Although New York’s G. Q. Colton (1814 to 1898) reported nearly 200,000 safe administrations of 100% laughing gas, a few dentist anesthetists left occasional patients with strokes or brain damage from such asphyxial anesthetics. As a Shakespearean scholar, could Colton have contemplated along with the Bard’s Falstaff that “This apoplexy … is a kind of lethargy … a kind of sleeping in the blood…..” Or on brandishing the mouthpiece of his “Colton gas” inhaler, did Colton consider lamenting along with Cassio (from the Bard’s Othello) that “men should put an enemy into their mouths, to steal away their brains…..”? Like that of sleeping Desdemona (left, as painted in 1859 by Christian Köhler), the life of Cassio would be threatened by the murderous Othello (right) and his cronies in Shakespeare’s 1622 play, originally published as The Tragedy of Othello, The Moor [sic] of Venice. (Copyright © the American Society of Anesthesiologists’ Wood Library-Museum of Anesthesiology.)

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