

Caduceus and the Cross:
The Influence of Evangelical Christianity on Health
Practices in the American South, 1800-1860

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Evangelical Christianity was the culture of the 19th-century South. This was something that both challenged and reinforced Southern society: evangelical clergy placed men as the religious head of households and women within pious domestic roles, but an absence of hierarchical rigidity required white men to reassert dominance in master-slave relationships. White men's battle for dominance over social order was not something exclusive to households, but extended into the professional realm. Southern medical schools reinforced the superiority of doctoring, construing a physician's role to be a guardian of life and soul in an integration of healing and divine responsibility. However, emerging alternative practices –botanical medicine, homeopathy, and folk healing– tested the boundaries of white male control. As white male physicians asserted their superiority within the healing community, they drew upon Southern Christian culture to form their definition of legitimate medical care.

The rise of Christian evangelism in the South provided an atmosphere conducive to hierarchical instability. The previous backdrop of Anglican Christianity supported one of the most notable regional characteristics of the 19th-century South –racialized slavery– through its strict tenets.¹ Other defined submissive relationships, including parent-child and husband-wife, strengthened under the system as well, construing a culture of systematic social order with the white man at the top. However, an emergence of evangelical Christianity –which placed more emphasis on soul-saving than on status and power– threatened this order.² “In short,” wrote Heyrman, “the problem facing the Methodist clergy was that their church's organization endowed youth with an authority traditionally reserved for men of a certain age, race, age, and

¹Jon Kukla, "Elizabeth Henry Campbell Russell Champion of Faith in the Early Republic," in *Virginia Women: Their Lives and Times*, eds. Cynthia A. Kierner and Sandra Gioia Treadway (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2015), 163, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt17575kb.12>.

²Christine Heyrman, *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 101.

standing in southern communities,” namely, “older white men.”³ A preoccupation with youth, particularly within the context of boy-preachers, was what gave the Methodist movement a progressive lens in contrast to Anglican Christianity, but nevertheless challenged the Southern pecking order.⁴ Because submissive relationships defined the roots of Southern society, allowing underlings to lead religious movements prompted tension among congregants. Although Baptists, another evangelical group, did not endow youths with more authority over the laity, both Baptists and Methodists required “southern patriarchs to forswear the self-control and liberty that made every free white man the master of himself and his household.”⁵ This was especially problematic in a society based in racialized slavery, centered around the concept that free white men would be masters of households— including wives, children, and slaves.⁶ Evangelism, while offering comfort in rituals and divine mercy, prompted a destabilization in social structure and anxiety amongst white patriarchs to maintain control over their households.

To be successful in the 19th-century South, evangelical Christianity needed to sculpt its tenets around racial order. Clergy, as a response to white men’s insecurity, “confirmed southern masters’ control... by sustaining their authority as heads of households, governors of churches, and members of the ruling class.”⁷ To remedy a perceived disruption of social order, evangelical clergy reaffirmed white male dominance— linking back to why evangelism flourished in the South, despite initial misgivings from older white men in the post-Revolutionary age. By the 1850s, evangelism had been twisted into being justification for a major core of the Southern economy and way of life: slavery. According to an 1852 edition of the *Southern Quarterly*

³ Heyrman, *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt*, 100.

⁴ Heyrman, *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt*, 15.

⁵ Heyrman, *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt*, 217.

⁶ Heyrman, *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt*, 189.

⁷ Heyrman, *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt*, 223.

Review, a popular and influential journal amongst white Southerners, one who is a “familiar acquaintance with divine record” would not question the ethics of slavery.⁸ In fact, “having received the divine sanction, the sacred volume abounds with instructions and directions for the treatment and management of slaves.”⁹ In other words, one who is well-versed in the Bible would recognize the presence of slavery in Biblical times, construing it as a divine reason for use in daily life. Of course, Southerners did not shy away from clothing with different kinds of fabric –something the Bible prohibits– but rather plucked out a set of rules that supported Southern culture and passed them off as religious doctrine.¹⁰ In a letter to the governor of South Carolina, Richard Furman, President of the Baptist State Convention, further underscored the idea of molding evangelical Christianity to fit white, Southern, male worldviews. “Had the holding of slaves been a moral evil,” he argued, “it cannot be supposed, that the inspired Apostles, who feared not the faces of men, and were ready to lay down their lives in the cause of their God, would have tolerated it...in the Christian Church.”¹¹ When challenged by the teachings of early evangelical Christianity, particularly those that questioned subservient relationships, Southern communities responded with a bending of rules to work in their favor– namely, interpreting the Bible to condone slavery, as found within the *Southern Quarterly Review* and Furman’s letter. The fact that evangelism needed to be carved out to fit the Southern hierarchical

⁸ James Henley Thornwell et al., “Treatment of Slaves in the Southern States.” *Southern Quarterly Review* 2, no.5 (1852): 212, HathiTrust.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ *The Ladies' Work-Table Book; Containing Clear and Practical Instructions in Plain and Fancy Needlework, Embroidery, Knitting, Netting, and Crochet* (Philadelphia: G.B. Zeiber & Co., 1845), 137, HathiTrust.

¹¹ Richard Furman, “Letter from Richard Furman to South Carolina Governor, December 24, 1822.” *Exposition of the Views of the Baptists Relative to the Coloured Population of the United States in Communication to the Governor of South Carolina*, accessed June 7, 2018. HathiTrust.

mold demonstrated both the rigidity of the system as well as the uneasiness of white Southern men, who approached a newfangled religion with a racial standpoint.

Christian doctrine was used to solidify gender roles, further underscoring white men's anxiety over losing their power as heads of society. Before the Wesleyan Female College in Savannah, Georgia, Mayor John Ward stated, "We can desire nothing more except that she had...act[ed] beyond the family— embodying the laws of Christian kindness, in forms of action graceful and beautiful as herself"¹² In explicitly stating "Christian kindness," Ward solidified the notion that spirituality was tied to a certain set of values. Furthermore, his speech highlighted the scope of Christianity within the South— there was both the soul-saving, fiery sermons from Baptist and Methodist preachers, and also a general vision for proper white women's behavior, which was indirectly tied to Christian beliefs. Ward expanded on the idea of values, arguing, "It is for this class of trials, that woman especially needs that 'mute patience' and saint-like submission, which often bears up her spirit where the stouter and harder nature of man succumbs."¹³ The use of Christian undertones —saint-like, spirit— linked religion to a set of gender ideas, namely, a middle or upper class white woman was patient, pious, and perhaps most importantly, submissive.

Although white women were not slaves, religious leaders used Christianity as justification for white male dominance over both racial and gender systems. This connection between religion and gender roles was similarly illustrated in an address before the Chowan Female Collegiate Institute, in which Minister Robert Boyte Crawford Howell asserted that women acted as men's complements. In the beginning of the address, Howell proclaimed, "If

¹² John E. Ward, *Address Delivered Before the Wesleyan Female College* (Savannah: George N. Nichols, Printer, 1857), 27.

¹³ Ward, *Address Delivered Before the Wesleyan Female College*, 28.

man is the *lord* and *ruler* of earth, ‘woman is the glory of man.’” Like John Ward’s words, religious motifs underlaid Howell’s argument, giving an idea of permanence and divine validity to a woman’s place. The fact that he was a minister also enhanced his evidence, since he had the religious authority needed to make an argument based on Christianity. According to Howell’s words, a man was the center of the earth, with a woman humbly within his orbit, strengthening the social order crucial to the Southern regime with the religious backing. Together, the words of Ward, Howell, and the pro-slavery arguments demonstrated two major ideas: first, when evangelism boomed in the South in the 19th century, men linked the religion to known, comfortable, traditional systems— racial and gender hierarchy. Second, white men felt a destabilization of their authority under evangelism. These are both points that later translated into the professional world— white men used both evangelism and a general sense of Biblical beliefs to define their roles.

Another major incorporation of evangelical teachings into Southern way of life could be found in the cultural preoccupation with salvation, something that came from the acceptance of Jesus Christ. According to a series of sermons published by Georgia Baptist ministers, death was not “an eternal sleep,” but rather a passageway to the “hereafter,” construing the utmost role of a preacher to be the “salvation of the soul.”¹⁴ “I must die;” preached Reverend John Hillyer, but with the salvation of Christ, “I shall live again,” highlighting death and afterlife as a principal hub for the tenets of evangelism.¹⁵ The widely-preached evangelical “saving” had the potential to spur a deep-rooted anxiety within followers. While evangelicals saw the conversion of an entire family as ideal, in reality, some members did not comply, leading to estrangements and troubled

¹⁴ Robert Flemming, *The Georgia Pulpit* (Richmond: H.K. Elyson, 1847), 425, HathiTrust.

¹⁵ Flemming, *The Georgia Pulpit*, 155.

thoughts over the destination of a relative's eternal soul.¹⁶ In addition, clergy viewed mothers as a way to “gently” lead their children to “Christ and salvation,” creating a partnership between ministers and mothers. This also highlighted a women's supposed soft, nurturing side, once again solidifying the presence of gender roles in Southern culture.¹⁷ According to evangelical preachers, salvation –someone's future after death– was so important that it required the recruitment of the entire family. In these examples, what was taught in church was enacted within the household, demonstrating the link between Christianity and family within the context of death. White Southern men translated this societal instability –sweeping anxiety over both their own fates and those of their relatives– to emphasize the importance of their places within professions.

Along with the rise of evangelism came another notable trend in the 19th century: what it meant to be an orthodox physician within the professional realm. In a time period with territorial expansion, immigration, and economic change, there was significant flux in schools of thought alongside a desire for lessened government regulation, prompting most states to abandon medical license requirements after 1820.¹⁸ This meant that orthodox physicians –a term comparable to the 21st century MD– were met with a plethora of alternative viewpoints, outside of their scope of practices, which they needed to filter themselves.^{19,20} Scorning the orthodox practices that relied on “bleeding, blistering, and purging,” the followers of Samuel Thomson's system of botanical

¹⁶Heyrman, *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt*, 127.

¹⁷Robert Boyte Crawford Howell, *The Relations of Woman to Human Happiness: An Address Before the Chowan Female Collegiate Institute, at the Anniversary at Murfreesborough* (Richmond: H.K. Ellyson, 1853), 11. HathiTrust.

¹⁸ Wilhelm Moll, "History of American Medical Education." *Medical Education*2, no. 3 (1968): 176. doi:10.1111/j.1365-2923.1968.tb01765.x.

¹⁹ Howell, Joel D. "Reflections on the Past and Future of Primary Care." *Health Affairs* 29, no. 5 (2010): 760. <https://search.proquest.com/docview/304582030?accountid=14505>.

²⁰ James C. Whorton, *Nature Cures: The History of Alternative Medicine in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 19.

medicine, for example, challenged these doctors with their “root-and-herb” system.²¹

Homeopathy, as well, presented an outside philosophy in its reliance on miniscule doses and the power of nature, as opposed the superfluous doses in regular medicine which often resulted in the patient’s death.²² Even in terms of schooling, homeopathic and botanical schools rose in the 1830s, alongside the more traditional medical colleges established in the late 1700s, for which courses included anatomy, chemistry, and pathology.²³ Not only did opposing systems compete with orthodox medicine at times –a tug-of-war for superiority in the healing world– but they also provoked a contemplation for valid medical systems, whether a system like botanical medicine could be integrated into the orthodox practices. In this century, particularly influenced by a lack of regulation from the state, orthodox physicians sought a concrete system that could be construed as the standing doctrine. One of the tools at their disposal was the newly-emerged evangelical Christian framework– a set of cultural and religious beliefs ingrained into the South and used to conceptualize the role of the doctor.

Orthodox Southern medical schools used the evangelical idea of salvation to conceptualize the role of white physicians. In an introductory lecture delivered to the Medical College of Georgia, Dr. Jones professed that a physician is entrusted “with the lives of his fellow men;” “his life is spent in the nearest communion with the sick and dying, in sight of the very gates of eternity; the work of the physician, therefore, requires the highest self command, the loftiest moral training, and the purest religious belief.”²⁴ Dr. Jones emphasized the connection

²¹ Lamar Riley Murphy. *Enter the Physician: The Transformation of Domestic Medicine, 1760-1860* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1991), 71.

²² James H. Cassedy, Review of *Homeopathy in America: The Rise and Fall of a Medical Heresy*, by Martin Kaufman, *Journal of American History* 59, no. 1, June 1, 1972, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1888409>.

²³ Moll, "History of American Medical Education," 176.

²⁴ Joseph Jones, “Suggestions on Medical Education: Introductory Lecture to the Course of 1859-60.” Lecture, Medical College of Georgia, Augusta, GA, 1860, *Everyday Life & Women in America*.

between doctors and death: working with a man in his dying hours indicated a holy job, something drawn closer to the “gates of eternity.” Within the context of Southern culture, since salvation was arguably the centerpiece of evangelism, describing doctoring in this way underscored an attempt to elevate the position of a physician. In addition to a direct connection to salvation, listing “the highest self command” and “the loftiest moral training” tied to a general sense of Christian beliefs, such as morality, suggesting that physicians should act a certain way as a testament to their Christian values. In another lecture given at the Medical College of South Carolina, Dr. Samuel Henry Dickson likened saving one from disease to Jesus Christ’s holy works. “It will be your delight, as well as your duty to diminish the mass of human suffering, to health the sick; to bind up the broken heart and soothe the afflicted spirit; to illuminate with joy and gladness the abodes of poverty and disease,” Dr. Dickson explained, like “Him who lived a perfect example of *virtue*.”²⁵ While this did not have the same explicit reference to the afterlife found in the lecture at the Medical College at Georgia, Dr. Dickson’s words compared a doctor to Jesus Christ— from whom evangelicals found salvation. Likening a physician to a central holy figure gave the job both power and responsibility. In a century in which white male Southerners molded evangelism to assert their authority, medical colleges interlocked salvation from Christ, death, and doctoring to form a definition of a physician as someone both holy and powerful.

Orthodox medical colleges employed a general sense of Christian values to construct the bounds of a doctor’s duties. The introductory lecture at the Medical College of Georgia, delivered in 1849, persuaded that “every practitioner of the healing art, should be at least an

²⁵ Samuel Henry Dickson, *Introductory Lecture Delivered at the Commencement of the Second Session of the Medical College of South-Carolina* ([S.l. : n.p.], 1826), 19. HathiTrust.

honest man, if not a Christian,” because “religion *alone*” raises man from a world of deceit.²⁶ While this did not evoke principles that were notably evangelical –like salvation– it was nevertheless rooted in religion. The connection between “honest man” and “Christian” expanded a doctor’s position from an evangelical holiness to a broader sense of Christianity. This was similar to the clergy’s propagation of Christianity within the home, such as with family conversions, in that both blurred the lines between culture and religion. In forming a definition of what it meant to be a physician, medical schools –spearheaded by white men– borrowed a cultural understanding of what it meant to be a Southern Christian. In addition to having a lofty moral character, Louisville Medical College argued that physicians should have certain religious limitations to the scope of their practice. On the topic of invasive surgeries, Dr. Joshua B. Flint explained in 1838, “Lamentable cases... not unfrequently present themselves, where the disorder is so extensive, or involves parts so essential, to existence, that no operative proceedings are justifiable– where the hand of adventurous art is arrest by the august command, ‘thou shalt not kill.’”²⁷ Including a Bible quote and describing it as an esteemed order created a sense of universality to the speech; Dr. Flint portrayed a Biblical law as common guidelines for the young physicians, something embedded within everyday life. By using Christianity as synonymous with cultural beliefs, both the Medical College of Georgia and Louisville Medical College further developed an image of a physician as someone who drew upon broad Biblical teachings –moral character, thou shalt not kill– within their practice. Beyond just evangelical constructs,

²⁶ Paul F. Eve, “The Present Position of the Medical Profession in Society; an Introductory Lecture.” Lecture, Medical College of Georgia, November 5th, 1849, HathiTrust.

²⁷ Charles Caldwell, *Louisville Medical Lectures From the Durrett Collection* (Louisville: Prentice & Weissinger, etc., 1874), 16.

these speeches exemplified the intertwining of religion and culture and its application to what it meant to be a doctor in the antebellum South.

Doctors used a shared Biblical language to heighten the importance of their work on human bodies. In his treatise *The Theory and Practice of Medicine*, Virginia doctor William I. Cocke described the human form in a religious context. If one looks a body, Dr. Cocke affirmed, “he will find there abundant evidence of the great goodness, power and wisdom of an allwise Creator, in the construction of the organs of the body, and of the care which has been taken so to place and guard them that, whilst each is sure in the performance of its duties, it is safe from all ordinary causes of harm from others.”²⁸ Similar to the previous speeches on the holiness of doctoring, Dr. Cocke’s treatise was another nod to the sacred duty of physicians— to work directly on a form ordained by God. While Dr. Cocke’s Biblical language was not specifically Methodist or Baptist, it presented a commonality between Christian faiths, again highlighting that Christianity was *the* culture of the South and something that could be used to emphasize a physician’s power. Other rhetoric from this period similarly used a general sense of Christianity: At a valedictory address to the medical class of Transylvania University in Kentucky, Dr. Ethbert Dudley stated that he operated on a man “in the presence of the medical class, and after the expiration of a few days was brought before them again to have the bandages removed and the blessed light of heaven let in upon his brain for the first time.”²⁹ Contrasting something as mundane as unwrapping bandages with the light of heaven elevated the work of the physician. It is particularly significant that this is in a valedictory address— Transylvania University wanted their medical students to have inflated egos, highlighting how white men worked to assert their

²⁸ William I. Cocke, *The Theory and Practice of Medicine* (New York: Holman, Gray, 1853), 33, HathiTrust.

²⁹ Ethbert L. Dudley, *Valedictory Address to the Medical Class of Transylvania University* (Lexington: Published by the class, 1849), 14, HathiTrust.

authority within the medical field. Framing a human body against the backdrop of heavenly light gave a sense of holiness to a doctor's work, both establishing the importance of their job and asserting dominance within the South, a highly Christian region.

As white men asserted their authority as doctors, they formed boundaries of what was and was not legitimate medical care, borrowing from Southern Christian culture— particularly, evangelism— to do so. A strongly defined opinion on the validity of botanical medicine vs homeopathy was a clear example of this: unlike homeopathy, botanical medicine was often linked to Biblical stories and salvation, attracting the respect of Southern Christian. In the 19th century, Samuel Thomson sparked the beginning of the botanical movement, and earned a plethora of botanical devotees from the South; a Natchez newspaper, the *Mississippi Free Trader*, reported that one-third of the state's citizens followed Thomsonian medicine.³⁰ The botanical approach relied primarily on the use of natural remedies, such as peppermint tea or mustard seed powder for indigestion, and was cited by followers to “overcome the disease, no matter what form it may assume.”^{31,32} What is particularly interesting is that Thomson did not directly cite highly Christian concepts within his popular medical guide —neither the Bible nor salvation— and yet his followers did so in practice. An analytical article on Thomson's practices looked to the evangelical concept of salvation, for example, writing should a man need medicine “as are in harmony with nature and vitality... he will secure all temporal benefits and blessings which were designed for him by his bountiful Creator. And, now may truth enlighten and wisdom direct the people to lay hold on this blessed reality, the salvation of their mortal bodies

³⁰ John S. Haller, *The People's Doctors: Samuel Thomson and the American Botanical Movement, 1790-1860* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000), 83.

³¹ Samuel Thomson. *New Guide to Health*, 3d ed. (Boston: Printed for the author, by J. Howe, 1831), 74.

³² D.F. Nardin, ed., “Devoted to the Dissemination and Support of the Thomsonian System of Medical Practice.” In *The Southern Botanic Journal* 1, no. 1 (1838): 33, HathiTrust.

from disease and death, till old age shall open to them the portals of glory in another and a better world.”³³ In linking “nature” and designs from “his bountiful Creator,” the beginning of this passage suggested that the natural world was something ordained by God and therefore had a level of holiness. This religious view encouraged the use of natural medicines by appealing to white Southern Christians—perhaps even other physicians, whose medical colleges encouraged Christian values and framed their jobs with a level of holiness. Similarly, the words “salvation” and “portals of glory” are reminiscent of the Baptist sermon from Reverend John Hillyer, who preached on the importance of accepting Jesus as a savior for access to the afterlife. Yet this evangelical backbone was the article’s own interpretation of botanical medicine; in shaping the meanings of Thomson’s botanical practices, followers looked to their own faith.

Other medical texts from the 19th-century South highlighted this disjuncture between doctrine and practice, demonstrating how white physicians used Christian beliefs to conceptualize botanical medicine and underscore its validity. Along with the direct nod to salvation, found in the article in support of Thomson’s practice, general Christian values comprised a major part of interpretation: in his domestic medical guide, Dr. John Gunn argued that disease was a product of original sin. “Man, in the early days, of nature, lived in a state of health, both in body and mind,” he wrote, but after violating the “sacred laws of his Creator,” he suffered “the penalties annexed to his own transgressions,” and as a consequence, man’s “days are now shortened, and encumbered with disease.”³⁴ Gunn directly credited a basic Biblical tenet—the story of creation—as one of the founding principles of the botanical movement. This story of original sin was something that many Southerners would have been familiar with, and likely

³³ D.R. Nardin, “Devoted to the Dissemination and Support of the Thomsonian System of Medical Practice,” 89.

³⁴ John Gunn, *Gunn's Domestic Medicine, or, Poor Man's Friend. Shewing the Diseases of Men, Women and Children, and Expressly Intended for the Benefit of Families* (Knoxville: F.S. Heiskell, 1863), XI. HathiTrust.

gave a level of familiarity or comfort to this medical approach. Similarly, the connection between healing and God's intention further wrapped botanical healing within the guidelines of Christianity: *The Southern Botanic Journal* proclaimed, "if it be the accomplishment of the will of God, that such vast multitudes die at all ages, under seventy years, why has He created and caused to grow out of the earth, thus bountifully, those vegetable productions which are so eminently calculated to cure disease and prolong life?"³⁵ Like the analytical article on Thomson's practices, this tied back to the Biblical story of creation, but rather than connecting it to salvation, it created a sense of general Christianity, appealing to a broader culture within the South. Because God specifically created nature with a reason, this journal argued, humans should reap the benefits, portraying botanical medicine as a legitimate form of care. Similarly, in an address delivered to the Reform Medical College in Georgia, 1858, Dr. O.A. Lochrane asserted that a botanist "turns over the leaves of nature's works, and learns from the pages on which God has stamped his visible intelligence."³⁶ This echoed *The Southern Botanic Journal's* earlier affirmation that botanical medicine's natural cures had Biblical roots, giving a sense of validity through the assertion of divine intention. In fact, the journal argued in a different article, "To support Thomsonism is the duty of the Christian."³⁷ White physicians construed Thomsonism—and its broader movement, botanical medicine—through a Christian lens, establishing its validity with links to of creation and salvation. Considering the widespread popularity within the South, the botanical movement could be considered a success as a legitimate form of medical care.

³⁵ D.F. Nardin, J.L. Wood, and W.H. Fonerden, "A Short Sermon," *The Southern Botanic Journal* 1, no. 2 (1837): 88, HathiTrust.

³⁶ O.A. Lochrane, "Address on the Subject of Medical Reform," Delivered to the Reform Medical College, Macon, GA, March 1, 1858, 12, *Everyday Life & Women in America*.

³⁷ Nardin, "Devoted to the Dissemination and Support of the Thomsonian System of Medical Practice," 297.

White physicians perceived homeopathic medicine, however, with a far more negative view. While it was similar to botanical medicine in its treatments, citing honey bee venom and natural metals, it was not construed to have the same evangelical Christian leanings.³⁸ *The Southern Quarterly Review* listed it as a uppity new form of religion, called it a “sublime devotion, a form of religion, [and] a rainbow of divine union,” establishing it as not just a medical practice but a spiritual practice as well.³⁹ The journal continued its scathing review, asserting that it is shameful to “connect homeopathy with religion and to promulgate a system of blasphemous infidelity under the name of a newly developed Christianity.”⁴⁰ The word “blasphemous” particularly targeted the homeopathic movement, reducing it to a fringe religion rather than a potentially valid form of medicine. The direct mention of Christianity displayed how the Southern Christian culture was a basis for what could and could not be incorporated as mainstream medicine— especially considering that *The Southern Quarterly Review* was a respected news source in the antebellum South. Another source, the *Georgia Blister and Critic*, had comparable beliefs: “Homeopathy as now practised is the merest gammon, an attempt to deceive and speculate upon human credulity,” it argued, declaring that it was based on “nonsense, presumption and ignorance”⁴¹ These cutting remarks were a sharp contrast to those on botanical medicine; white men considered the former to be deceptive foolishness, even blasphemous, and thought the latter to be a reflection of God’s commands. While botanical medicine undoubtedly had its critics, what is most notable is the application of religion within

³⁸ Henry M. Smith, ed., “Review.” *The American Homeopathic Review* 1 (1859): 27,109, HathiTrust.

³⁹ William Henderson, “Homeopathy.” *Southern Quarterly Review* 28, no. 1 (1855): 196, HathiTrust.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ H.A. Ramsay, “Homeopathy.” *Georgia Blister and Critic: A Monthly Journal Devoted to the Development of Southern Medical Literature* 1, no. 2, (April 1854): 45, HathiTrust.

these contexts. Using and applying Christian doctrine –both evangelism and a general Biblical language– white men delivered polar views on two highly similar practices.

In the household, while domestic medicine and slave folk healing were similar in many ways, white physicians accepted one and deemed the other quackery. This distinction was tied to both racial and religious reasons. Sculpted around a vision of proper, Christian home life, physicians promoted the intersection of motherhood and preventative medicine through medical guides. Part do-it-yourself prose, part scientific text, physicians hoped these handbooks targeted to white middle and upper class mothers would lead to improved physical health in the home.⁴² The guides provided simple remedies such as warm vinegar vapors for nasal congestion or horsetail for ulcers, but had deeper implications: they enforced a theme of a “child’s recovery and character not only to his mother’s careful nursing but also to her ability to instill in him the moral and physical qualities appropriate to Americans.”^{43,44} This is reminiscent of addresses in women’s colleges, proclaiming their Christian duty to instill values in their sons and be models of piety and moral superiority. In this case, however, this expectation is transferred to the realm of healing. White doctors, backed up by evangelical households, placed white women in paradoxical positions: on one hand, they were seen as critical helpers and their child’s spiritual or even physical welfare was in their hands; at the same time, they were merely in an assisting role to the physicians. Therefore, the doctors carved a significant place for white mothers within health care, but still used their subordinate positions to assert their own authority. Here, physicians both enforced hierarchical rule and encompassed maternal healing within their idea of proper medical care.

⁴² Murphy, *Enter the Physician: The Transformation of Domestic Medicine, 1760-1860*, 41.

⁴³ Kay K. Moss, *Southern Folk Medicine: 1750-1820* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1999), 120.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

In contrast to white mothering, white men's insistence that slave healing was merely "superstition" delegitimized the value of their practice and labeled it an instance of quackery. Slaveholders themselves readily accepted beliefs on the intersection of religious, moral, and mental influences on health, and yet branded their slaves' practices with the pejorative term "negro superstition."⁴⁵ Proslavery scientific racist literature from the 1850s backed this up; physician A.P. Merrill offered "'superstitious fear' as a characteristic of the 'negro race.'"⁴⁶ Of course, much of this antagonism likely derived from racism, considering that the Southern economy depended on racial slavery. However, it is significant to recognize the religious tones used within this context. Popular writer Josiah Priest used religion as well to justify slavery: in his explanations about the "ancient negroes of Egypt, Ethiopia, Libya, and Phoenicia," he claimed, "It is true that Scriptures intimate that the Egyptians were a very wise people, by saying that Moses was earned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians; Acts vii, 22. But what was this wisdom after all, but a mass of superstition and nonsense, respecting their idolatrous religion, a world of stuff, which Moses despised and rejected."⁴⁷ His intense rhetoric, namely, referring to an ancient practice as a "mass of superstition and nonsense," stressed Priest's irreconcilable stance on the religion of early darker-skinned people. Extending the roots of this back to a period before the people were even enslaved, creating the sense of a long-standing practice, that his assertions were backed up by thousands of years of history. Not only did his blatantly racist remarks parallel the proslavery arguments of the *Southern Quarterly Review* and the president of

⁴⁵ Sharla M Fett, *Working Cures: Healing, Health, and Power on Southern Slaves Plantations* (University of North Carolina Press: Chapel Hill, 2002), 45.

⁴⁶ Fett, *Working Cures: Healing, Health, and Power on Southern Slaves Plantations*, 49.

⁴⁷ Josiah Priest, *Bible Defence of Slavery: Or the Origin, History, And Fortunes of the Negro Race, As Deduced From History, Both Sacred And Profane, Their Natural Relations--moral, Mental, And Physical--to the Other Races of Mankind, Compared And Illustrated--their Future Destiny Predicted, Etc.. 6th stereotype ed.* (Louisville: Printed and published by J.F. Brennan for Willis A. Bush, Gallatin, Tenn., 1851), 244, HathiTrust.

the Baptist State Convention –the presence of slavery in the Bible condones its use– but it expanded the argument to the sphere of superstition. According to Josiah Priest, slavery could be justified both through the Bible and the ridicule of slave folk beliefs.

In practice, the remedies of white middle and upper class mothers and slaves were quite similar. A former slave’s narrative from the Federal Writers' Project gave insight into enslaved folk remedies, including catnip tea for measles, goldenrod tea for fevers, and rue tea for stomach worms. In this same interview was a description of folk beliefs, including that “To dream of dancing is a sign of happiness,” “To dream of crying is a sign of trouble,” and a direction to “starch your sweetheart’s handkerchief” so “he will love you more.”⁴⁸ Within the web of slave healing, herbal remedies linked to superstitious practices. Some of the treatments within the domestic guides for middle and upper class white mothers mirrored these practices: A well-respected volume, *English Physician*, also promoted the use of goldenrod for a variety of illnesses, from kidney stones to cleansing the blood. Similarly, the *William Lenoir Medical Memorandum* cited rue for worms, as did the slave narrative.⁴⁹ However, there were several major differences between white mothering and enslaved healing: first, in the racially-segregated South, race was arguably the most significant division between the two practices. Second, in terms of religion, maternal healing echoed a Christian vision of a nurturing, pious mother– much like “gently” leading her children to Christ, a woman would nurse her children back to health with home remedies, as simple as they may be. In slave practices, however, medicinal teas were used alongside superstitious practices, evoking a level of skepticism from white Christian

⁴⁸ “Georgia Narratives, Volume IV, Part 4: Folk remedies and superstition,” Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936-1938, accessed June 7, 2018, <http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=mesn&fileName=044/mesn044.db&recNum=286>.

⁴⁹ Moss, *Southern Folk Medicine: 1750-1820*, 186.

physicians who were unfamiliar with religion beyond the the Biblical bounds. While religion was not the sole reason for white men's scorn of slave folk healing practices, it was nevertheless used as a tool to debunk an alternate belief.

The 19th-century South was highly characterized by sweeping Evangelism. While pieces of the religion gave comfort to followers, such as life after death, it also prompted anxiety within laity by destabilizing social roles. In this unknown religious territory, white men reinstated their power as heads of society, including within the professional realm. Looking to the newly-evangelized Southern culture, Southern white physicians construed what was and was not valid medical care— establishing dominance within the medical community. For natural cures, doctors portrayed botanical medicine in a religious light, yet labeled homeopathy as blasphemous. For folk remedies, doctors believed white mothers to be an integral part in preventative medicine, but dismissed slave healing as superstition. The instability of evangelism in the 19th-century South provided an atmosphere conducive to white male angst; it was from this context that physicians defined proper medical care. In the modern medical community, doctoring may seem to be tied to a particularly *white* narrative —a continuum of white physicians' discoveries. However, it is important to recognize the voices with equal merit but a historically diminished role, including the homeopaths and the enslaved. While they, too, had significant remedies similar to those found in other practices, their inability to condone Biblical tenets contributed to their dismissal from the white medical community. In the antebellum South, the cross overshadowed the caduceus.