

“YUKON JACK”

Part II

by Cecil Munsey

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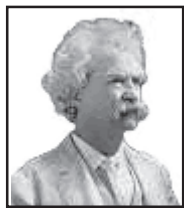


Figure 1

- “The Cat and the Painkiller”
- “Perry Davis’ Painkiller”

PROLOGUE

In **Part I** of the article entitled, “YUKON JACK,” the history of the well-known prospector and pioneer of the Yukon Territory, Leroy Napoleon (“Jack”) McQuesten, was related;

His development of the “**Sourdough Thermometer**” that utilized the famous proprietary medicine, Perry Davis’ Painkiller as one component was described;

The classic milk-glass figural “Klondike” pocket-flask was shown and discussed. The believed relationship of the flask blown to commemorate the gold-seeking pioneers of the Yukon, like Jack McQuesten, was explained;

The part in the “Yukon Jack” McQuesten history played by his Koyukon Athabascan Indian wife Katherine (“Kate”) James Satejdenalno McQuesten was also presented;

The fact that McQuesten had a popular whiskey and honey liqueur named in his

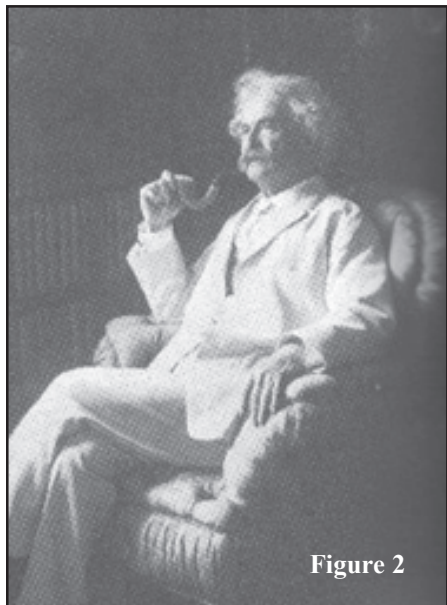


Figure 2

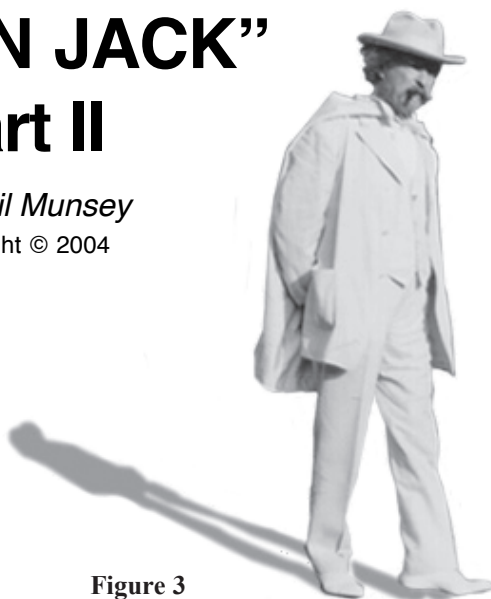


Figure 3

honor was covered;

It was also mentioned that the McQuesten River and the McQuesten Mineral Belt in the Yukon, were named to honor the pioneering efforts of “Yukon Jack” McQuesten.

“The Cat and the Painkiller”

Undoubtedly there isn’t an American alive who is not familiar with the writings and sayings of the “Lincoln” of our literature, Samuel Langhorne Clemens (“Mark Twain”) – see **Figures 1 - 4**.

It is generally accepted that his masterpieces, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, are children’s books. While that is true, it is just as true that they are also adult books. Part of his greatness is that he had messages for both young and old.

Like Charles Dickens, Twain employed humorous satire to underscore social injustice. It is Twain’s role as a humorist and philosopher that is the focus of this first of the two sections of the story of Jack McQuesten that is presented here as Part II of the article, “YUKON JACK”.

Recall McQuesten’s “**Sourdough Thermometer**,” where the last product to freeze in the Yukon winter, was a bottle of the alcohol-laced patent medicine – Perry Davis’ Painkiller. Then note the following excerpts from Twain’s, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, Chapter XII, “The Cat and the Painkiller” [**Figure 5**]. Tom is suffering his first big case of love sickness. Tom suddenly lost interest in life because Becky Thatcher had stopped

coming to school. Aunt Polly became very concerned and decided to do something about Tom’s problem. Most will recall Aunt Polly as the symbol of the typical ultra-conventional housewife of the 1800s:

“She began to try all manner of remedies on him. She was one of those people who are infatuated with patent medicines and all new-fangled methods of producing health or mending it. She was an inveterate experimenter in these things. When something fresh in this line came out she was in a fever, right away, to try it; not on herself, for she was never ailing, but on anybody else that came handy. She was a subscriber for all ‘Health’ periodicals and phrenological frauds; and the solemn ignorance they were inflated with was breath to her nostrils. All the ‘rot’ they contained about ventilation, and what to drink, and how much exercise to take, and what frame of mind to keep one’s self in, and what sort of clothing to wear, was all gospel to her, and she never observed that her health journals of the current month customarily upset everything they had recommended the month before. She was as simple-hearted and honest as the day was long, and so she was an easy victim. She gathered together her quack periodicals and her quack medicines, and thus armed with death, went about on her pale horse, metaphorically speaking, with ‘hell following after.’ But she never suspected that she was not an angel of healing and the balm of Gilead in disguise to the suffering neighbors.”

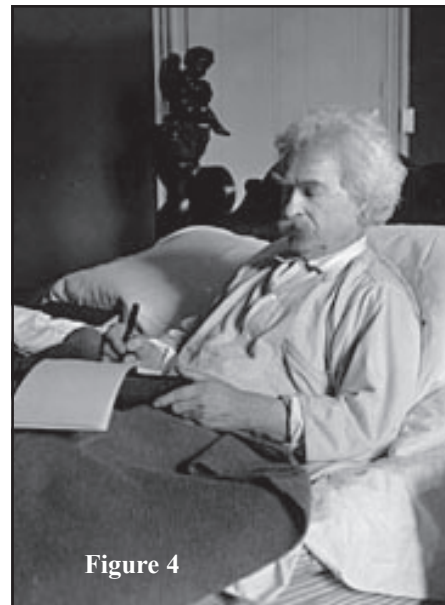


Figure 4

"The water treatment was new, now, and Tom's low condition was a windfall to her. She had him out at daylight every morning, stood him up in the woodshed and drowned him with a deluge of cold water; that she scrubbed him down with a towel like a file, and so brought him to; then she rolled him up in a wet sheet and put him away under blankets till she sweated his soul clean and 'the yellow stains of it came through his pores' – as Tom said."

"Yet notwithstanding all this, the boy grew more and more melancholy and pale and dejected. She added hot baths, shower baths, and plunges. The boy remained as dismal as a hearse. She began to assist the water with a slim oatmeal diet and blister plasters. She calculated his capacity as she would a jug's, and filled him up every day with quack cure-alls."

"Tom had become indifferent to persecution by this time. This phase filled the old lady's heart with consternation. This indifference must be broken up at any cost. Now she heard of [Perry Davis'] Painkiller for the first time. She ordered a lot at once. She tasted it and was filled with gratitude. It was simply fire [high alcoholic content] in a liquid form. She dropped the water treatment and everything else, and pinned her faith to Painkiller. She gave Tom a teaspoonful and watched with deepest anxiety for the result. Her troubles

were instantly at rest, her soul at peace again, for the 'influence' was broken up. The boy could not have shown a wilder, heartier interest if she had built a fire under him."

"Tom felt that it was time to wake up; this sort of life might be romantic enough, in his blighted condition, but it was getting to have too little sentiment and too much distracting variety about it. So he thought over various plans for relief, and finally hit upon that of professing to be fond of Painkiller. He asked for it so often that he became a nuisance and his aunt ended by telling him to help himself and quit bothering her. If it had been Sid, she would have had no misgivings to alloy her delight; but since it was Tom, she watched the bottle clandestinely. She found that the medicine did really diminish, but it did not occur to her that the boy was mending the health of a crack in the sitting-room floor with it."

"One day Tom was in the act of dosing the crack when his aunt's cat came along, purring, eying the teaspoon avariciously, and begging for a taste.

"Tom said: 'Don't ask for it unless you want it, Peter.'"

"But Peter signified that he did want it."

"'You better make sure.'"

"Peter was sure."

"'Now you've asked for it, and I'll give it to you, because there ain't

anything mean about me; but if you find you don't like it, you mustn't blame anybody but your own self.'"

"Peter was agreeable. So Tom pried his mouth open and poured down the Painkiller. Peter sprang a couple of yards in the air, and then delivered a war whoop and set off round and round the room, banging against furniture, upsetting flowerpots, and making general havoc. Next he rose on his hind feet and pranced around, in a frenzy of enjoyment, with his head over his shoulder and his voice proclaiming his unappeasable happiness. Then he went tearing around the house again spreading chaos and destruction in his path. Aunt Polly entered in time to see him throw a few double somersets, deliver his final mighty hurrah, and sail through the open window, carrying the rest of the flowerpots with him. The old lady stood petrified with astonishment, peering over her glasses; Tom lay on the floor expiring with laughter."

"'Tom, what on earth ails that cat?'"

"'I don't know, aunt,' gasped the boy.

"'Why, I never see anything like it. What did make him act so?'"

"'Deed I don't know, Aunt Polly; cats always act so when they're having a good time.'"

"'They do, do they?' There was something in the tone that made Tom apprehensive."

"'Yes'm. That is, I believe they do.'"

"'You do?'"

"'Yes'm.'"

"The old lady was bending down, Tom watching with interest emphasized by anxiety. Too late he divined her 'drift.' The handle of the telltale teaspoon was visible under the bed valance. Aunt Polly took it, held it up. Tom winced, and dropped his eyes. Aunt Polly raised him by the usual handle—his ear—and cracked his head soundly with her thimble.

"'Now, sir, what did you want to treat that poor dumb beast so for?'"

"'I done it out of pity for him—because he hadn't any aunt.'"

"'Hadn't any aunt!—you numskull. What has that got to do with it?'"

"'Heaps. Because if he'd 'a' had one she'd 'a' burnt him out herself!"

Figure 5



She'd 'a' roasted his bowels out of him 'thout any more feeling than if he was a human!'"

"Aunt Polly felt a sudden pang of remorse. This was putting the thing in a new light; what was cruelty to a cat might be cruelty to a boy too. She began to soften; she felt sorry. Her eyes watered a little, and she put her hand on Tom's head and said gently:

"I was meaning for the best, Tom. And, Tom, it did do you good."

Tom looked up in her face with just a perceptible twinkle peeping through his gravity:

"I know you was meaning for the best, auntie, and so was I with Peter. It done him good, too. I never see him get around so since--"

"Oh, go 'long with you, Tom, before you aggravate me again. And you try and see if you can't be a good boy, for once, and you needn't take any more medicine."

From the *Autobiography of Mark Twain*, edited by Charles Neider comes an interesting and appropriate quote regarding the above story of the cat and the painkiller:

"It was not right to give the cat the 'Painkiller;' I realize it now. I would not repeat it in these days. But in those 'Tom Sawyer' days it was a great and sincere satisfaction to me to see Peter perform under its influence – and if actions do speak as loud as words, it took as much interest in it as I did. It was a most detestable medicine, Perry Davis' Painkiller."

"Perry Davis' Painkiller"

One of the most famous of the patent and proprietary medicines that bottle collectors are very familiar with is Perry Davis' Painkiller that was invented in 1839. Beyond Perry Davis' Painkiller as a component of Jack McQuesten's famous "Sourdough Thermometer" and as "...a most detestable medicine," mentioned in "The Cat and the Painkiller" (above), the reader is offered here a capsule history of the medicine that has thrived and survived for over 160 years.

To begin, in Mark Twain's own words, spoken by and as Samuel Langhorne Clemens [Figure 2] – Twain's real name – about his experience as a nine-year-old

boy:

"It was a most detestable medicine, Perry Davis' Painkiller. Mr. Pavey's negro man, who was a person of good judgment and considerable curiosity, wanted to sample it and I let him. It was his opinion that it was made of hell-fire. These were the cholera days of 1859. The people along the Mississippi were paralyzed with fright. Those who could run away did it. And many died in the fright in the flight. Fright killed three persons where cholera killed one. Those who couldn't flee kept themselves drenched with cholera preventatives and my mother chose Perry Davis' Painkiller for me."

The painkiller part of the story of Perry Davis (1791-1862) started in Dartmouth, Massachusetts during the winter of 1839. In Perry Davis' own words,

"My stomach became very sore. My digestive organs became weak. My appetite failed. Night sweats followed. Then my kidneys were affected. Piles in their worst form were preying upon me. The canker in my mouth turned very troublesome. Under all these circumstances I thought I was fit subject for the grave."

The sick Davis decided to invent some concoction that would relieve his misery while he awaited the sound of "*Gabriel's horn*." He supposedly selected the "*choicest gums and plants*" in the world and "*directed by the hand of Providence*"

put together the famous "Perry Davis Painkiller [Figures 6 and 7]."

Davis put his product, to be used internally and externally, on the market in 1840 and by 1843 he was doing quite well with it and living in Providence, Rhode Island and had listed himself in the City Directory under the title "*Physician*."

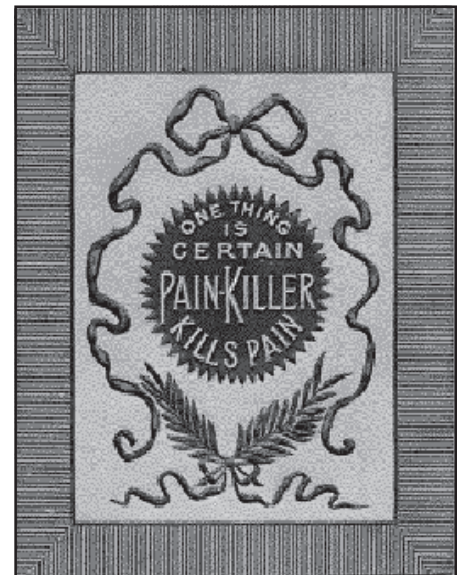
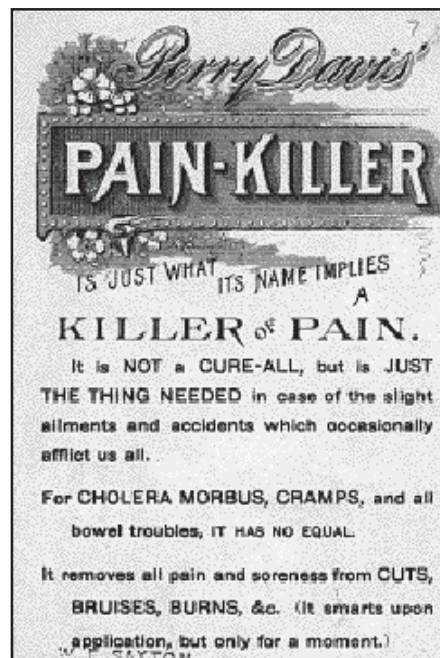
Even though he jealously guarded his "*God-given*" formula, an analysis was made of his product by a druggist. The ingredients, in a 5-plus-gallon batch, were revealed to be: "Gum myrrh 2 1/4 pounds, Capsicum 10 ounces, Gum benzoin 6 ounces, Gum opium 8 ounces, Gum fuaia [sic] 3 ounces and alcohol 5 gallons."

It was the cholera epidemic of 1849 that made the "painkiller" famous. Before the year was out Davis was selling 6,000 bottles a month. At about the same time, sea captains coming through the great seaport of Providence, began to take Davis' product with them on their voyages all over the world. Soon Perry Davis & Son opened a branch office in London. According to Mr. Davis, sales "increased more than a thousand-fold." (It is interesting to note at this point that Perry Davis [Figure 8] was a generous financial supporter of both the Baptist Church and the Temperance Movement.)

At the age of 71, in 1862, Davis breathed his last breath. His son, Edmund, took over the business and carried on until he died in 1880. The business was then sold and remained in Providence until 1895, at which time it was removed to New York City.

Left: Figure 6

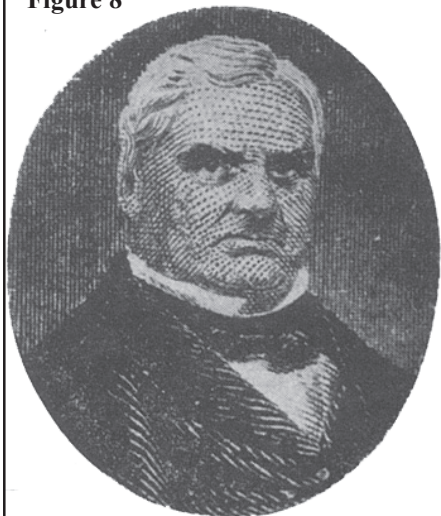
Below: Figure 7



And without any apparent trouble, Perry Davis Painkiller survived the Pure Food and Drug restrictions of 1906. Today, 163 years later, it can still be purchased under the title "Liniment, Painkiller Brand" in both the United States and Canada.

The term liniment implies external use but after all it is liquid – who knows? If even tempted, remember, "Yukon Jack" McQuesten's "sourdough thermometer" where the ultimate measuring device of coldness was the fourth bottle. That bottle was Perry Davis' Painkiller which, because of its alcohol content, didn't freeze solid until the weather reached – 76° F.

Figure 8



Perry Davis & Son advertisement.

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Jack London:
<http://sunssite.berkeley.edu/london/>

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<http://www.parks.sonoma.net/jlstory.html>

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Advertising lithograph for the painkiller.