Hill of “Cocoene,” “Cocoaine,” or Cocaine: Anesthetic Friend or Fiend?

Besides printing a crooked obverse (top) on his ca. 1888 “Friendship” trade card, Dr. George E. Hill (ca. 1847 to 1923) misspelled his local anesthetic on the reverse as “Cocoene” (bottom). In Pennsylvania periodicals, his spelling misadventures advertised his numbing medication as “Cocoaine.” In August of 1905, The Scranton Truth juxtaposed stories of success and failure with cocaine. The success focused on one of Hill’s patients who was still using her same prosthetic teeth 14 yr after her anesthetic; the failure, titled “Cocaine Fiend Arrested,” followed a cocaine addict’s relapse. Is it any wonder then that a wary American public was questioning whether cocaine was a friend or a fiend? (Copyright © the American Society of Anesthesiologists’ Wood Library-Museum of Anesthesiology.)

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