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ANESTHESIOLOGY REFLECTIONS FROM THE WOOD LIBRARY-MUSEUM

Advertising McNeil's Pain Exterminator: A General for the Specific?



McNeil's Pain Exterminator was a 19th-century pharmaceutical “specific” or remedy touted to allay pain, cough, and diarrhea. Before the creation of the Federal Drug Administration (1906), pervasive patent medications had promised fantastical cures while delivering questionable results. Like most patent medications, the Exterminator's ingredients were guarded, but this specific likely included ether, alcohol, and opium. Developed by Thomas S. McNeil (1814 to 1874, *right*), the cure-all enticed both Union and Confederate troops to ingest purifying pills or apply a miracle ointment. Advertisements attempting to legitimize the ubiquitous concoction featured, posthumously, the revered Union General and 18th president of the United States, Ulysses S. Grant (1822 to 1885, *left*). More talented militarily than politically, the cigar-smoking icon had succumbed to aggressive and painful squamous epithelioma cancer in 1885. After agonizing throat cancer had overwhelmed the “exterminating” capacity of McNeil's or other specifics, the General had resorted to cocaine-laced throat sprays for terminal pain relief. (Copyright © the American Society of Anesthesiologists' Wood Library-Museum of Anesthesiology. www.woodlibrarymuseum.org)

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