

ANESTHESIOLOGY REFLECTIONS FROM THE WOOD LIBRARY-MUSEUM

Tolling the Bell-cap-sic Bell Against Pain: A Belladonna, Capsaicin, and Aconite Plaster



After earning his medical degree from Harvard and serving in America's Civil War as an assistant surgeon in the Union Army, John Milton Grosvenor, M.D. (1839 to 1917), returned to Boston to garner fame as a respected physician and fortune from topical medications, such as his proprietary medicinal plasters. By 1897 he was advertising that each of his "Bell-cap-sic Plasters" contained the "same quantity of Belladonna [atropine] as in...the standard U. S. P. Belladonna Plaster, one half the quantity of aconite [a numbing neurotoxin] plaster, and the same amount...as in the standard Capsicum [capsaicin] plaster." While reddening the skin with his plaster's Capsicum, Grosvenor tried to avoid blurring his patients' vision. He did so by balancing the pupillary effects of his plaster's Belladonna (dilation) against those of Bell-cap-sic's Aconite (constriction). With its trademark Bell-cap-sic bell (enlarged, *upper right*), this advertising card (*lower left*) suggests that no home is complete without a puppy or without a Bell-cap-sic plaster, presumably in the medicine cabinet. After all, by "combining two anodynes and a rubefacient" [Capsicum], Grosvenor boasted that Bell-cap-sic was "without doubt the best medicinal plaster ever produced!" (Copyright © the American Society of Anesthesiologists' Wood Library-Museum of Anesthesiology.)

George S. Bause, M.D., M.P.H., Honorary Curator and Laureate of the History of Anesthesia, Wood Library-Museum of Anesthesiology, Schaumburg, Illinois, and Clinical Associate Professor, Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, Ohio. UJYC@aol.com.