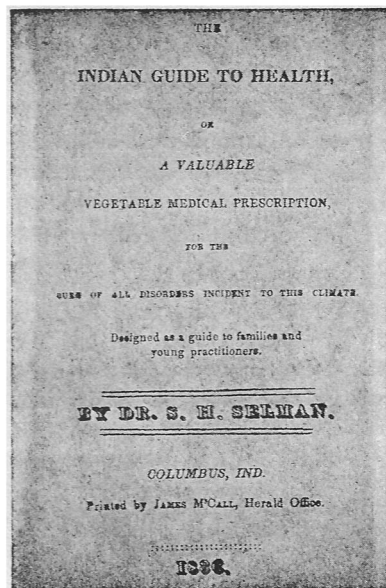


“Hoosier Incunabula”
THE EARLIEST MEDICAL PUBLICATIONS OF
INDIANA AUTHORS*

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It seems strange that in this great commonwealth of ours, famous throughout the broad expanse of the United States as the home of distinguished literati, there has been such a dearth of medical literature. True, there have been numerous and excellent contributions to current medical journals, but the more operose and laborious undertaking, the writing of books, has evidently not appealed to many of our doctors for medical texts from the pens of Indiana authors are few and far between. It is interesting to note, however, that some of our pioneers in medicine had the temerity to spread the gospel of healing through the medium of the



written word, and it is a description of two of the very earliest of these medical texts—may I call them “Hoosier Incunabula?”—that is the purpose of this article. Neither of the authors would be in the good graces of the council of his local medical society were he to publish today a work “Particularly Adapted to the Use of Heads of Families and Mid-

wives" and even in that early period both authors excuse their dereliction on the ground of a thinly settled country and a scarcity of physicians. Both works are classical examples of the familiar "family physician."

The earlier work is entitled *The Indian Guide to Health*, by Dr. S. H. Selman, and was published in Columbus, Indiana, in 1836.

Dr. Selman's name does not appear in Kemper's *Medical History of Indiana*,¹ nor is he mentioned in Vonnegut's *Indianapolis Booksellers and Their Literary Back-ground*.² Neither is there any record of him in any of the standard histories of Indiana nor in the records of Bartholomew County on file in the State Library. I had almost despaired of finding anything concerning him when I learned of a notebook left by the late George Pence, one of the pioneers of Bartholomew County, to his local historical society. From it I quote verbatim, Mr. Pence's reminiscences of Dr. Selman:

Dr. 'Squire H. Selman came from Kentucky, located in Columbus in 183—. Indian doctor, though a white man. Also Baptist preacher. Extensively patronized as a physician. Published small duodecimo volume, "The Indian Doctor" or "Guide to Health" of which he was the author. Printed by James M'Call at Herald office and bound in Madison. Book sold at the high price of \$1.50. The book described ordinary diseases of the Western country and set forth the kind of remedies to be used, and how they should be administered. He was a good-looking man of reserved and dignified demeanor and dressed with elegance and taste in the finest broadcloth. An elegant fob-chain and seal of gold and a watch of the same material—then very rarely worn in this section adorned his person. By some mishap he had lost an eye, but an artificial one filled the vacancy to all appearances as well as if it had been genuine. He was a man of some culture but judging from his book knew but little about medicine or surgery. He prepared his own remedies, having a small copper still and some retorts for that purpose. He made frequent visits to the woods, camping out Indian fashion for days at a time, with a party of helpers, gathering barks, roots, herbs, leaves and seeds, from which he extracted and compounded his medicines.

Fond of pets, he captured wild animals alive on his wood expeditions and brought back many a young fawn—once a black cub wolf. These he brought to his residence and soon domesticated. The wolf ran at large like a dog. In old age, however, it grew snappish. A pungent paragraph in the Herald respecting the wolf, gave great offense to the doctor. The animal, however, was still allowed its freedom

¹ G. W. H. Kemper, *Medical History of the State of Indiana* (Chicago, 1911.)

² Theodore F. Vonnegut, *Indianapolis Booksellers and their Literary Background* (Bloomington, 1926). Masters thesis, Indiana University.

and one day being found "out of bounds" near Haw Creek, by two youngsters out hunting, it was shot and killed.

Such was the doctor's fame and reputation that, though he charged high fees, he always had plenty of patrons. The mystery that attached to everything "Indian," the doctor's trips and encampments in the woods, his strange pets, the curious apparatus for extracting medicinal properties from vegetable substances, his reticence and gravity of manner, and the marvelous glass eye, doubtless contributed largely toward securing the extensive and profitable business with which he was favored.

The regular doctors lost no opportunity to deride Doctor Selman's medical pretensions. He was by no means a "sure cure" and without doubt shortened the days of many a poor, confiding patient. I remember one of his cases in which he was loudly accused of malpractice by the other doctors who described it about as follows: "William, a son of Miles Bunnell, the tanner, was climbing a tree one day, carrying an ax to cut off a crooked limb for a sled runner, and accidentally cut his knee very badly. Selman attended him and the result was that the boy lost the use of his knee-joint entirely, but got well with a stiff and very crooked leg; that during the treatment the doctor applied a poultice or dressing of what he called 'wet fire' which caused such intense pain the nurse was compelled to remove it; and that in throwing it out of the house it struck the door-frame and actually scorched it as with a red-hot iron." Selman died in 1873 or the year following.

My copy of Selman's book is a 16 mo. of two hundred pages, in contemporary calf. The paper is of poor quality, the printing fair, but the capitalization and punctuation would be a nightmare to a modern proof-reader. There is an index of diseases and remedies, not in alphabetical order, which includes herpes, tetter-worm, negro-poison, king's evil, "hooping" cough or chin cough, gravel and stone, and an extended discussion of mid-wifery.

Perhaps the best conception of the book may be conveyed by quoting a short chapter in full:

THE CRAMP COLIC

This is a colic that cramps the stomach, and draws the patient sometimes nearly double with violent pains all through the breast, and will roll through the bowels like goose eggs, and sometimes goes off with a lax, or discharge of wind up or down before the patient can get any ease. Parched peas eaten freely have had a happy effect, when other means have failed, a gill of dogwood berries boiled in a quart of water down to half a pint and drank, is wonderful; or boil a large burdoc leaf in a quart of water to a gill and drink; or take and scrape the inside of a pipe, soot water, or weak lye is very good, or take a teaspoonful of pulverized charcoal in a little water and drink this; or take a young shoat and cut it open in haste and obtain the gall and drink it and may probably relieve the patient; or make ginger tea and drink; or take calamus chew and swallow the spittle; or eat ginger root

freely; or combine a small quantity of aloes, asofetida, and rhubarb, put these in spirits and drink as needful; but of all medicines I have ever used is garlic boiled in new milk, this prescription often relieves the quickest of any remedy that has ever been tried. Beware of eating such food as creates wind or is hard of digestion.

This disease is very bad,
And cramps the patient up;
And if a cure cannot be had,
You'll soon be drawn enough.

Mr. Pence comments particularly on Dr. Selman's elaborate stills and retorts. Imagine, if you can, the preparation of the following prescription in his primitive laboratory:

To keep down inflammation, you will get one peck of green plantain, the same of liverwort, the same of winter-green, the same of burdock, the same of the blossoms of philadelphia fleabane, the same of poke-berries, the same of dogwood berries, you will put these ingredients together in a large kettle or still, boil them in fifteen gallons of water down to three gallons, then strain the liquid from the vegetables, add to the liquid two pounds of Epsomsalts, one pint of the tincture of gumguaiacum, one quart of hard cider, half an ounce of the rust of iron, the same of salamoniack, you will now boil this down to one gallon, it is then fit for use; the patient may take from a teaspoon to half a tablespoonful, three times a day, refraining from all strong diet.

It is a far cry from such a heterogeneous mess to the "elegant pharmaceuticals" of the present day. This has indeed been a "Century of Progress."

There is just one note of humor, unconscious of course, in Dr. Selman's book. Interpolated between the section on midwifery and that on therapeutics, and occupying an entire page, is the following evaluation of his students:

A LIST OF MY STUDENTS AND THEIR ACQUIREMENTS

Thomas Selman, my brother, he was my first Student; he stayed with me three years and made great improvement in my practice.

John E. Goodwin, stayed with me one year and made good improvement for the time.

Silas D. Readish, he only stayed with me two or three months, he learned nothing.

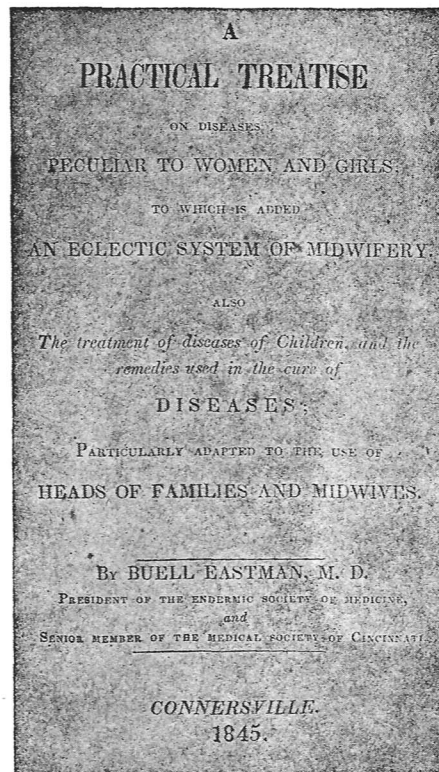
Napolian P. Young, another only studied with me a few weeks, he gained no insight.

Samuel P. Langsdon, is the last student that has studied under me, he set in for two years, he has now been with me near eighteen months, his prospects appear very flattering.

Would we had the courage of our convictions today as men had a hundred years ago.

The second work which engages our attention is en-

titled *A Practical Treatise on Diseases Peculiar to Women and Girls, to which is added an Eclectic System of Midwifery* by Buell Eastman, M.D., published in Connersville in 1845. When I purchased the book, about five years ago, I had reason to believe that it was the first medical work published in the State of Indiana, and it was three or four months later that Dr. James Stygall called my attention to the Selman volume. Dr. G. W. H. Kemper, in the section on Medical History in Dunn's *Indiana and Indianans*³ shows the title page of the second edition of Eastman's book and says he believes it to



be the first medical publication in the state. Of Doctor Eastman, we can learn but little. None of the state or Fayette County records mention him. Dr. W. N. Wishard has no knowledge of him, nor have any of a number of Connersville physicians or residents with whom I have spoken. Dr. J. Rilus Eastman is familiar with the name of Buell Eastman,

³ Jacob P. Dunn, *Indiana and Indianans* (Chicago, 1919), II, 787-859.

but says that the family genealogy does not include him and Doctor Rilus believes that if there is a relationship, it is very remote. A brief note in the Indianapolis *Star* of March 12, 1919, concerning the copy of the book then in the possession of Dr. Kemper, said that Dr. Eastman came to Connersville in 1844 and was a resident there for two years. I know of no way to substantiate the statement.

On the title page of his book, Dr. Eastman identifies himself as a "Senior Member of the Medical Society of Cincinnati." I wrote to Dr. Alfred Friedlander of Cincinnati for such information as he might be able to obtain for me and got the following reply:

I had our secretary go over the old records of the College. I find that Dr. Eastman was graduated from the Medical College of Ohio—the precursor of the present College of Medicine, University of Cincinnati—in 1832. The Faculty minutes read to the effect that when Mr. Eastman came up for final oral examination he did not pass. He was given a second examination shortly thereafter and at this time succeeded in satisfying the requirements of the examiners, and was accordingly given his degree in 1832. No further biographical data are available.

It is my impression, however, that although Dr. Eastman "flunked his exams," he was a rather scholarly man, as a passage from his book, which I shall presently quote, will attest.

As to the book, it is a duodecimo of 182 pages bound in hand-marbled boards. The paper, printing and composition are far superior to the Selman work and the pages are little discolored by age or use. Dr. Eastman evidently had faith in his brainchild, as the verso of the title-page carries an advertisement, giving the price of a single copy as \$1.50; one hundred copies, \$1.25 each; and five hundred copies, \$1.00 each. That the work was a success is evidenced by the fact that Dr. Kemper's copy, which is now in the State Library, is the second edition.

The book is divided into five parts: The first is devoted to Diseases of Women and Girls; the second to Midwifery; the third to "Manual Labor"; the fourth to Diseases of Children; and the last to Medical Properties and Uses of Remedies.

Chapter One opens with a definition of puberty which is classic:

Puberty is that period of life at which the person assumes its due proportions, and distinguishing beauty of form; the voice becomes more

harmonious; the countenance more animated; and the motions more graceful. The sexual organs, which previously lay in a dormant state, are so far matured as to begin to exercise their functions. The bosom becomes greatly augmented; the breasts are expanded, and the nipple elongated. The womb and cavity of the pelvis are enlarged, and the menses appear. The future vigour of the constitution is greatly improved; and the sexual functions are now capable of full and active exercise and appear to be intimately connected with the spirits, energy and development of many parts of the oeconomy. The other functions undergo equally remarkable modifications, under the new and instinctive impulse which animates every part of animal life. The external senses attain fresh and peculiar activity; the intellectual faculties become greatly developed, while the morals and social manifestations show themselves in that indescribable feeling of interest, and captivating modesty and affection which characterize the female sex. . . . Her mind is replete with changes; peurile amusements now yield to maturer enjoyments, and rational inquiry; capricious attachments give place to sincere unaffected and permanent friendship; and the best proportions the individual is susceptible of, are now suddenly and successfully developed, *in a word*, a new creature almost seems to be suddenly formed.

An appreciation of Eastman's intelligent conception of good obseteric practice may be gathered from his statement: "I hope to be credited when I declare, that more mischief is done, more misery and pain occasioned, and more broken and shattered constitutions are produced by the untimely interference of art, by handling and boring, and stretching the parts, than by all other things put together."

Nor was Dr. Eastman a polypharmacist. His book contains none of the shotgun mixtures which abound in Selman's work. In fact, his *Materia Medica* might not be a bad guide for a recent graduate. Read what he has to say of opium:

Opium is one of the most valuable articles belonging to the science of medicine. Taken by a healthy person in a moderate dose, it increases the force, fullness, and frequency of the pulse, augments the temperature of the skin, invigorates the muscular system, quickens the senses, animates the spirits, and gives energy to the intellectual faculties. Its operations are extended to all parts of the system. In a short time this excitation subsides, a calmness of the corporeal actions, and a delightful placidity of mind succeed, and the individual, insensible to painful impressions, forgetting all sources of care and anxiety, is conscious of no other feeling than that of a quiet and vague enjoyment. All the secretions, with the exception of that from the skin, are either suspended or diminished, the regular motion of the bowels is arrested, pain and inordinate muscular contraction if present are allayed, and general nervous irritation is composed, if not entirely relieved. . . . No medicine is so efficient in allaying nervous irritation, relaxing spasms

and quieting irregular muscular movements, as this article. Hence its great importance as a remedy in cramp, spasms, colics, painful mensuration, hysterics, coughs, etc.

And so throughout Buell Eastman's book, every paragraph and every sentence couched in splendid English, we see a keen insight into the principles of medicine and obstetrics, crude as the practice must necessarily have been. It seems a pity that his talents were not turned to a worthier cause than the production of a popular guide to medicine. And yet, who can question his sincerity when, in his introduction he says: "The present work has not been undertaken without due deliberation upon the responsibility attached to such an enterprise."

I am reasonably certain that these two books, Selman's *Indian Guide* and Eastman's *Treatise* are the earliest medical works published in Indiana. However, if any of my readers can direct me to a work of earlier date, the information will be greatly appreciated.⁴

⁴I wish to acknowledge my obligation to Miss Esther McNitt of the Indiana State Library, to Mrs. Albert G. Newsom and Mrs. Roseada Pence Pruitt of Columbus, Indiana, and to Miss Caroline Dunn, Librarian of the Connersville Library, for their co-operation and help.