

Why Are Mormons So Susceptible to Medical & Nutritional Quackery?

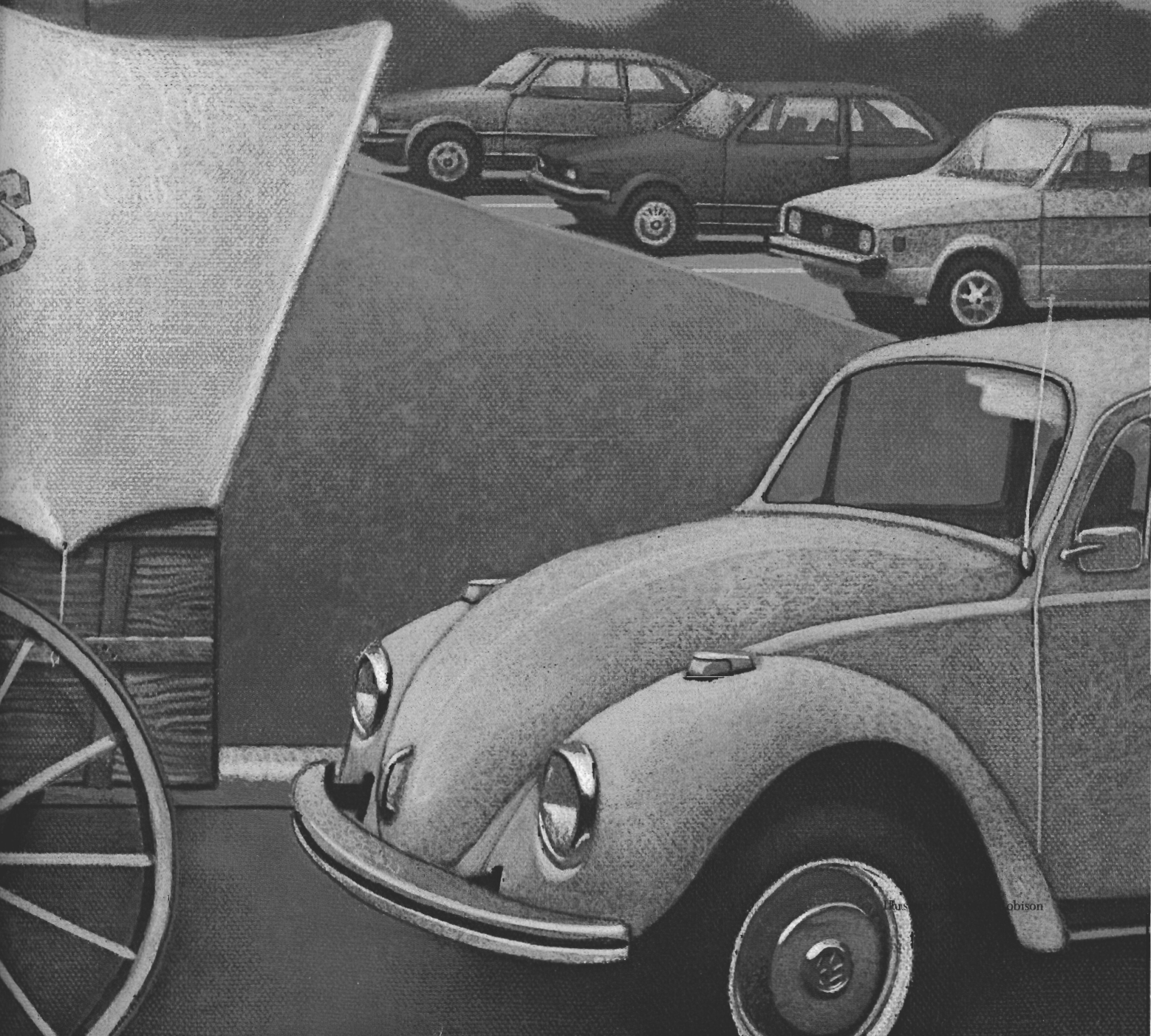
Norman Lee Smith, M.D.

Saying that Mormons are susceptible to quackery requires, first of all, some evidence that many of

the Saints are in fact unusually susceptible to unreliable medical (and nutritional) promotion and some examples to

give a feel for the significance of the problem.

Kay Gillespie of the Sociology De-



partment at Weber State College made a study on cancer quackery for the State of Utah about five years ago. He visited a number of various types of irregular practitioners of what would usually be called quackery, including unorthodox herbalists. They prefer to call themselves "alternative health care providers." Having sat in on their seminars where they share techniques and encouragement, Gillespie noted that the seminars "began with a Mormon rationale based on the Word of Wisdom and quoted Church leaders as a beginning foundation for the importance of the work to be done in the seminar." After considerable data, he summarized, "The findings of this research indicate a strong religious background among those studied, both the quacks and their patients. This religious background was found to be predominantly Mormon and tends to be influenced by early Mormon teachings and beliefs" (Gillespie, K. 1976. Cancer quackery in the state of Utah. A report given to the Utah State Department of Health. July.)

In a master's thesis study of unorthodox herbalism among Mormons, Janice Morin surveyed herb use in some LDS wards in Utah and California. Some of her findings are summarized in Table 1. It is noteworthy that *half* of those surveyed were using unorthodox herbal medicines, and one-fifth were using them frequently, defined as four or five herbs *daily*, "preventively." Among frequent users, their reasons for thus indulging, and sources of information, are summarized in Table 2. Of significance is the fact few had any idea of danger of such practices due largely to the vast amount of misleading literature available in recent years (Morin, J. M. 1979. An investigation of utilization of herbs as medication among a selected LDS population. Master's thesis, Brigham Young University, August).

Titles by Mormon authors such as *No Side Effects* or *The Return to Nature Healing* give some idea of the

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Table 1
Survey Regarding Use of Herbal Remedies

	Frequent Users (20%)	Limited Users (13%)	Rare Users (16%)	Nonusers (51%)
Regarded as <i>not safe</i> (Survey by Janice Morin)	1%	2%	9%	15%

Table 2
Sources of Information about Herbs

Books	76%
Health-food stores	73%
Church friends	59%
Non-Church friends	25%
Scriptures	45%
TV, newspapers, magazines	41%
Formal discussion at Church	20%
Type of Literature	
Clearly unreliable	89%
Reliable	2%
Nondistinguishable (by Janice Morin)	9%

problem. Essentially none of such literature hints at the profoundly dangerous side effects of the herbal medicines advised. And most of the many books and magazines published by Mormons extensively quote LDS scripture and authorities to give an impression of any herb being "God's medicine as opposed to man's medicine."

Three years ago, the *Deseret News* ran some articles on quackery in the State of Utah. In a letter to the editor, a young lady responded, "As a member of the LDS Church I must express my feelings about your recent article on medical quackery. The article would have us believe that the drug and surgery doctors are the good guys and all the other health practitioners are the bad guys. I resent that because it leaves my Church and my God on the wrong side of the fence. In particular I resent the inclusion among the quacks of doctors who treat with herbs."

Her attitude is characteristic of that held by many in our environment who are linking to Mormon theology

and belief, to their very religious testimony, these alternative health practices. They are believers. After one man died of a bleeding ulcer, having taken "natural curing herbs" for weeks to heal it, his wife expressed pride in his faithfulness to the end. "We'd do it the same way again. You see, it's part of our religion." A tragic footnote is that she also died recently, of cancer, while taking a number of herbs.

It's important to note that while such irregular practices are highly profitable, many who promote them in the LDS community are not charlatans but rather may be respected believers who feel it's part of their LDS religion. Many feel that the right to choose even dangerous forms of quackery is part of the divine principle of free agency, and that any restrictions on that free choice is satanic.

What we need to examine is why so many LDS people are such vigorous proponents of strange medicine. What kind of arguments are there, and what's this all about? Why is it such a big thing in Utah?

In the last ten years there have been a lot of books and magazines published, particularly out of the Provo and Orem, Utah, area, which quote scripture and the prophets in support of their methods. One that caught my eye has been titled interestingly *Joseph Smith and Herbal Medicine* by John Heinerman. I bought it at a Church-owned Deseret Book store. The frontispiece quotes Joseph Smith's Journal (April 13, 1843): "At 10 o'clock Joseph met with the immigrants. Opening prayer was offered by Elder Kimball." Joseph was quoted, "The doctors in this region don't know much. Doctors won't tell you where to go to be well. They want to kill you or cure you to get your

money.” (The author quotes that in capital letters.) Further on, Joseph said, “If you feel any inconvenience take some mild physick two or three times and then some bitters. If you can’t get anything else take a little salt and cayenne pepper. If you can’t get salt, take pecosia or gnaw down a butternut tree, cut some boneset or horehound. . . . I’ll give you good advice that will do you good.”

Clearly, Joseph Smith suggested and used herbs as medicines. The quotes are abundant that these folks can use to attach herbal belief to the Prophet Joseph Smith. Here is a summary statement from this book by John Heinerman. Further on we’ll see why he reaches this conclusion. “Joseph Smith believed in herbalism because he loved the Lord and knew that was what God wanted him to do. If we love the Lord should we not do the same likewise?” That is the crux of the argument on which these other folks, the believers quoted earlier, are basing their faith. Remember that if you’re going to make a leap away from science—or what appears logically proven—and into one of these alternative movements, it’s a leap of faith. It is not peculiar just to Mormonism but characteristic of the whole alternative movement that if it can be attached to scripture, to one’s religious faith, that leap of faith away from science becomes a lot easier. As we look to see from where it came, this sentiment forms a fascinating story.

In the literature and rhetoric of the alternative health care movement (and not just among Mormons) three major emphases keep coming up: (1) avoid physicians; (2) use only herbs and inspired cures for medicine; and, particularly, (3) nutrition is the key to the cure and prevention of all disease. To bolster these three emphases, scriptural authority is cited together with lots of quotes from religious authorities. While the technique is widely used, I’m going to examine it here only as it is applied to Mormonism. An important key in understanding how this can be done is knowing *when* these quotes were given. This discussion then, requires historical

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analysis, because, like all interpretation of quotes or scriptures, you have to know exactly what the setting was. What is the context? One can go to early Mormon teachings and make a terrific argument in favor of alternative health care: avoiding the physicians, using only herbs, and regarding nutrition as the key to everything. That is true also of the scriptures. For example, we will look just very briefly at some scriptures related to only one aspect of nutrition. Then we’ll do the same thing with scriptures related to avoiding the physicians. Finally we’ll explore more detail on this matter of using herbs and other inspired cures.

The one aspect of nutrition we’ll look at momentarily is vegetarianism. The books that would like to have us not eat any meat (but rather stick with “healthy foods”) frequently cite the fact that Adam was vegetarian (Gen. 1:29–30). They note that it was not until after Noah that some flesh was approved in the scriptures (Gen. 9:3–5). Then they make the point that the introduction of meat eating is probably the reason for the sudden drop in longevity of life—that is, the marked reduction in those huge life spans that existed before the flood. Now note in what follows, that we have a sort of scriptural evolution here (is that a contradiction of terms?). What happens scripturally with regards to eating meat is this: none in the beginning but some flesh was approved by the middle of Genesis. By the time of the Law of Moses only “clean” animals are sanctioned (Deut. 14:3–2; Lev. 7:22–23). The kosher law comes in.

One may wonder why pigs were excluded and blood forbidden. The reason appears to be for far more than health or hygiene reasons. It seems it was not so much the trichinosis as it was a symbolic thing. The pig was a sacred sacrificial animal of the Baalistic religions, the fertility or materialistic religions. Eating of that pig was like taking into you that religion and that god. The covenant of the people of Israel had to do with Jehovah being their God. Scripturally, blood is a symbol of the carnal life of this earth and eating it is seen as taking that carnality within you, letting it become part of your being. Avoiding such forbidden things was symbolic of the covenant relationship between God and Israel, much more than it was whether you get parasites or the like.

In any case, by the time of the New Testament (when Baalism is gone) every creature is approved (I Tim. 4:1–5). So once again there appears to be an evolution in the counsel from the scriptures. A person can choose quotes from wherever he wants in that historical evolution to make his point, not being aware of the change. In our own time, eating meat sparingly was the advice that was given (D&C 89:12–13).

The point, of course, is that historically the advice in the scriptures has changed. The same principle applies to those passages applied to avoiding the physicians. You may well be aware that early in the Old Testament, the Hebrews conceived that everything that happened was done by God. When the sun comes up in the morning, it’s because God says, on that day, to the sun, “Rise!” All disease, all suffering of man was God’s will. If healing occurred, it was God’s will. If you were suffering, if you were sick, it was because you had done something to break your relationship with God. For example, Deut. 32:39–40 says, “See now that I, even I, am he and there is no god with me: I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal: neither is there any that can deliver out of my hand. For I lift up my hand to heaven, and say, I live forever.” The feeling of the Hebrews anciently

was that if you're suffering, it is God's will that you're suffering.

During that early Hebrew period, there were no physicians separate from the priests. If one's illness was God's will, then the way to get rid of your disease or your suffering is to go to the priest and right your relationship with God. The priest and the physician were the same. That was true not only among the Hebrews but also in most other ancient cultures. Even today, if one looks at somewhat less developed cultures, one sees the Indian or African medicine man, where the priest and the physician are still the same. (I think there's meaning in that kind of notion, particularly in the present interest of getting back to a more "holistic medicine.")

As a sort of transition, the book of Job addresses the issue of illness being God's will. When physicians separated from the priests (usually non-Hebrew), the prevailing notion that sickness is God's will led to the conclusion that if the physician is trying to change that and make you well, then he is attempting to thwart God's will. He is going against God. There are a number of passages in the early Old Testament that in essence say, "Stay away from the physicians. Depend on God. He's the source of your healing."

A subtle example was King Asa's terrible foot disease (2 Chron. 16:12-13). One could probably compare it with that suffered by Elder LeGrand Richards. The disease was "exceeding great" in his feet. LeGrand Richards, in one of those great attitudinal statements said, "I'm sure glad I'm dying from the feet up and not from the head down." And then he added, "I'm not afraid to die. It's getting there that bothers me." King Asa may also have had gangrene in his feet. The scripture continues, "Yet, in his disease he sought not to the Lord, but to the physicians." Then the cryptic footnote, "And Asa slept with his fathers, and died while in the one and fortieth year of his reign." You see the notion that the physicians were thwarting the will of God. So it's easy to quote those kinds

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of things saying "stay away from the docs" if you look at the early part of the Old Testament.

Once again, however, one begins to see a historical evolution in attitude as one moves through the later Old Testament. We begin to find a change particularly when the Hebrews went into the captivity in Babylon, where they were suffering greatly. There the emphasis is on God as the comforter, the helper, the healer. As they came back to Jerusalem from Babylon they began to pick up notions that disease, in fact, was caused by evil spirits, by Satan's design. We (perhaps earlier) get that transition in the book of Job where he is called perfect, and yet he's sick. His comfort was in the Lord. At the end of the Old Testament, when disease is seen as caused not so much by the Lord as by external forces, we begin to see a different feeling towards physicians. For example, in the writings of Ben Sirac, the book of Ecclesiasticus, written during the intertestamental period between the Old and New Testament, this evolution becomes evident. "Honor the doctor for his services, for the Lord created him. His skill comes from the Most High, and he is rewarded by kings. . . . The Lord has created medicines from the earth and a sensible man will not disparage them. . . . The Lord has imparted knowledge to men, that by their use of his marvels he may win praise" (Ecclesiasticus 38:1-9). Note that it's the Lord still that is the source of it all. He has imparted to man the knowledge of the use of medicines he has provided; therefore, it is the Lord that should be

praised for any medical success. He continues: "By using them the doctor relieves pain and from them the pharmacist makes up his mixture. There's no end to the works of the Lord. He spreads health over the whole world." Again we see an exact reversal in ancient Jewish attitude in that now, instead of thwarting the will of God, the physician is helping and participating in what God would do for man to give health, to give comfort, to give nurture. By New Testament times, Jesus' comments, while a little more neutral, are somewhat in favor of physicians: "They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick" (Matt. 9:12).

If one doesn't have that sense of the historical change in attitude, he can selectively pull out of the early Old Testament a number of admonitions to stay away from the doctors, who are seen there as uninspired men trying to thwart the will of God. For an example, in his book on *Joseph Smith and Herbal Medicine*, Heinerman quotes a number of such scriptures. Then (p. 23) he says, Joseph Smith "knew too well by heart the scripture which he had translated in the Book of Mormon. 'CURSED is he that putteth his trust in the arm of flesh. Yea, CURSED is he that putteth his trust in man or makes flesh his arm [his capitalized emphasis].'" He says, "Joseph was not about to risk his life or his father's life by submitting to the services of medical men, thereby incurring the wrath and indignation of an angry and displeased God." You see the notion now using the early Old Testament logic. Then he says, "From this swift and vivid lesson, Joseph Smith had keenly learned that when God commands MAN MUST OBEY or suffer for his transgressions. Because he loved the Lord, he kept the commandment of the Word of Wisdom, and employed only herbal remedies and herbal doctors whenever sickness was found in his midst. If we love the Lord, and revere the sacred and honorable name of Joseph Smith so highly today, ought we not to be doing the same also and keep them [his commandments] as Joseph kept them."

Now we begin to see the logic that's involved in the argument distinguishing "man's medicine versus God's medicine."

Can one find scriptural basis for the third emphasis used by these folks?—namely, herbs and God-inspired remedies should be used. Herbs are mentioned at least thirty-seven times in the Bible. Many herbs heavily promoted today (see Bruce H. Woolley's article in this journal) are scripturally mentioned. The aloes are in the Bible. Hyssop was used for infection. (It's interesting as a sidelight here that the leaves of the hyssop plant are specifically used for the growth of the penicillium mold.) Balm of Gilead is mentioned, as are figs and mandrake.

Rachel and Leah used mandrake as a sort of aphrodisiac. Mandrake is a toxic drug. It has podophyllin-like resins that can, in fact, irritate the bladder, possibly relating to the claims for its aphrodisiac values. However, the masculine shape of the root was the real reason why the Hebrews regarded it as such.

Herbs were the standard remedies of the Jewish physicians. Herbs were what they had in their bag. The Bible is filled with the use of herbs. But just as with the mandrake, one needs to make the point that the Bible is descriptive of what was being used rather than prescriptive. Of thirty-nine apocryphal books ascribed to Solomon, one of them was an herbal remedy guide book.

But there is more to this than is evident at first glance. Ezekiel, when he saw in vision the temple to be built in the future New Jerusalem, said that on the banks of the river coming out from under this temple were trees, "the leaf thereof for medicine" (Ezek. 47:12). The herbalist notes, accurately, that this suggests God gives medicine in the form of plants. But the real clincher comes for Mormons with latter-day scripture.

The Nephites, when they moved down out of the highlands into the swampy lowlands, ran into some health problems. "There were some who died with fevers, which at some seasons of

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the year were very frequent in the land—but not so much so with the fevers, because of the excellent qualities of the many plants and roots which God had prepared to remove the cause of the diseases, to which men were subject to the nature of the climate" (Alma 46:40).

Clearly the scripture says that God has placed herbs and plants here on the earth for the healing of disease. Perhaps there is a little testimony about the grand design of things in that for all of us.

A passage from our own era states: "And whosoever among you are sick, and have not faith to be healed, but believe, shall be nourished with all tenderness, with herbs and mild food, and that not by the hand of the enemy" (D&C 42:43).

You begin to see how some of the folks quoted earlier could say it's part of our religion, how they could suppose that herbs are God's medicine versus the intrusive arm of man trying to better God with his medicine. It becomes an issue of trusting God's wisdom more than man's (with plenty of other scriptures to support that position). One begins to see the testimony that's coming through there. And that's why it can be preached over the pulpit, not just for profit but because they believe in it. How does one respond to that? Some surveys in the 1960s show that between 47 and 50 percent of prescribed medicines are from natural origins. A physician can cite many examples to demonstrate that plants were the original sources of many of our medicines, even

those now synthesized in the lab. Cortisone came from Mexican yams to begin with. The cardiac glycosides, belladonna alkaloids, anesthetics, the opiates, even aspirin—berated by herbalists—originated in the white willow ("salicylate" comes from the willow's name, *Salix alba*). Plants *are* given for the healing of disease. The problem is in finding *which ones*, because some of our worst poisons also come from plants. Most promising medicinal plants studied are discarded because of excess toxicity. But they're *not* discarded by the herbalist.

If one tries to say, "Oh, that's all hogwash, that herbal stuff doesn't do anything," then he's making a big mistake. We do believe God has given herbs for the healing of men. Again, the problem is, which ones have a safe therapeutic-toxic dose ratio? And that's where the scientific method comes in.

With this scriptural background, it's not hard to understand what Joseph Smith's attitude was towards all of this. Joseph said, "I preach to a large congregation at the stand, on the science and practice of medicine, desiring to persuade the Saints to trust in God when sick, and not in the arm of flesh and to live by faith and not by medicine, or poison; and when they were sick, and had called the Elders to pray for them, and they were not healed, to use herbs and mild food" (*History of the Church* 4:414). We, however, need to look a little closer at Joseph Smith's attitude on that. Nevertheless, taking the scriptures cited together with quotes like this, one can make a very persuasive case to a Latter-day Saint: stay away from medicine or poison he says; use the herbs if you don't have the faith to be healed. We need to look closely at the reasons why Joseph Smith seemed to be against the physicians. Why was he so interested in herbs and nutrition? As before, with the scriptural evolution of such attitudes, we need to put it in historical perspective. It forms a fascinating and revealing story.

It is of value to review American medical history as applied to the period from which the restoration grew. During America's first century after the Pil-

grims landed, 1620–1720, there were essentially no doctors. Those taking care of the ill were primarily clergymen using supportive care. Again we see the priest-physician connection. The clergy were inclined to relieve suffering, were perhaps a little better educated, and were the only ones available.

During the second century, 1720 to 1820, we see the rise of heroic medicine. The theories had to do with the humoral theories and the solidism theories of disease. All disease it was thought was caused by the same thing, an imbalance in the humors. The four humors were blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile. For example, feeling malaised and depressed was attributed to having too much black bile. In Greek, black is “melas” and “chole” refers to bile. One gets melancholia, then, because there’s too much black bile. Again, it was thought that *all* disease was caused by such congestion of the humors. The solidist corollary added that disease was manifest by tension in the solid parts, namely congestion in the blood vessels and in the nerves. So how does one treat such congestion? Historically, once again, one tried to balance the humors by purging out the bad bile, by bleeding to relieve the tension in the solid parts, and drugs to remove the phlegm. Heat was added to burn up the bad humors.

A prominent name in all of this was Benjamin Rush. Rush was educated in Edinburgh, Scotland. In fact, most American physicians came from Scotland or Leiden University in Holland during this period. Rush attained prominence during the period that the first hospitals were set up, the first medical licensure took place, and improved sanitation contributed to a great increase in the health and survival of the American populace, despite the prevailing medical theories. Things were improving so fast that, in a letter, Benjamin Franklin foresaw the day when Americans might even live forever. Much of the improvement was attributed to the standard therapies of the day, therapies which arose in the thought of Benjamin Rush. A signer of the Declaration of In-

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dependence, Rush was a man of great prestige and political prominence. He was involved in establishing the first medical school in America in Philadelphia. During the infamous yellow fever epidemics in that city, Rush found that a poisonous mercury compound ($HgCl_2$) was a potent purgative and emetic. His panacea compound was called calomel, derived from Kalos, meaning good or beautiful, and melos, meaning black.

After taking calomel one experiences richly black stools, interpreted as the black bile coming out. Calomel would also make you vomit, throwing up the yellow bile, thus “rebalancing all the humors.” So everything was treated with calomel and with bleeding “to reduce blood vessel congestion.” Also added was moxabustion—applying hot suction cups to the skin (to suck out the evil humors)—arsenic, and “sugar of lead.”

Such excesses became the standard of orthodox care after Rush enthusiastically published his methods. In fact, if the afflicted didn’t respond sufficiently to a little bit of calomel, a lot more was the order of the day. Benjamin Rush would use heroic doses of eighty grains a day, clearly a toxic dose. Those following his dictum that “if a little bit is good, a lot is better,” were called “heroic physicians,” or more derogatorily, “the poison doctors” (which they indeed were!).

It didn’t take long before some people began to recognize the dangers of calomel. Those thus treated started losing their teeth, suffering stomatitis, and mucosal ulcerations, bloody diarrhea, osteomyelitis, CNS depression, and other similarly unpleasant effects. Many began to question, becoming very suspicious of American doctors.

One such skeptic was John Wesley, founder of the Methodist Church. He wrote the very influential book, *Primitive Physik*, in which he admonished his readers to stay away from the doctors. Instead, he said, one should use God’s natural medicines. “Each man should be his own physician.” His book found enthusiastic reception, extending through twenty-three editions (seven of them in America during the period just prior to the establishment of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the early 1800s).

Rush came under a lot of controversy. Writing under the pen name Peter Porcupine, William Cobbett used some of Rush’s own statistics to show that he was hurting more of his patients, with calomel and bleeding, than he was helping. This is probably the first application of statistics to medicine in America. About the same time (the 1820s), the French were running some controlled studies on bleeding and found that those with pneumonia did worse when they were bled. We began to get the first hint of science applied to medicine. Nevertheless, it took another fifty years for science to have any major impact on medicine in America.

In that prescientific era, orthodox (heroic) doctors were practicing quackery. How do you define quackery? Perhaps one of the best definitions calls it enthusiastic, incautious promotion of an unproven or disproved method. Fortunately, today research on an unproven method is conducted very cautiously. But the incautious evangelizing of Benjamin Rush created a standard of medical care that for more than a century in America was plain quackery. They were called the poison doctors appropriately.

As antagonism mounted, Rush pled, “There is but one fever in the world. Follow me, and I’ll say that there is but one disease in the world.” He was being attacked by those that said diseases have many causes (pluralism) and were not all from one cause (monism). Rush continued with something that might have particular appeal to frontiersmen, “The physician who

thinks different clinical pictures are really different diseases is as ignorant as the savage who supposes that water, dew, and frost are distinct substances.”

Out of this interesting and controversial period (1820–1870) in American medical history arose the Mormon founders and pioneers. Joseph Smith and Brigham Young were embroiled in the controversy. It was a period of confusion, ridicule of Rush’s theories, and therapeutic nihilism. The attitude prevailed that one couldn’t believe anything the doctors were saying. They got rid of medical licensure. Only New Jersey maintained such licensing of physicians. A Jacksonian democratic spirit demanded that one ought to be free to seek any type of practitioner, who, after all, was as good as any other. And the choices of “alternative health care” expanded rapidly. As spotty testing began to demonstrate the fallacy of heroic orthodoxy, a popular revolt resulted. A number of alternative sects arose, competing for top honors. All of this was occurring prior to 1870, when scientific medicine began in earnest.

Two of the middle nineteenth century alternatives deserve special attention in the Mormon context: Popular Health Reform (*the* preventive movement) and Thomsonian herbalism. Sylvester Graham, a Presbyterian temperance preacher from Philadelphia, caught the notion that nutrition was the key to prevention. “Why limit temperance to drink,” he wrote in the *Graham Journal*. “Gluttony certainly accounts for as much suffering as alcohol. The way to man’s salvation is through his stomach.” (That’s a sentiment with overtones heard in many current Mormon nutrition books.) Graham became immensely popular on the circuit. The leading tenets of the Popular Health Reform Movement he began were these: You ought to bathe frequently, even three times a week. (A letter from one fellow to the *Graham Journal* expressed fear that bathing so frequently must be dangerous, washing off one’s protective substances and the like.) Popular health reform called for more sun exposure (the origin of senti-

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ments regarding being tanned as healthy). Graham said that meat should be avoided (regarding it as the cause of sexual licentiousness and of consumption, tuberculosis). Not all that Graham said was right, but much of it was valid as well as interesting.

The five poisons of the Popular Health Reform Movement sound very familiar. One should not use alcohol, tobacco, tea, coffee, or opium. You should use lots of grain and fruits in season. Whole-grain graham flour was developed and incorporated into graham bread and graham crackers. On the whole, the Popular Health Reform Movement did indeed physiologically reform America. Graham boarding houses and ladies’ physiological reform societies were set up. Grahamist newspapers and journals were published.

As a spin-off of the temperance movement, some churches became involved. For example, Helen G. White, Seventh-Day Adventist founder, developed her notions on health out of the Popular Health Reform Movement. She invented corn flakes as a means to increase grain intake but felt the idea didn’t deserve patenting or developing because the advent, the second coming, was so close. She sold the patent rights to her proselyte, John Harvey Kellogg, who in turn taught the principle to Charles Post, and thus the entire cereal industry was born. Your breakfast this morning may have arisen out of popular health reform, which was largely a valid movement.

The excitement for all of this was high among the Saints living in Ohio and in Nauvoo. A number of letters to the *Graham Journal* from Ohio in the 1830s evidence the great success of the movement there. These were the questions in the air when Joseph Smith asked in prayer about the Word of

Wisdom tenets. In my opinion, these issues were the things that prompted that revelation even more than the tobacco juice on the floor of the Whitney store. They were major issues of the era. Many of them were confirmed by the Lord as being valid. A number of the notions espoused by Graham, who died malnourished, were not approved by the Lord. Nevertheless, he had great impact on subsequent Mormon health attitudes.

Coming on the scene at the same time, as part of the alternative movement, was Samuel Thomson. Thomson, of course, didn’t originate herbal remedies, but he organized them into a highly popular system. He was taught by dear old Mrs. Benton as he grew up that you didn’t have to use calomel to make you throw up; you could use natural things to get the same effect. He believed in the same theories as the heroics. Thomson’s theory of disease was that all disease, again, was caused by the imbalance in the humors and from “want of heat.” He found that lobelia, wild Indian tobacco, was equally effective as calomel in making one throw up to “purge the system.” Lobelia became his panacea to treat everything. To promote heat he prescribed his second mainstay, cayenne pepper, which makes you feel warm, even hot, when you swallow it. He also recommended hot sweatbaths. Then he added herbal laxatives for the purging and other herbs like bayberry and sumac “to remove the residue of canker.” Thomson’s theory came to be called “puke ’em, purge ’em, and sweat ’em.” Thomson ungenerously patented his method, meaning orthodox physicians could not use it. That, of course, raised the ire of the medical community. Doctors, coming down on him with gusto, weren’t willing to even listen to what he was doing. He became very antidoctor, and marketed his method as God’s medicine vs. man’s medicine. Antidoctor philosophy became a prominent part of Thomsonian herbalism. To become a Thomsonian doctor in this period of no medical licensure, one simply bought a patent for the right to use the system

THOMSON'S



PATENT.

To all Persons whom it may concern:

This may Certify, That I have this day appointed

Willard Richards of *Richmond* State of *Massachusetts* a Sub-Agent; and he is hereby authorized and empowered, to administer, use and sell the Medicine secured to SAMUEL THOMSON, by Letters Patent from the President of the United States; and also, to sell FAMILY RIGHTS, (signed by me, the Agent of SAMUEL THOMSON, with one of his NEW GUIDES TO HEALTH, and a NARRATIVE OF HIS LIFE, to each Right; all of which are to be furnished by myself,) to all suitable persons, except Physicians or their Students, and collect pay for the same. The price of FAMILY RIGHTS is, in all cases, Twenty Dollars. This agreement to continue and be in force for the term of *one* year, if not previously revoked by me, or the Patentee.

Given under my hand, at Stockbridge this third day of October in the year of the common era one thousand eight hundred and thirty-three, and of the nation 58

Joseph Stinson Agent for Samuel Thomson.

Extra and Confidential to Agents, to be given at discretion to the Purchasers of Rights.

To prepare Conserve of Hollyhock...Take one pound of fresh blossoms; bruise them in a mortar; add four pounds of white sugar; pound them well together until it forms a paste. Then take the compound of two ounces of poplar bark, two ounces of bayberry, two ounces of golden seal, two ounces of cloves, two ounces of cinnamon, two ounces of nerve powder, one ounce of cayenne, half ounce of bitter-root, mix them well together, and knead it with the pestle in a mortar until it becomes thick as dough. Then add one table-spoonful of the oil of pennyroyal; pound them well together, to be kept in the above powder, with the same weight of sugar, made fine, will make good spice-bitters for wine. Put two ounces of the compound into one quart. The powders may be eaten dry, or taken in hot water, with more sugar. No spirit is recommended in this medicine.

Three things are to be observed by agents, viz.

1. To do justice to the proprietor, yourself, and the public.
2. To sell no RIGHTS to Doctors, or those who have studied their authors for a rule of practice; as they will most assuredly corrupt the system, as several have already done.
3. To keep no poisonous drugs in your shop, as no one should sell to others what he would not use himself, nor recommend to be used; or suffer any human blood to be shed, with the lancet or otherwise, by your consent.

Willard Richards' Thomsonian Patent



Willard Richards
Engraving courtesy
of BYU Photo Archives

for twenty dollars and purchased an herbal guidebook for two dollars, thus becoming an official doctor of herbal medicine. There was no training; in fact, Thomson discouraged the setting up of schools.

However, there is a significant exception. Willard Richards became a Thomsonian physician in Massachusetts before he joined the LDS Church. He went to Boston and studied with Thomson himself for several weeks, later becoming an agent to sell Thomsonian patents. The response to Thomson's promotion was nothing short of a revolution. Over 100,000 patents were sold by Thomson's agents, and at \$20 apiece, there was big money in this whole business. Thomson very wisely attached his "natural cures" on to the Popular Health Reform Movement, which was enjoying success. He deplored the five poisons and promoted eating grains and herbs. From his viewpoint, the herbs could be taken preventively as part of that good nutrition.

During Mormon residence in Kirtland, fully half (some estimate two-thirds) of the population of Ohio were converted totally to Thomsonian herbalism, including its strong antiorthodox doctor sentiment. Nearly all of the prominent early Mormon physicians were Thomsonian herbalists. Willard Richard's brother, Levi Richards, was Joseph Smith's personal physician, also a Thomsonian herbalist, as was Frederick Granter Williams, counselor in the First Presidency to Joseph Smith. Thomas B. Marsh, President of the Quorum of the Twelve, was a Thomsonian who was called as a physician to the Church in the Doctrine and Covenants (D&C 31:10). Again, the Thomsonian philosophy was not just pro-herb as being God's medicine, but also was antidoctor, for a good reason.

Joseph Smith also had a number of things occur in his family that would predispose him to favor Thomsonianism in the controversy. (He, however, was not converted to nearly the extent the LDS herbalists today would have you believe.) In this connection, it is of interest to explore why the Smith family

was so poor, even to the point of having to move several times in New England and finally to Palmyra. Joseph Smith, Sr., the prophet's father, owned a store in the New Hampshire countryside. A great epidemic of plague in China had depleted that country of ginseng, the mainstay of Chinese medicine in those days. The market to export American ginseng to China grew like wildfire in New England. The store provided the gathering point for those collecting ginseng in the field. The store owner, in turn, delivered it to a middleman, called a drummer, who arranged for shipping to the Orient. Because the drummer enjoyed the bulk of the profit, Joseph Smith, Sr., decided to ship it himself, borrowing heavily to do so. His peeved drummer, by sending his son to China with the shipment, made certain Smith's profit was totally lost. He lost not only his store and farm, but all he had in order to cover his debts.

The Smith family continued to have much interest in herbal remedies. The prophet's mother, Lucy Mack Smith, was known in Palmyra for frequently doctoring her neighbors with herbs. Joseph's wife, Emma, in a letter to her son, Joseph III, details at length concoctions of herbs for the healing of various diseases. The family became very much inclined to avoid heroic physicians after a number of notable failures. In particular, Alvin, Joseph's older brother, had been treated with calomel for probable gastroenteritis. He was killed by the calomel—an autopsy proving that the calomel had caused gangrene of the intestine. For good reasons, Joseph Smith advised his followers to stay away from the heroic medicines or poisons and to depend on the Lord for healing. He had observed firsthand the far greater effectiveness of healing through faithful prayer than through the physicians of his day. And after all, the scriptures do say the Lord gave herbs for medicine if one didn't have the faith to be healed.

However, Joseph wasn't entirely convinced by Thomson's attaching his method to popular health reform. We've previously cited Joseph's advice

Alvin, Joseph's older brother, had been treated with calomel for probable gastroenteritis. He was killed by the calomel—an autopsy proving that the calomel had caused gangrene of the intestine.

to the immigrants mentioning the use of herbs. He continued, "Calomel doctors will give you calomel to cure a sliver in the big toe; and they do not stop to know whether the stomach is empty or not; and calomel on an empty stomach will kill the patient." But then he adds this: "And the lobelia doctors will do the same. Point me out a patient and I will tell you whether calomel or lobelia will kill him or not, if you give it" (*History of the Church* 5:357). Note that Joseph was skeptical of all types of physicians.

Unusual LDS practitioners and herbalists today will drag up all these quotes from Joseph Smith saying stay away from the doctors. But one needs to consider who the doctors were with whom the Saints were dealing. There are only a couple of orthodox, poison doctors among them. And they were very simmered down in the Mormon communities. The doctors that were there were the Thomsonian herbalists. Joseph later advised, "You that have little faith in your elders when you are sick, get some little remedy in the first stages. If you send for a doctor at all send in the first stages. And all ye doctors who are fools [Remember, once again, who are the doctors in his community?] and not well read and who do not understand the human constitution stop your practice" (*History of the Church* 6:59). Keep in mind one became an herbal doctor with no education.

Joseph was converted to the use of herbs, but he was what we would call a simmered down botanic. He was far from the enthusiastic Thomsonian that many of the quotes in the herbal books will try to make out. He was against both types of practice—and so was Brigham Young.

You can find a number of quotes from Brigham Young saying stay away from the doctors. He also advised the Saints to use natural cures that are available if you have to use them, but use God, use faith, and blessings by the brethren first. For example, a letter written by Brigham Young, carried by an herbal Thomsonian physician to the Mormon Battalion, says, "If you're sick, live by faith, and let the surgeon's medicine alone if you want to live, using only such herbs and mild food as are at your disposal" (Tyler, D., Sgt. 1969 [1881]. *A concise history of the Mormon Battalion in the Mexican War, 1846-1847*. Glorieta, New Mexico: Rio Grande Press, 146). Such counsel was not only what you would expect but was good advice in that period of orthodox quackery. And, incidentally, the battalion surgeon, Dr. Sanderson, was known as Dr. Death. He wouldn't let Dr. Reed, the Mormon herbalist, practice. Sanderson said, "If anybody takes anything but what I give him, I'll shoot him." He gave them calomel in an old rusty spoon without washing it in between.

The antipathy towards orthodox doctors continued to grow when orthodox doctors would be converted to the Church and would ask to join the Saints in the West. Brigham's reply in essence was, "Don't come if you want to practice your medicine. We're happy to have you here as a brother, but we don't want you to be practicing your poison medicine."

On arrival in the Salt Lake Valley, the first issue of the *Deseret News* announced the establishment of the Council of Health. Willard Richards was the editor and, by then, counselor to Brigham Young in the First Presidency. The announcement read: "Though we may fail to convince some of the superiority

of botanic practice we feel confident that our exertions under this head will shake the faith of many in the propriety of swallowing, as they've long done with confidence, the most diluterious drugs, believing in the goodness of the Creator that he placed in most lands medicinal plants for the cure of all diseases incident to that climate, especially so in relation that in which we live."

This is pure Thomsonian theory. In actuality, since there was no lobelia here, it had to be imported. The herbal councils of health were, of course, conducted along the lines of similar societies set up by Samuel Thomson. Firsthand accounts describe sisters coming in from the outlying communities to these councils, where they would extol with testimonies the virtues of the herbs (and decry the dangers of the orthodox physicians). The only orthodox physicians practicing at that time were one or two in Salt Lake City. There were essentially none in the outlying communities during this early pioneer period. The herbal philosophies of these councils of health, which the ladies took back to their communities, lay a basis for some of these strong family traditions of fondness for the herbs and desires to keep away from the doctors, philosophies that carry down to our time, particularly in some small communities in southern Utah.

Not all the brethren were enthusiastic for herbal physicians, however. During the Mormon reformation in the 1850s, the cry was to trust in God first, not in all of these physicians of whatever type. Jedediah Grant, perhaps the most colorful leader of the reformation, decried those who "first try the physician, have the head shaved, take a dose of calomel and gombage, have blister plasters put on the back of the neck and another all over the bowels, besides one on each hip. . . . When James [is] about dead, having had two quarts of blood taken out of him on Saturday and another on Monday, and when the life is nearly drawn out of the poor fellow by physicking and bleeding, why then they sent for the elders and asked them to pray for him."

When today's herbalists use early quotes against physicians, they usually leave out the parts decrying the herbal physicians also.

But note, in this same talk, Thomsonians were not exempt either: "You know that it's hardly allowable in Utah to drink any more than five gallons of lobelia at once, for the Assembly of Deseret once had the matter under consideration" (*Deseret News*, April 11, 1855).

When today's herbalists use early quotes against physicians, they usually leave out the parts decrying the herbal physicians also. The emphasis of the Brethren during this period of time was, in essence, "Depend on the Lord. All of this medicine has to be suspicious. Stay away from all of it if you can. Use mild things. Yes, the Lord has given herbs for healing" (but which ones?).

Like Joseph Smith, the pioneers already recognized the dangers of lobelia. We have in personal journals, for example, the reports of convulsions, seizures, and death from the use of lobelia.

Significantly, Brigham Young's attitude began to change. His flexibility becomes a key to how you deal with this philosophy. He earlier had noted, "If we are sick, and ask the Lord to heal us, and to do all for us that is necessary to be done, according to my understanding of the Gospel of salvation, I might as well ask the Lord to cause my wheat and corn to grow, without my plowing the ground and casting in the seed. It appears consistent to me to apply every remedy that comes within the range of my knowledge, and to ask my Father in heaven, in the name of Jesus Christ, to sanctify that application to the healing of my body; to another this may appear inconsistent" (*Journal of Discourses* 4:24-25).

By the 1870s, Brigham Young began to reverse his feelings toward the physicians. Why? What happened in the 1870s? The scientific method was introduced into medicine. Germ theory was introduced and verified (and discussed at length by George Q. Cannon of the First Presidency in the February, 1870, *Deseret News*). Testing began to prove what medicine was legitimate. After the Civil War, calomel was taken off the formularies. They got rid of bleeding, and began to use those things that studies could show worked. When the railroad came to Utah in 1869, that same transition time, new orthodox physicians arrived who had been trained in the East, physicians that were no longer heroics. Now called allopathic physicians, they were trained in the use of herbs that were good and got rid of the herbs that weren't. By the turn of the century, 80 percent of orthodox medicines were still derived from plant sources.

During this transition period, Brigham Young offered a little caution that is applicable to us today. "Let me tell you about doctoring, because I'm acquainted with it, and know just exactly what constitutes a good doctor in physic. It is that man or woman, who, by revelation, or we may call it intuitive inspiration, is capable of administering medicine to assist the human system when it is besieged by the enemy called Disease; but if they have not that manifestation, they had better let the sick person alone. . . . Who is the real doctor? That man who knows by the Spirit of Revelation what ails an individual, and by the same Spirit knows what medicine to administer. That is the real doctor, the others are quacks" (*Journal of Discourses* 15:225-226).

There is something important here for LDS physicians. Science by no means has all the answers. How often do we really call upon the inspiration of the Lord for finding out what God's medicine really is?

With a more reliable orthodox medicine making itself evident, Brigham Young began to call young Mormons to go east to study the new

medicine. In 1871, he called the eldest of Willard Richards' sons (interestingly enough) to study at Bellvue Medical College in New York. On his return, Heber John Richards found difficulty being accepted among the Mormons in Logan, Utah, and finally moved his practice to Salt Lake City. Brigham also called his nephew, Seymour Young, to go back to the College of Physicians and Surgeons in New York. Brigham also made a point of calling sisters on these "medical missions," all of which demonstrates his reversal of opinion toward orthodoxy once orthodoxy changed. Perhaps most telling, during his last illness, Brigham Young was attended by four physicians, all allopathic: Seymour B. Young, his nephew; Washington Anderson, who had great influence on his change in attitude (Washington Anderson was not initially a Mormon, but was a very moderate physician of wisdom, who seemed to love the Mormons and in turn was respected by Brigham Young); and two other non-Mormons, the Benedict brothers. These four treated Brigham Young when he had that terrible peritonitis at the end of his life. Seymour Young later conjectured that it had been caused by a ruptured appendix. Also of interest, but less contributory is the fact that for the last many months of his life he was in total urinary retention and had to continually catheterize himself. In any case, during this grizzly scene, he received several hours of mouth to mouth resuscitation, as well as opiates by injection into the foot from his allopathic physicians.

This change in attitude among Church leaders caused considerable consternation among a people conditioned to Thomsonian ideas. In his memoirs, James Henry Moyle notes: "When our neighborhood learned that the President of the Church and the chief officers of the Church had regularly attended physicians whose services were actually called into use even when the sickness was not serious, it was something of a shock."

This change in medical attitude among Church leaders was again dra-

Recognizing a problem of resistance to change among the Saints, President Wilford Woodruff called three people per ward to come to Salt Lake City to study the new orthodox medicine.

matized when, under John Taylor, the first Church-sponsored hospital was built. Earlier, a little herbal hospital had been set up by Thomsonian Ezra Williams, located on the site where the Church Office Building now stands. Williams' hospital became the first in Utah. But the first Church-sponsored hospital was the Deseret Hospital established through the Relief Society in 1882. It was staffed entirely with allopathic physicians trained in the new scientific medicine. It was a prepaid plan, costing a dollar a year to belong, and three dollars a week if one went into the hospital. The whole First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve were part of that prepaid plan. It didn't last long, however, dying out because of lack of funds and popular support.

Recognizing a problem of resistance to change among the Saints, President Wilford Woodruff, together with Zina Young, the General Relief Society President, went out to the small communities to call three people per ward to come to Salt Lake City to study the new orthodox medicine under Dr. Ellis Shipp. She conducted her school in a little house, still standing, on Second Avenue. This move appears to be an attempt to reverse the old attitudes generated in the herbal councils of health as well as to provide scientifically trained midwives and healthcare for the community. An earlier medical school, established in Morgan, Utah, had died after a vigorous press campaign against it in the *Salt Lake Herald*.

At the turn of the century, un-

proven patent medicines were being promoted heavily in national magazines and from the medicine man's wagon as an alternative to physician prescriptions. As the dangers of such unsubstantiated claims became evident, President Joseph F. Smith counseled the Saints, "let a reputable and faithful physician be consulted. By all means, let the quack, the traveling fakir, the cure-all nostrum and the indiscriminating dosing with patent medicine be abolished like so much trash" (*Improvement Era* 5:624, 1902).

By 1905 the Church established the Latter-day Saint Hospital and later the large Church hospital system along orthodox lines. Many Saints remained resistant however, waiting until they were on death's doorstep before they would go into the new LDS hospital. A number of editorials came out in Church publications encouraging a change of attitude. In one such editorial in 1921, Elder James E. Talmage expounded on the fact that it is not inconsistent to say we believe in faith healing and still give medicine. He then said, "Because we know that there is a law irrevocably decreed in heaven before the world was and when we attain any blessing it is by obedience to that law upon which it is predicated and the law is, in the instance under consideration [that is, medicine], that we shall do all we can of ourselves."

Notice a change here. All the early statements say go to the Lord first, he is the real healer. You can't trust man's medicine, and should try them only if you don't have the faith to be healed. But note the change once legitimate medicine began to come in. He concluded, "We must do all we can, and *then* ask the Lord to do the rest, such as we cannot do. Hence we hold the medical and surgical profession in high regard. . . . When we have done all we can, then the Divine Power will be directly applicable and operative" (*Deseret News*, Dec. 17, 1921 [Sec. 4, p. 11]).

Now how about today? What is happening? In the mid 1970s there was a flurry of activity publishing books and

magazines attaching unorthodox medicine, herbalism, and nutritional fadism to LDS theology and belief. Some were brought to the attention of the First Presidency of the Church. In response, an editorial came out in the February 19, 1977, *Church News*, quoting Elder Talmage as above, then adding, "The Church, of course, deplors the patronage of health or medical practices which might be considered ethically or legally questionable. People with serious illnesses should consult competent physicians, licensed under the laws of the land to practice medicine." A little bit later in the same year the problem continued to get worse. A significant number of people were coming down to the Church Office Building, making appeals to the Brethren, and asking for endorsement. Quoting all the old quotes and scriptures, they felt their methods were already endorsed by the Lord.

In response to this zeal, a second editorial was written. Because of the emotional controversy, it was felt best to keep the response low keyed. The editorial, published in the *Church News*, June 18, 1977, was entitled "Health Fads May Hurt." It was specifically commissioned by the First Presidency and was written by an Apostle. In asking the First Presidency's Office and Presiding Bishop's Office (after it came out) if this were representative of official opinion, both said yes. Their response can be useful for patients with this problem. It says, in part: "Frequently fads are advocated under the guise of the Word of Wisdom by unauthorized persons with unwarranted claims respecting health. . . . They have displayed pictures of the Presidents of the Church or of the temple to give an 'authoritative' backdrop to their teachings. Their exhibits of foods and remedies are enhanced by copies of the scriptures obviously placed there to give further appearance of credibility to their projects. The Church officially disclaims all such pretensions. Also it completely disclaims any sponsorship or endorsement of such teachers, remedies, foods, or fads. . . . To refuse to accept

"We must do all we can, and then ask the Lord to do the rest, such as we cannot do. Hence we hold the medical and surgical profession in high regard." —James E. Talmage

assistance from highly skilled men and women may be to reject the very help that could save a life. Some patients are known to have died from diseases which 'nature remedies' could not relieve but which proven medical practices could have cured. . . . Is it wise to turn our backs upon medical advances and place our hopes and our lives in the hands of unproven practitioners? Would we reject other forms of true scientific advancement? Would we do without telephones, radios, or airplanes? Why then should we reject proven health care provided as a result of years of research? . . . Latter-day Saints may well follow the prophets in matters of health as in other things. Leaders of the Church accept sound advice from acknowledged professional men. They themselves submit to surgery and other forms of treatment as needed, and their lives have been extended as a result. Is not their example worthy of emulation?"

President Spencer Kimball, of course, is a classic example.

The point that can be made out of all this is that many of these folks believe in their unusual practices as a matter of *faith*. They are standing by what they really believe and have been taught in all of these writings by those who are promoting their herbs and irregular practices. Their determination to be faithful no matter what ought to be admitted, even that of the man that died from his ulcer. The problem is that it is a misguided faith. You cannot tell them this is all a bunch of hogwash. Their faith tells them that is not true.

It's you against God.

What you have to do is reorient their faith to the modern prophets. You need to give some of this historical perspective. The former advice was great advice when it was given. It was perhaps even inspired advice to stay away from the poison docs. But they also advised staying away from the Thomsons if possible. That is a point not often made.

Historians will tell you that cultural patterns are heavily influenced by the attitudes of the pioneers of that culture. That's why we have much of this sentiment today. What we are seeing today is a resurgence of the revolt against orthodox medicine of 150 years ago. It's important to note some of the striking parallels with our own time: skepticism toward orthodox medicine, enthusiasm for alternative methods (including making them legitimate), and an emphasis on free choice. (It's interesting to note the current move in California to "legally register" all alternative practices, and Utah's recent licensure of nonmedically trained acupuncturists, able to prescribe "Chinese herbal remedies.") A further parallel is the emphasis on preventive nutrition. After all, if you can't trust any of the forms of treatment, the only answer is prevention.

As one evaluates the alternatives that arose a century and a half ago, two generalizations are evident. First, they nearly all had a monist basis (one cause of disease and therefore one way to treat everything). Secondly, the innovations of that revolt form the basis of most of the unusual medical practices of today. Examples include reflexology (treating all with foot massage), iridology (diagnosing all from spots on the iris), chiropractic (all disease arising from pinched nerves), and Christian Science (picking up on the Old Testament notion of all illness arising out of a disordered relationship with God). Homeopathy flourished a bit later, treating everything with miniscule doses of herbs that reproduce the symptoms of the disease (perhaps analogous to immunizations).

Note the similar elements. (1) Skepticism of physicians—certainly there is much of that today for a number of reasons. (2) A new movement emphasizing nutrition, prevention, exercise, and the like. (3) Free choice—a big issue today. “One ought to be able to choose whatever care he wants.” That was the issue in the Jacksonian America when they got rid of the licensure. Everybody could be called doctor, and every practitioner was considered as good as another. (4) Finally, the issue of God’s medicine vs. man’s, which today for some translates to the Holistic Health Movement.

While genuine holism is nothing new, physicians have not quite caught on to what the holism appeal is all about. One reason the alternative proponents are successful is that they attach their practice on to genuine, valid concerns of today. Do we see nutrition or prevention today as a valid concern? It’s the quacks that are calling themselves today’s nutritionists, taking great advantage of that association just as Samuel Thomson attached to popular health reform. All kinds of funny things are attaching on to “holistic medicine,” with its concern for the mind, the spirit, the body, the whole person—again, *valid* concerns.

In the balance between art and science, physicians have leaned, perhaps a little too much, toward cold science and the physical part of healing only. This is largely why there is an upsurge in quackery today.

How we respond to these very valid issues is crucial. How do you respond to some of these issues? Do the terms “nutrition” or “holistic” perk your interest or turn you off?

An example may illustrate the seriousness of the problem. A young mother had breast cancer. Treated appropriately with surgery and adjuvant therapy, with no positive lymph nodes, she fell into a 90 percent cure category. She went in for a six-month checkup, with no evidence of recurrence of the tumor. However, the costs were getting to her. Perhaps her physician was a little bit callous in the way that he han-

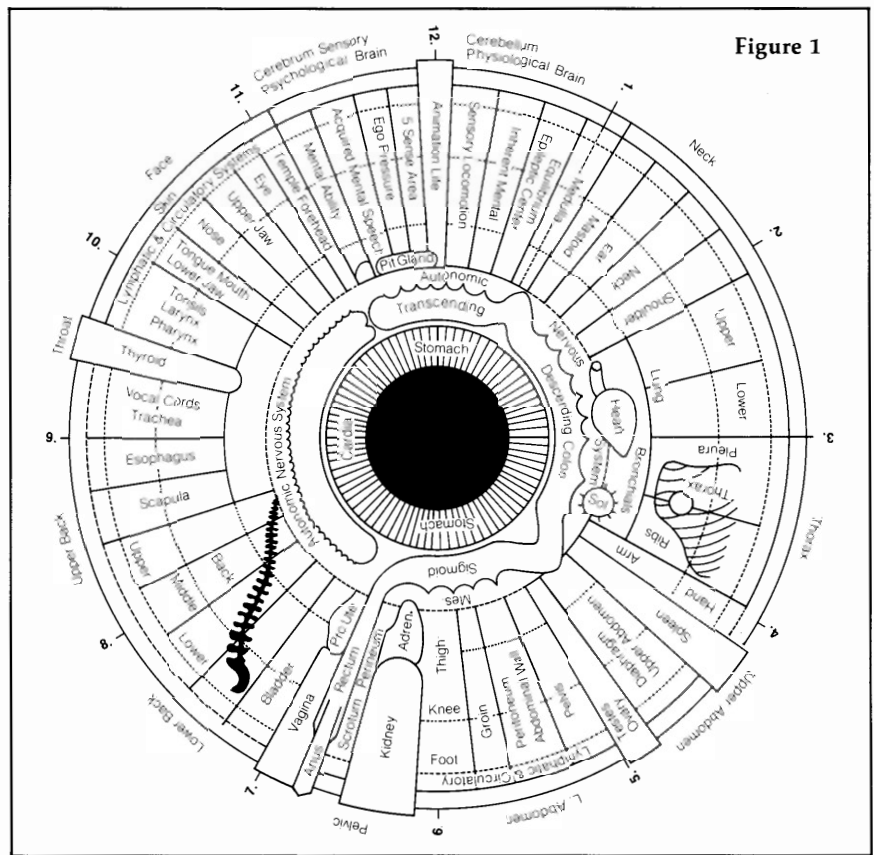


Figure 1

dled her.

A good Mormon friend said, “You know those doctors can’t really tell whether you’ve got recurrence of the tumor. I know someone who can, who has a very special method, both safe and cheap, for finding out whether you still have cancer.” She was taken over to the local iridologist.

Iridology was one of those alternatives of two centuries ago in which all disease is diagnosed by spots and lines in various parts of the iris (see figure 1). This notion developed when a fellow once observed that an owl with a broken leg had a mark on its iris. When the leg got better, the mark in the iris seemed to disappear, and an entire theory of medical diagnosis was born.

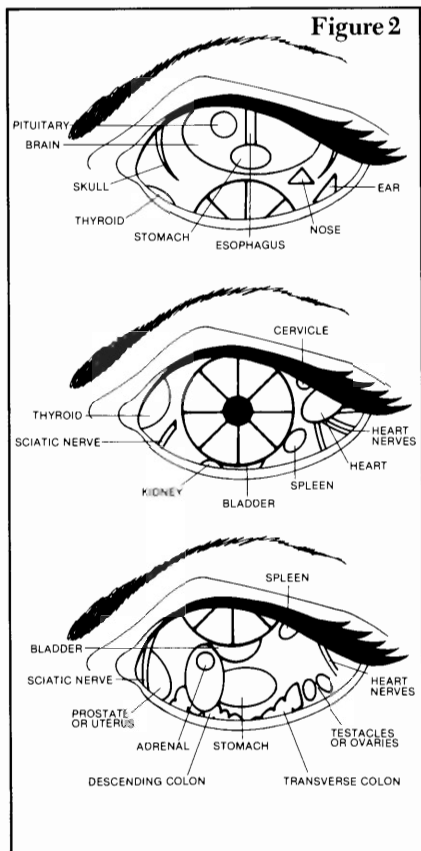
The iridologist looked in this lady’s eye and said, “Yes, you still have the cancer. It has metastasized [curiously enough for a breast cancer] to the eye, to the stomach, and to the brain. However, you don’t need to take chemotherapy for that,” he said. “I can give you some herbs which will go out and draw the tumor out of these sites into

the bowel, and then we will give you a second herb which will make you throw off the cancers. We will purge it out of your system. She was treated with herbal cathartics, laxatives, and emetics. One month later she was brought into the emergency room, dead. There was, of course, no tumor found, but she died of dehydration from the toxic effects of the drugs.

It is of note that iridology is one of the few blatantly strange alternatives that has been studied in a good, double-blinded way (see *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 242:1385–1389, 1979). The study showed iridology to be as effective as flipping a coin. The study is unique because it is difficult to get irregular practitioners to cooperate for such a rational evaluation of their methods.

Also of associated interest is the fact that recently a Mormon author has come up with a new spin-off of iridology called “scleroglyphics,” in which the bloodshot lines in the sclera of the eye correlate with the location of the disease (see figure 2).

Figure 2



The preceding story illustrates what may be the most important fact about unorthodox herbs. The herbs this lady took killed her. They are marketed as "nutrition," as "health foods." They are promoted as having "no side effects" (the actual title of one Mormon's book on the subject). But the fact is that the unorthodox herbs are a form of dangerous, uncontrolled drug therapy. One cannot go to an herbal person and say "that stuff doesn't do anything." They won't respond, and that statement just isn't true. The only thing usually that they will respond to, in addition to redirecting their faith to modern prophets, is to point out the dangers of the herbs.

Table 3 lists just a few of the common herbs sold today by herbalists, health food stores, and more recently, in some drugstores with documented dangerous effects. For example, golden seal, the latest panacea, can either stimulate or depress the cardiorespiratory system depending on what dose is given. (It has caused death from respiratory paralysis.)

One has no idea the dose he is getting with the uncontrolled herbs. That

is an important point to pass on to patients. One taking herbs places great confidence in the plant gatherer, since similar species can have such varied physiological effects. In the strophanthus genus, for example, one species has steroid effects, another digitalis-like activity, and another causes muscle paralysis. Periwinkle, with its chemotherapeutic alkaloids vincristine and vinblastine, is another species of the same genus and appearance. Most herbs contain several drugs, with great potential for dangerous drug interactions. Imported Chinese herbs often are mixed with prescription drugs without so indicating on the label. There have been deaths from cortisone and indomethacin toxicity when taking Chinese "herbs" for arthritis.

The scriptures are right in noting herbs can affect physiology significantly. Many are dangerous drugs, and they need to be treated as such. Many unorthodox herbs have largely been rejected, even though they may help cure disease, because they have dangerous side effects. That is an important emphasis to which people will respond. If an herb has not been studied, the odds are against its qualifying for safety.

With regards to the notion that herbal remedies are part of the Word of Wisdom, one needs to carefully scrutinize Doctrine and Covenants 89:9-10. "And again verily I say unto you all wholesome herbs hath God ordained for the constitution, nature and use of man." The question is, what are "wholesome" herbs? The herbalists will say "wholesome" refers to their herbal remedies. They will reject the physician's herb-derived medications. Once a plant medicine is accepted by scientific medicine, it is tossed out by the herbal practitioner. (There are many examples: quinine, aspirin, digitalis, etc.)

In these same verses, have you ever wondered why the Lord might have worded verse nine in this way: "And again hot drinks are not for the body or the belly." Keep in mind the context in which this was given. What were the hot drinks that people in Kirtland were drinking in the period of

Thomsonian exuberance? They were drinking the herbal teas regularly. For that matter, regular coffee and tea are herbs. Alcohol and tobacco are herbs. But why did the Lord say "hot drinks?" Hyrum Smith responded to this a little later in Nauvoo. There is an implicit question he is addressing. After quoting verse nine, he remarks, "Many wonder what this can mean, whether or not it refers to coffee or tea or not. I say it does refer to tea and coffee. Why is it that we are frequently so dull and languid" (*Times and Seasons* 3:799-801). Why would he even ask the question? One can infer what the Saints are asking. Here are all these hot drinks, all these different herb teas they are taking. Does the commandment also include regular tea and coffee? Hyrum's reply, in essence: How can we be so dumb; of course it does. I think the Word of Wisdom (and this is only personal opinion) is *against* the use of these unproven, disproven, and dangerous herbal teas. Hyrum went on to say how people can be poisoned in future times by them.

A related concern regarding nutritional fadism needs mentioning. I have emphasized nutrition as a very valid concern in our day. We dropped the ball after the Second World War when vitamin requirements were defined, but the last ten years have seen a renaissance in nutritional research. Megavitamins are pushed by herbalists and many irregulars. Megadoses, defined as five to six times the daily recommended amount, are profitably promoted claiming any excess will just be excreted. This is not always so. Like the herbs, megadose vitamins can be dangerous, as shown in table 4. As an example, a Mormon lady, normally a very vigorous person, came to see me a few months ago feeling terribly depressed, with stomatitis, and muscle weakness (the classic syndrome of vitamin E toxicity). Stopping the 1500 units of vitamin E she was taking cured what had been a chronic problem. Another man saw me recently who precipitated his gout by taking megadoses of vitamin C. As a powerful reducing agent, megadose

Table 3

Herb (Drug it contains)	Dangerous Side Effects
Lobelia (lobeline)	Convulsions, vomiting, nicotine-like stimulation and effects
Mistletoe tea	Anemia, liver toxicity, hemorrhage
Horsetail tea (equisitine and nicotine)	A nerve poison capable of producing convulsions and coma
Sassafras (safrole)	Liver cancer
Pennyroyal	Death from kidney and liver failure
Cayenne Pepper	Heart over-stimulation, intestinal ulcer (for which it is sometimes paradoxically prescribed)
Golden Seal (hydrastisine, berberine and three or four other drugs)	Convulsions, paralysis, respiratory failure (deaths) Can either stimulate or depress the cardiovascular system depending on the dose (which is seldom known in any given preparation)
Peppermint	Heart fibrillation, addiction
Pleurisy root	Many toxicities (some deaths in minutes)
Juniper	Intestinal irritation, dangerous for ulcers
Rheumatism root (cortisone-like base)	Destruction of blood cells
Licorice root	High blood pressure, heart failure, loss of potassium and cardiac arrest
Burdock roots	Uncontrolled paralysis of intestinal tract and secretory glands
Comfrey (consolidine and symphytoghlossine)	Liver cancer, serious drug interactions (death)

Table 4

Vitamin E
Stomatitis
Nausea
Muscle weakness
Bleeding
Hypoglycemia
Depression
Vitamin C (Powerful reducing agent, RDA = 45 mg)
Destroys 50–95% of B ₁₂ in diet
Precipitates gout
Oxalate stones
G-6-PD hemolysis
Sickle cell crisis
False negative urine sugar and stool blood tests
Niacin
Liver damage
Peptic ulcer disease
arrhythmias
Others
Lecithin: phosphate toxicity
Dolomite: heavy metal poisoning
Fiber: decreased absorption (particularly CA, MG, FE, ZN)

vitamin C also can cause hemolysis in the genetically inclined and precipitate oxalate or uric acid stones. Niacin has been known to cause arrhythmias, peptic ulcers, and liver damage in megadoses. The point needs to be made that such doses of vitamins are not "natural." The lady with her vitamin E toxicity was surprised to find out that it would take ten quarts of safflower oil a day, or twenty pounds of wheat germ to supply her 1500 units. The point that needs making with megadose vitamins is that doses above ten times the daily recommended amount cause drug effects separate from their vitamin effects. They can be toxic, just like the herbs.

Perhaps, in summary, the concept of genuine holistic care relates to why people seek alternatives to scientifically proven medicine. Those into quackery have often mastered the *art* of medicine—the ability to engender trust, to give hope, to promote genuine faith as a motivating force. At least two good studies document the beneficial role of these "spiritual" principles in determin-

ing the outcome of disease. As physicians, we can learn from them here. And we need to seek and sell with earnestness what can validly be shown to be genuinely preventive nutrition. We need to involve patients more in decisions regarding their care (the "free choice" issue). Again, studies document more benefit and compliance from a course of therapy a patient has decided (often with a great sales and concerned teaching job by the physician), than with a regimen foisted upon the patient.

Genuine holistic care—surely a major concern for a group like Collegium Aesculapium—involving both the spiritual art and the physiological science, is, after all, what God's medicine is all about.

Some References of Value:

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1. *Dialogue, A Journal of Mormon Thought* 1979. 12 (3) [autumn]. The entire issue is on medical concerns.

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B. Herb Toxicity

Most of the information in table 3 is from individual articles in the pharmacology literature, but some general sources include:

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3. *Medical Letter* 1979. 21, 6 April (7): 29–31.
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5. Morton, Julia 1977. *Major medical plants: botany, culture, and uses*. Springfield, IL: Thomas.
6. Spoerke, D. G., Jr. 1980. *Herbal medications*. Santa Barbara, CA: Woodbridge Press Pub. Co.

C. Megavitamin Toxicity (and General Nutrition Quackery)

1. Herbert, Victor 1980. *Nutrition cultism: facts and fiction*. Philadelphia: George F. Stickley Co.