

## Medical Advice from 130 Years Ago

Medicine has made great advances in our lifetime, but it is both interesting and informative to remember how our forefathers dealt with medicine and health problems. Revisiting the pages of a book intended for home consumption during the mid-1800s reveals some truths that are as factual and timely today as when they were written. For example, under the heading of “Rules for the Preservation of Health”, the text reads:

“Pure atmospheric air is composed of nitrogen, oxygen and a very small proportion of carbonic acid gas (CO<sub>2</sub>). Air once breathed has lost the chief part of its oxygen, and acquires a proportionate increase of carbonic acid gas. (The term used then for carbon dioxide.) Therefore, health requires that we breathe the same air once only.”

“The solid part of our bodies is continually wasting and requires to be repaired by fresh substances. Therefore, food, which is to repair the loss, should be taken with due regard to the exercise and waist of the body.”

“The fluid part of our bodies also wastes constantly; there is but one fluid in animals, which is water. Therefore, water only is necessary, and no artifice can produce a better drink.

The fluid of our bodies is to the solid in proportion as nine to one. Therefore, a like proportion should prevail in the total amount of food taken.”

“Light exercises an important influence upon the growth and vigor of animals and plants. Therefore, our dwellings should freely admit the sun’s rays.

Decomposing animal and vegetable substances yield various noxious gases, which enter the lungs and corrupt the blood. Therefore, all impurities should be kept away from our abodes, and every precaution be observed to secure a pure atmosphere.”

“Warmth is essential to all the bodily functions. Therefore, an equal bodily temperature should be maintained by exercise, by clothing, or by fire.

Exercise warms, invigorates and purifies the body; clothing preserves the warmth the body generates; fire imparts warmth externally. Therefore, to obtain and preserve warmth, exercise and clothing are preferable to fire.”

“Fire consumes the oxygen of the air, and produces noxious gases. Therefore, the air is less pure in the presence of candles, gas, or coal fire, than otherwise, and the deterioration should be repaired by increased ventilation.”

“The skin is a highly organized membrane, full of minute pores, cells, blood vessels and nerves; it imbibes moisture or throws it off according to the state of the atmosphere or the temperature of the body. It also ‘breathes,’ like the lungs, (though less actively). All the internal organs sympathize with the skin. Therefore, it should be repeatedly cleansed.”

“Late hours and anxious pursuits exhaust the nervous system and produce disease and premature death. Therefore, the hours of labor and study should be short.

Mental and bodily exercise are equally essential to the general health and happiness. Therefore, labor and study should succeed each other.”

“Man will live most happily upon simple solids and fluids, of which a sufficient but temperate quantity should be taken. Therefore, over-indulgence in strong drinks, tobacco, snuff, opium and all mere indulgences, should be avoided.

Sudden alternations of heat and cold are dangerous (especially to the young and the aged). Therefore, clothing, in quantity and quality, should be adapted to the

alternations of night and day and of the seasons. And therefore, also, drinking cold water when the body is hot, and hot tea and soups when cold, are productive of many evils.”

Never visit a sick person (especially if the complaint be of a contagious nature) with an empty stomach, as this disposes the system more readily to receive the contagion. And in attending a sick person, place yourself where the air passes from the door or window to the bed of the diseased; not between the diseased person and any fire that is in the room, as the heat of the fire will draw the infectious vapor in that direction.”

There is a chapter devoted to instructions for making various medicines, among which are recipes for wines, bitters and other drinks, a few I feel are worth repeating, as in the past I have wondered how the old timers made certain drinks that I vaguely remember from my youth, but the method of manufacture seemed to be lost in the sands of time. However, here are two of them, although by the sheer volumes expressed, they were far more serious about making them than I ever would be:

#### **Ginger Beer**

White sugar,	20 pounds
Lemon Juice,	8 fluid ounces
Honey,	1 pound
Bruised ginger,	17 ounces
Water,	18 gallons

Boil the ginger in three gallons of water for half an hour, then add the lemon juice, sugar and honey with the remaining water and strain; when cold, add the white of an egg, together with half an ounce of essence of lemon; after standing four days, bottle.

#### **Blackberry Wine**

Ripe berries,	20 gallons
Hot water,	5 gallons
Sugar,	40 pounds
Ginger, bruised,	2 ounces
Red tartar,	8 ounces
Alcohol,	1 gallon

(Red tartar is potassium bicarbonate, a derivative of winemaking.)

Bruise the berries and pour on three gallons of hot water, infuse three days, and subject to pressure in a canvas bag. Macerate the dregs for twelve hours in the remaining water, and press again; mix the two liquors together, add the sugar, and after fermentation, the ginger, the tartar, and mix well.

The method used to halt the fermentation process in making wines is to add one-half pound of mustard seed to each 40 gallons of liquid. Failure to halt fermentation would result in a large batch of vinegar.