers of the opium it contained, especially when it was used for children.⁵⁸ The perils of the "sleeping Cordial", which might well have been Godfrey's, were even detailed in verse by George Crabbe in *The borough* (1810). As early as 1757, however, a Bath newspaper carried an advertisement for a Carminative Mixture, presumably Dalby's, which attacked Godfrey's Cordial as a treatment for infants with "gripping pains in the bowels": "Many Medicines stand recommended for a Cure, amongst the which Godfrey's Cordial stands yet in repute, but being administered injudiciously, and by unskilled Hands, has too often had fatal Effects, so that a judicious Writer on the Care due to Children, says, It has obtain'd the emphatic Name of *Lord have Mercy*, alluding to the affected Squall of hireling Nurses, on finding their Charge dead after administering an over Dose thereof, to allay its Cries, caused by the Agony of gripping Pains."⁵⁹ This advertisement may echo Walter Harris who forbade the use of opiates for treatment of any disorders of children except "obstinate Vomiting", even if they were dignified with the name of "cordial" medicines, "for the Name of *Cordial* was cunningly and artfully invented . . . For who can imagine that any Harm can happen to him after taking a *Cordial*? And yet it is a Matter of Doubt with some of the best Physicians, *whether* of those who have not died a violent Death, *more have perished by Diseases or by Cordials*."⁶⁰ Writing on consumption later in the century, John Fothergill mentioned all three of the opium-containing medicines just discussed with the comment that "the mischiefs that have proceeded from Godfrey's cordial, Bateman's drops, Squire's elixir, and other heating anodynes in the hands of ignorance, are scarcely to be enumerated."⁶¹ William Hawes also considered Godfrey's Cordial "a very pernicious opiate" and one of the few good things he had to say of the author of *Primitive physic* was that he did not recommend this preparation.⁶²

Godfrey's Cordial cannot be matched with an official preparation in Britain but,

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like Bateman's Pectoral Drops, it was included in the American National Formulary as Mixture of Sassafras and Opium.⁶³ Recognition of these two preparations may simply have been to regularize the position of medicines which were widely used and by so doing to standardize their content of the potentially dangerous opium. Most of the ten medicines so far discussed were probably popular in America. In 1824, the Philadelphia College of Pharmacy saw fit to publish formulae for Anderson's Scots Pills, Hooper's Female Pills, British Oil, Bateman's Drops and Godfrey's Cordial,⁶⁴ and Young mentions eighteenth-century American newspaper advertisements for all of the ten except Radcliffe's Elixir.⁶⁵ The selection of preparations available to Americans he attributes to the commercial enterprise of Robert Turlington, Francis Newbery and Dicey & Okell. These distributors may also have had a considerable influence on the pattern of self-medication among the visitors to Bath: the four medicines most frequently advertised in the present sample were all distributed both by Newbery and by Dicey & Co.

THE SAMPLE AS A WHOLE

The 302 medicines mentioned in the advertisements have been roughly classified according to the conditions for which they were offered and the distribution into categories is shown in Table 1. Even though the classification is necessarily rough, it shows some similarities to the distribution of advertisements for medicines found by Flemming in forty newspapers circulating in southern England in 1911.⁶⁶ The three most frequently advertised types in his sample were also preparations for gastrointestinal symptoms, local applications and general medicines, if the latter is taken to embrace his categories of panaceas, tonics, blood mixtures and tonic wines.

The medicines advertised in newspapers may give a biased sample of the whole range of proprietary medicines available to the public. Many may never have been advertised in this way: Joshua Ward's medicines did not appear in the sample from Bath until after his death, when their sale was being organized by Sir John Fielding and Robert Dingley.⁶⁷ Some test of the completeness of the list of medicines extracted from the newspapers can be obtained by comparing it with the schedules attached to the Acts of Parliament regulating stamp duties on proprietary medicines.⁶⁸ The Act of 1785 listed only 83 preparations and 61 of these can be identified in the sample. But there is a greater discrepancy between the sample and the more comprehensive schedule of the 1802 Act which listed about 450 preparations. Only 152 of these can be identified in the list from the newspapers, so it is necessary to remember that the latter may not be representative of the whole field. It must also be remembered that the present list is only derived from a sample of newspapers.

The general medicines did not form the most numerous group in the sample but they figured in the greatest number of advertisements. The two most frequently advertised preparations, Anderson's Scots Pills and Daffy's Elixir, were in this category and typical advertisements for such products have been quoted. Towards the end of the century a paragraph about a general medicine appeared which almost met the suggestion, humorously developed by Oliver Goldsmith in *Letters from the citizen of the world* (1762), that, as the advertised medicines were said to be so effective,

TABLE 1. THE TYPES OF MEDICINES ADVERTISED IN A SAMPLE OF EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY BATH NEWSPAPERS: THEIR NUMBERS AND FREQUENCY OF ADVERTISEMENT.

Types of medicines	Total number of advertisements	Number of medicines
General medicines: claimed as effective in many unrelated conditions or in general debility from various causes.	1651	28
For gastro-intestinal disease and symptoms.	1022	44
Local applications for skin lesions, injuries etc.	974	43
Dental preparations: dentifrice, tincture for the gums etc.	825	52
Antiscorbutics and medicines taken internally for cutaneous lesions.	638	13
For mental symptoms and diseases of the nervous system, such as epilepsy.	597	19
For respiratory disease, including consumption.	568	32
For treatment and prevention of venereal disease.	534	19
For complaints of females.	301	6
For arthritis and gout.	281	13
For fevers and ague.	233	11
For calculi of the renal tract.	93	7
Unclassified	271	15

they should be tested for a possible ability to restore the dead to life. Sibly's Reanimating Solar Tincture was advertised for the "Restoration of Life in cases of sudden death". After listing causes such as "blows, falls, fits, suffocation, strangulation, drowning, apoplexy, thunder and lightning, assasination, duelling, etc" it was advised that the medicine "will not fail to restore life, provided the organs and juices are in a fit disposition for it, which they undoubtedly are much oftener than is imagined."⁶⁹ This would seem to have been a good line of advertisement in Bath in the 1790s when resuscitation of the apparently dead must have had some publicity. Anthony Fothergill and, later, Thomas Cogan, who had been closely associated with the Royal Humane Society, moved to Bath.⁷⁰ The Bath Humane Society was founded in 1805 and its first report was printed by William Meyler who contributed an ode to the contents.⁷¹ Fothergill's essay which won him the gold medal of the Royal Humane

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Society was printed in Bath by Samuel Hazard.⁷² Both printers were proprietors of circulating libraries and active venders of proprietary medicines.⁷³ Meyler was one of the Bath venders of Sibley's tinctures.

One general medicine particularly relevant to Bath was the Bath Restorative for which the following rather pathetic advertisement appeared in Salmon's Mercury: "The Author (a regular Physician at Bath) has for 30 years found this remedy superior to all as a General Restorative; it is the greatest cordial in nature; in the last decays of life it will supply the vital lamp with some recruits; it is admirable for those who have been almost worn out by women and wine, and will restore such as have suffered by acute diseases: . . . and those who have impaired their constitution, by the act of Self-Polution, will find this a certain remedy, as well as in all nervous cases."⁷⁴

Two other medicines originating from Bath which have been classed as general medicines were Dr. Brooke's Roman Pills and Neapolitan Restorer.⁷⁵ Brooke was not a regular physician but he published a volume of letters from Italy which explained the Italian origin both of his medicines and his doctorate.⁷⁶ The Pill Unique of W. D. Knight would have been classified as a general medicine associated with Bath, but it did not appear in the sample.⁷⁷

Another interesting group of medicines is that containing nineteen preparations concerned with venereal disease, because some were offered for prophylaxis. The medicines designed for cure were often advertised as containing no mercury,⁷⁸ though Swediaur suggested that mercury was frequently present in a disguised form.⁷⁹ Their use was commonly described as safe, pleasant and effective, without confinement or hindrance to business and capable of being concealed even from close associates.⁸⁰

The six preparations designed for the prevention of venereal disease appeared late in the sample, five of them not being advertised before 1790. George Crabbe, among others, deplored these prophylactics and commented in *The borough* (1810)

In plainer English—if you mean to sin,
Fly to the drops, and instantly begin.

John Wesley would presumably have felt the same: he included a treatment for lues venerea in his *Primitive physic* only because he had known an innocent sufferer who had been infected by a "foul nurse".⁸¹ In 1774, Samuel Hannay had tried to patent "his new invented medicine, consisting of a liquid, which, by washing the part, in men, any time within eight hours of coition, absolutely prevents the communication of the venereal disease, let it be of any degree or virulence whatsoever"; but the Lord Chancellor refused to let this pass the Great Seal.⁸² The advertisements in the present sample, however, were not apologetic, their general attitude being like that of the one for the Abbé Blondel's Chymical Specifick which was both prophylactic and therapeutic: the advertiser said that "so sovereign a remedy should ever be in the possession of such persons as either through juvenile inclination, or the habit of gallantry, frequent the haunts of pollution."⁸³

According to William Buchan, the prevention of venereal disease did not seem to interest the regular practitioners and "prophylaxis has been generally left to quacks, who, by puffing their pretended antedotes, have amassed fortunes, while credulous men, by trusting to their lies, have been tricked out of their money and their lives."⁸⁴

The advertisements commonly claimed infallibility for the prevention of the disease, and Buchan comments that "I have known a dignified nostrum-monger insist that a gentleman had not the lues, merely because he had used his lotion according to the printed directions". There appears to have been considerable proliferation of these preparations and Kiernan, writing in 1815, reported that the idea of a prophylactic had "opened a fertile field to empyricism; and the patent warehouse is loaded with preventative washes, and specifics for this purpose; indeed the list of preventatives is too numerous to be reduced to any regular account of them".⁸⁵

COMPOSITION AND EFFECTIVENESS

Many of the sources of information about the composition of the proprietary medicines have already been mentioned. When they were patented their composition should have been declared: but even in the mid-eighteenth century no specifications were provided for some medicines and, in the case of the well-known Dr. James's Powders, it was alleged that the medicine could not be prepared according to the declared method.⁸⁶ Most of the eighteenth-century publications which have been quoted only gave recipes for a small number of the best known preparations but a larger compilation was that of James Makittrick Adair. He searched out patent specifications and quoted analyses of unpatented preparations so that he was able to publish the composition of twenty-three proprietary medicines.⁸⁷ Detailed recipes were made public in a few special cases, the best known example being those for Joanna Stephens' medicines for the stone.⁸⁸ The composition of Joshua Ward's medicines was also described in detail because, at his death, Ward passed his formulae to John Page, who published them and set up an organization to prepare the medicines, to market them and to devote the proceeds to the Asylum for the Support of Female Orphans and the Magdalen for the Protection of Penitent Prostitutes.⁸⁹

The formulae published early in the nineteenth century were for a wider range of proprietary medicines. Gray, in his *Supplement to the Pharmacopoeias* in 1818, explained that he had obtained the formulae used by the leading druggists to compound these nostrums which were in great demand.⁹⁰ He quoted numerous recipes giving, for example, eleven methods of preparing Daffy's Elixir. Rennie, eight years later, supplied further details and the topic was of sufficient general interest for the *Lancet* in its first volume to give recipes for thirty-one "quack medicines".⁹¹ The footnotes to Paris's *Pharmacologia* have been mentioned repeatedly and were frequently quoted by contemporary writers. Formulae for sixty-four of the 302 medicines advertised in the sample were given by Paris, Gray or Rennie. The similarity of some of the most advertised medicines to official preparations has already been stressed, and the same is true of the rest of the sample. Thirteen of the medicines were noted by one or more of these three authors to be very similar to preparations in the London or Edinburgh Pharmacopoeias. Even when the published formulae do not approximate closely to those of official medicines, they usually call for similar and familiar ingredients. This situation may reflect some bias towards crediting the nostrums with orthodox ingredients because it is these which would be most easily recognized and which would be the easiest to use as substitutes for unidentified materials. But even with this possible caution, it seems likely that many of

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the proprietary medicines did not differ radically from medicines that might have been prescribed by regular practitioners.

In the present age of formal clinical trials we can hardly expect to be convinced of claims that the eighteenth-century nostrums were of therapeutic value. At the time, the apparent efficacy of Mrs. Stephens' medicines was certified by a distinguished committee and two individual certificates were signed, one by the President of the Royal College of Physicians.⁹² The possible benefit from some preparations containing iron has been mentioned and there can be little doubt that many of the medicines, including several of the most frequently advertised, were effective purgatives. This was clearly the desired effect and the belief that purgation was a general benefit and great aid to health has died hard: in the present century writers such as Sir Arthur Hurst still had to plead on behalf of the unhappy colon.⁹³ The confident advertisements of the sellers of nostrums must also have frequently had a useful psychological effect. The physicians of Bath would have had good opportunities for observing the effects of suggestion. William Corp was well aware of the use of medicines as charms⁹⁴ and John Haygarth, who revealed the true basis of the effectiveness of metal tractors, realized that suggestion might "account for the marvellous recoveries frequently ascribed to empirical remedies" and that "magnificent and unqualified promises inspire weak minds with implicit confidence."⁹⁵

In the modern clinical trial, the effectiveness of a new treatment can only be compared with the effectiveness of some other treatment, even if that is merely a placebo. Equally, in the present case it would be appropriate only to compare the effectiveness of eighteenth-century proprietary medicines with that of the medicines offered by the apothecaries and physicians. We have already seen that several nostrums coincided in their composition with official preparations and that similarities existed with others. Thus the contrast between the official and unofficial treatment may not have been sharp, though the prescriptions of the regular practitioners would have had the advantage of associated medical supervision. This might have been particularly important with the more toxic preparations.

PRICE

Many of the medicines were advertised with a retail price, though the volume of fluid in a bottle or the number of pills in a box was only rarely stated. Table 2 shows the distribution of prices quoted for the cheapest pack of the medicines so advertised in the present sample. Prices were mostly steady from 1744 to 1770, so data for that period have been pooled. Half of the seventy-four medicines advertised with price then cost from 1s. to 1s. 9d. Thereafter, prices tended to rise though the increase was usually modest and, in many cases, simply met the stamp duties imposed in 1783 and 1785.⁹⁶ Greenough's Tinctures, Fryar's Balsam, Stoughton's Elixir, Bateman's Pectoral Drops, Radcliffe's Purging Elixir and Hooper's Female Pills were all retailed in Bath at 1s. in 1744 and at 1s. 1½d. in 1799: the Act of 1785 had imposed a duty of 1½d. on medicines not exceeding 1s. in price. Table 2 shows that the mode for prices had shifted up by about one shilling in the 1790s and further small peaks had appeared at 5s. to 5s. 5d. and at 10s. to 10s. 6d. The popularity of 5s. 5d. as a price is explained by the duty of 6d. on medicines costing less than 5s. imposed by the Act of 1783. The two most expensive

medicines in the sample were Donna Maria's Lotion at 25s. the bottle and Restorative Salo Pills at 22s. the box. Both preparations were for female use and have been mentioned previously.⁹⁷ The list of proprietary medicines published in the *Gentleman's Magazine* in 1748 showed prices in 165 instances.⁹⁸ Their distribution is also shown in Table 2 and is, perhaps, more like that of the 1790s sample from Bath than the 1744/1770 group.

TABLE 2. THE NUMBERS OF MEDICINES ADVERTISED IN VARIOUS PRICE-RANGES IN A SAMPLE OF EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY BATH NEWSPAPERS, OR AS SHOWN IN A LIST PUBLISHED IN THE *Gentleman's Magazine*.

Price			Bath newspapers		<i>Gentleman's Magazine</i> 1748
At least	but	Less than	1744-70	1790-9	
—		1s	5	5	11
1s		2s	37	43	52
2s		3s	13	46	25
3s		4s	8	8	32
4s		5s	3	5	6
5s		6s	5	21	22
6s		7s	2	3	4
7s		8s	1	1	4
8s		9s	0	0	0
9s		10s	0	0	0
10s		11s	0	6	8
11s		26s	0	4	1
		Total	74	142	165

These figures show that the advertised medicines were sold at prices that covered a wide range and some were clearly in the luxury class. A small number were sold at less than 1s. and Godfrey's Cordial was in this group: priced at 6d. in 1744 and until 1770, it was 7½d. in 1790, 8d. in 1798 and 9d. in 1799. Various preparations of Cephalic Snuff and Clinton's Imperial Royal Golden Snuff were offered in the same price range for headache, drowsiness, vapours and deafness. Others in the group were Clinton's Oil for deafness, Palsy Drops, Bathing Spirits, Dr. Waite's Worm Medicine and Aromatic Tooth Water. The newspaper advertisements were obviously not aimed

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primarily at those who could only afford the cheapest medicines, and cheaper nostrums may well have been available from other sources which are less well documented.

While it may be easy to list some of the rich and famous who used the well-known proprietary medicines, such as James's Powders,⁹⁹ it is unlikely that records will survive of the unknown poor who used the cheaper products. James Lackington, however, recorded that his wife received apparent benefit from a "Cephalic snuff" recommended to them by an old woman at a time when he was an impecunious journeyman shoemaker.¹⁰⁰ John Page, when publishing the composition of Ward's medicines, listed prices ranging from 3d. to 2s. 6d. with the following comment: "The very low price, at which it is intended they shall be sold, has been mentioned: but let not this circumstance, which shews how little they cost in making, and renders them attainable to the Lower Class of Mankind, cause them to be despised by the Highest."¹⁰¹

Early in the next century, Crabbe summed up the situation in *The borough* (1810):

No class escapes them—from the poor man's pay,
The nostrum takes no trifling part away;

CONCLUSIONS

The advertised medicines covered a wide range in price, in type and in pretensions. Some were expensive and flamboyantly advertised, with an appeal dependent upon the personalities of their often well-known proprietors. Many others were probably so familiar as to be common household medicines, sold at a modest and steady price through the decades, the purgatives among them probably being safe enough in ordinary usage, though not in some acute illnesses, but the opiates a potential hazard at all times, especially when used to treat children. Those containing mercury were particularly dangerous but so they probably were in the hands of the regular practitioners. Many of the other advertised nostrums seem to have been unambitious preparations or ones which were short lived or of local distribution. Their formulae do not appear in nineteenth-century publications and will probably never be known but, by analogy with the more famous preparations, their ingredients were probably orthodox enough in most cases.

The similarity between proprietary and official preparations, which has been mentioned repeatedly, was admitted in the better argued attacks of the regular practitioners on the "nostrum mongers" and "empirics". The physicians claimed that their own prescriptions were the result of deep and learned consideration of the diagnosis and the requirements in an individual case. In what purports to be a letter from a physician in London to a gentleman in Bath in 1749, the "empirics" are attacked for their lack of both general and medical education. The argument that the proprietary medicines were effective preparations, likely to do good despite their proprietors, was countered with the following sentiment: "Diseases are not cured by Medicines and Receipts, but by a learned and methodical Use of them, whereunto Empiricks cannot attain."¹⁰²

Adair, in similar attacks, complained of the proprietors of nostrums that "these men, at least most of them, have pilfered their nostrums from regular practice." As an example he quoted Ward's medicines which, except for his paste, "had long been in regular practice before he adopted them."¹⁰³ He then listed many others with their

equivalents among the medicines used by the regular practitioners. For their part, the sellers of proprietary medicines often boasted of the respectable origins of their preparations. It was claimed in the Bath advertisements, for example, that Dr. Hooper had used his Female Pills “in his own Private Practice, as a Man-Midwife and Apothecary”;¹⁰⁴ that Dalby’s Carminative had “been many years administered in a course of reputable practice”;¹⁰⁵ and that British Pills had been “invented long since by a regular Physician, and administered in private practice only.”¹⁰⁶

No matter how like their own medicines the proprietary nostrums were, the regular practitioners could put forward the same argument against their use. Paris, commenting on Dalby’s Carminative early in the nineteenth century, admitted that it was a well-conceived preparation but echoed the London physician quoted above. Paris wrote: “In examining the pretensions of this combination, it must be allowed that it is constructed upon philosophical principles; this however is no reason why the physician should recommend it; the mischievous tendency of a quack medicine does not depend upon its composition, but upon its application.”¹⁰⁷

How effectively the regular practitioners used their medicines is another problem, which fortunately need not be discussed here: but William Buchan makes an interesting observation about their behaviour which falls sympathetically on modern ears. He pointed out something very akin to quackery in the performances of the physicians themselves, and wrote: “Quackery is founded on ignorance. The man who writes a medical prescription, couched in mystical characters and in an unknown tongue, countenances quackery, the very existence of which depends on disguise.”¹⁰⁸

The attitude of the physicians and apothecaries was their defensive posture against the proprietary medicines which probably impinged appreciably on their practice. Adair wrote of his “duty as a physician, and consequently an avowed enemy to all empirical pretensions.”¹⁰⁹ But considerable ambivalence existed and it was possible to be a respected physician and still to be the proprietor of patent medicines. This was the case with Robert James, though he was censured by medical authors. An obituary which acknowledged the virtues of his fever powder qualified its approval by commenting that “it cannot, however, be mentioned without regret, that he should have thought it necessary to conceal his method of preparing it.”¹¹⁰ Munk echoed this sentiment.¹¹¹ As a further example of this ambivalence of contemporary attitudes it is interesting to end with a quotation from no lesser person than John Hunter who wrote to Edward Jenner suggesting that he capitalize on an improved method he had invented for preparing tartar emetic. The suggestion was not carried through, but Hunter’s letter reads: “I am puffing off your tartar, as the tartar of all tartars . . . Had you not better let a bookseller have it to sell, as Glass of Oxford did his magnesia? Let it be called Jenner’s Tartar Emetic, or any body’s else you please. If that mode would do, I will speak to some, viz. Newbery, etc.”¹¹²

SUMMARY

The advertisements for patent and proprietary medicines in a sample of Bath newspapers (1744–1800) have been scrutinized. The 302 medicines, which are roughly classified according to the conditions for which they were offered, are discussed in detail; and their sources, distribution, composition, effectiveness, and price are

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examined. A previous report (*Medical History*, 1975, 19: 352–369) described in detail the retailers of these products.

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