

Fiddle Tune History

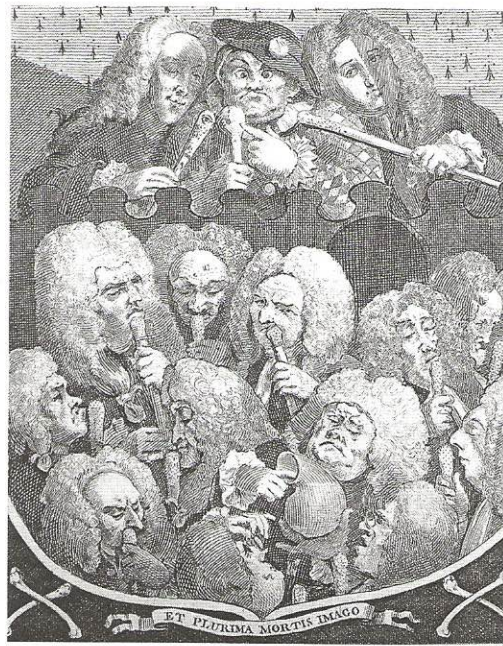
By Andrew Kuntz

Doctor, Doctor

*Doctor, Doctor, come here quick,
I swallowed my tobacco and it's
makin' me sick.*

Health was a constant concern in 18th century Europe, where diseases were prevalent, causes little understood, and cures rare. When a sufferer did find relief, the result was often considered “miraculous” and ascribed to divine intervention. Illnesses that are largely eradicated or controlled today, such as croup, whooping cough, scarlet fever, tuberculosis, cholera, dysentery, and typhoid fever, took a toll of life long before our modern scourges of heart disease and cancer—diseases of longevity—culled the population.

As today, the first resource most people turned to when ill was their own experience and neighborhood resources, such as an apothecary, or pharmacy, or sage person. Many households had their own medicinal recipe books, often handed down generationally. As early as the seventeenth century, botanist, herbalist, physician, and astrologer Nicholas Culpeper (1616-1654), writing in his *Physicall Directory* (sic) (1649) remarked, “All the nation are already physicians. If you ail anything, every one you meet, whether a man or woman, will prescribe you a medicine for it.” People were acutely aware of the prevalence of disease and knew well that the best remedy was preventive, taking care before they



William Hogarth, *The Company of Undertakers*.
Joshua Ward is depicted at top right.

took sick, as medical historian Roy Porter noted. “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure” was already proverbial in the 18th century, and attention to diet, exercise, and a healthy environment was exercised by the prudent. If one were prudent and wealthy you had expanded choices for staving off disease, including balneology or cold water therapy, medicinal springs, vegetarianism, and fads of all kinds. Science was making rapid advances, but it was often hard to tell what was truly preventive or curative and what was not. Even legitimate, beneficial medical advances seemed farfetched—consider Edward Jenner’s struggles for public acceptance of his new vaccinations (c. 1797)...invisible protection by having matter from a diseased cow introduced to your own tissue?

Preposterous!

It was only as recently as 1858 that a medical act set up a “Medical Register” of qualified doctors in Great Britain, although medical societies had been formed in the previous century. They began the work of supporting practice with legitimate science; however, there was often scant difference (and several similarities) between medicine and quackery [the word derives from old Dutch *quack-salver*, or one who quacks (boasts) about the virtue of his salves]. Practitioners of both advertised and honed their rhetorical skills in support of their treatments, and both sought a legitimate place in society and public acceptance of professionalism, and both rejected occultism and faith healing. In view of the dismal state of bona fide medical treatment, coupled with old fashioned greed, it is small wonder that wealthy and poor alike were routinely fleeced

The Doctor





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with all sorts of notions, potions, and procedures that at best were benign and at worst, fatal. Therein lies the distinction between the quack and the doctor; one knows that his remedy is fraudulent and seeks to deceive, the other seeks to cure.

It is revealing to look at the large body of country dance tune titles as social history, and, in the context of this article, we might begin with a 6/8 tune called “The Doctor.” The melody was printed by Glasgow musician and publisher James Aird in his *Selection of Scotch, English, Irish, and Foreign Airs, vol. 2* (1785), a potpourri of a collection that also contains a number of martial tunes (it was dedicated to those serving in the armed forces of Great Britain). It seems to have been meant as a march, as it was also printed in period fife tutors, but it makes a splendid jig. Most doctors in the 18th century did not examine patients, a task left to those lower down the social order. Rather, doctors “conferred” and “advised,” as was their station. The title is apparently neutral, and we know not what discipline is referred to, nor how the individual was perceived. It is only an affirmation of a social status.

Less ambiguous is a country dance called “Worm Doctor” or “Harlequin Worm Doctor” printed by John Walsh in *Caledonian Country Dances vol. 3* (London, c. 1740) and by John Johnson in

A Choice Collection of 200 Favourite Country Dances vol. 3 (London, 1744). The title is derived from an anonymous pantomime acted at London’s Goodman’s Fields in 1734 called “The Chymical Counterfeits; or, Harlequin Worm Doctor,” a work of little merit apparently, for it is but a footnote in history. “Harlequin” had been an impish stock comic character of the Italian Commedia dell’arte of the 17th century, and was popular in England in the 18th century. The English version of Harlequin, however, was imbued with romantic and mercurial characteristics, and the impish mischievousness of the Italian character was submerged. The elements of misrule were transferred to another character, the Clown, with whom Harlequin was often paired. Harlequin took on many guises in plays, including those of Ranger, Gardener, Highlander, Nabob, Sorcerer, and others, all prefixed with the name “Harlequin,” as in Harlequin Worm Doctor. The play’s title gives some clue as to context, for here we are dealing with malfeasance—there is a counterfeiting and an attempt to deceive.

Worms are a somewhat rare malady in the developed world, but were a common scourge in the 18th century, the remedy for which many repaired to “worm doctors,” who would usually prescribe (and sell) a medicine or purgative. One of the more famous of these was John Gardner, The Worm Doctor of Shoreditch, a medicine vendor of the 1780s whose nostrum was a vermifuge. Gardner even collected specimens of his results, and preserved them in museums (a form of “medical advertising,” not unique to him). He was accused of being a charlatan, and it was said that his worm specimens were fashioned by Gardner himself out of common offal and everyday objects (such as vermicelli). Gardner was more complex than a one-dimensional greedy purveyor of patent medicine, however, for he was also a Methodist preacher who lived a seemingly pious life, and even founded the Stranger’s Friend Society for the relief of the poor in 1785, to which he himself donated a penny a week.

Consider next the decidedly malevolent tune title examples of “The Mountebank,” a reel for a longways dance printed in dancing master Daniel Wright’s Wright’s *Compleat Collection of*

Worm Doctor



Celebrated Country Dances printed in London in 1740, and “Le Charlatan” a quadrille from Longman’s *XXIV New Cotillions or French Dances* (London, 1770). A mountebank is a charlatan, a person who deceives others, especially in order to trick them out of their money. The term was particularly applied to those who hawked medicine. The synonym, charlatan, is from the identical French word meaning a seller of medicines, although the French term itself is derived from the Italian *ciariare* (to prattle) or from Cerretano, a village in Umbria renowned for its quacks.

One of the most famous 18th century English quacks was Joshua Ward (1685–1761), whose topicality is “celebrated” in country dance tune repertory. The title “The Drop” or “Ward’s Drop” (not actually a “drop” as we know it, but a dose of half an ounce) refers to the product of a notorious and often-cited medical quack of the first half of the 18th century, named Joshua “Spot” Ward (an indelicate nickname that referenced a claret-colored birthmark on his cheek). Ward seems to have originally worked as a drysalter in London, but in 1717 he attempted to represent Marlborough in Parliament, only to be removed when it was discovered he had not received a single vote. He was forced to flee to France (perhaps because of some Jacobite associations), and spent the next sixteen years in that country, perfecting Ward’s Pill, which began to receive some notoriety as a cure for a variety of ailments. He returned to England around 1733-34, in more advanced circumstances than when he had first left the country. He must have had at least some medical training, for he cured King George’s dislocated thumb with a violent wrench, earning some vehement disapprobation in the immediate, but the King’s esteem somewhat afterwards. Having secured royal patronage, London aristocracy flocked to his door for ministration.

Despite his success with the upper classes, Ward seems to have retained a social conscience for he also ministered to the poor, first with Crown resources, then his own. Ladies of the aristocracy, drawn to his mission, would sit before the doors of his infirmary handing out his medicines to everyone who came. The success made him the object of some professional jealousy, as joked about



by Churchill, when asked by Queen Charlotte whether it was true that Ward’s medicine made a man mad. “Yes, madam: Dr. Mead” (referring to Richard Mead, M.D., one of the most renowned physicians of his day).

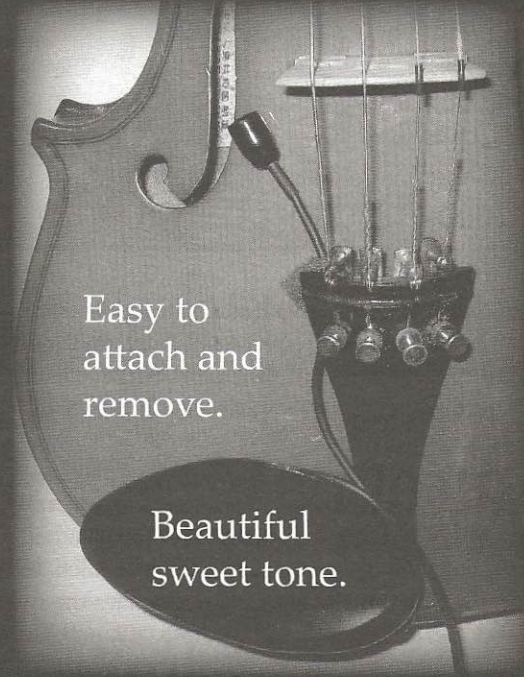
Ward advertised that he “performed many marvelous and sudden cures on persons pronounced incurable in several hospitals,” and “proved” his assertions by hiring “patients” at half a crown a week, instructing them in the symptoms for which he wished to demonstrate a cure, and having them simulate the miracle. Not only the poor were hired, but middle class “patients” as well, who came in coaches to sit in his consulting rooms (at five shillings a day). His claims to cure gout, rheumatism, scurvy, palsy, “Lues Venera,” King’s Evil, and cancer were fairly quickly found false, however, and the press started to go to town on him, led by the *Grub-Street Journal*, which began a crusade against him in November, 1734.

Condemnation in the press was fueled by the fact that Ward’s drops and pills were in fact quite dangerous. The *Journal* described a dozen cases in which taking the cure had serious, even fatal results. Dr. David Turner reported one individual he treated, who, after taking only one of Ward’s pills, “after a most violent

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gerel was published, and Ward is referenced in period plays. Ignominy was sealed when William Hogarth depicted Ward with two other notorious quacks in his print "The Company of Undertakers" (a reference to the fatalities from Ward's potions, in which Ward appears with Mrs. Sarah Mapp, bone-setter, and Dr. John Taylor, surgeon and oculist. Boswell, in *Life of Johnson*, said "Taylor was the most ignorant man I ever knew, but sprightly; Ward was the dullest.").

Undeterred, Ward continued to practice and dispense his drops and pills, particularly his "Ward's White Drops." He was still treating the poor and other patients past the mid-century mark. Ironically, his "medicines" survived him, and after his death it was arranged that the profits garnered by their sale would be divided equally between the Asylum for Female Orphans and the Magdalen. The charities benefited greatly at first, until Ward's advertisements and controversy faded from memory, and the potions fell into disuse. The "White Drop," however, continued to be mentioned as late as 1798, when the *Gentleman's Magazine* described it as a good, cheap and useful medicine" (Ward also made medicines in other colors). Ever the self-aggrandizer, Ward in his will requested that his body be buried in Westminster Abbey with national heroes, "within the rails of the altar and as near the altar as may be."

What was in the pills? No one knows for sure, as his recipes apparently changed over the years (at least the earlier versions included arsenic). Antimony seems to have been the base for most of them, a fairly commonly prescribed remedy throughout the 18th century. After Ward's death his assistants had no consistent recipes to follow, bedeviling the trustees who were taxed with continuing to manufacture the potions for charity.

vomiting for some hours, gave near 70 stools, with the most imminent danger." The paper continued the crusade against Ward for several years, documenting case after case. Finally Ward had enough, and took them to court. He failed in his suit, however, as it was thrown out. A quantity of satirical verse and printed dog-

[Andrew Kuntz maintains two on-line databases, The Fiddler's Companion (www.ibiblio.org/fiddlers) and his current project The Traditional Tune Archive (www.tunearch.org). When not researching tunes, he enjoys playing in a variety of old time, Irish, and French-Canadian music sessions.]

Ward's Pill