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Two Cents' Worth from “Pain Killer” Makers Perry Davis & Son



When you reach for a “painkiller,” remember to thank New England manufacturers Perry Davis (1791 to 1862) and then his son Edmund (1824 to 1880) for the older Davis’s 1839 formulation of “Vegetable Pain-Killer.” By 1854 from Providence, Rhode Island, “Perry Davis & Son” (*lower left*) had become so prosperous that they were issuing one-cent paper notes (*upper left*) and one-cent revenue stamps (*upper right*). An ordained minister, Rev. Davis generously donated his “Pain Killer” to religious missions in China, India, and around the globe. From these religious outposts, dedicated missionaries promoted temperance and decried the evils of alcohol and opium. And what was this Davis-donated “Joy to the World” (*lower right*), the “Pain Killer” that many missionaries were distributing? Why, it was a heavily alcoholic herbal elixir that was laced with opium.... (Copyright © the American Society of Anesthesiologists’ Wood Library-Museum of Anesthesiology.)

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