Document 13.9 Stiles Kennedy, “Turpentine as a Remedial Agent” (1867)

Quinine—sometimes mixed with whiskey—was well recognized for its remarkable specificity and effectiveness in preventing and curing malaria (commonly called “intermittent fever” or “periodic fever”). But because the South had no preexisting large-scale drug industry, the unreliability of existing sources of medical supply and the ever rising cost of goods forced the Confederacy to commence the collection of native resources, especially plants, from which medicines could be made. Here a Confederate surgeon describes the treatment of malaria with tree bark.

While in Savannah, November, 1862, I assumed control of the medical department of the 47th Georgia Regiment....Several companies of this regiment had been exposed during the summer months to the effluvia of the rice fields on the Savannah river, and at first “sick call” I found over one hundred cases of “chills.” No quinine was being issued at this time by the confederate purveyor, but instead of this potent remedy, infusions of Pinckneya pubens [Georgia bark]. Spanish willow and dogwood were sent in large quantities with full directions for their use....When the patient is in comfortable quarters in town, away from exposure and malarial influences, with sufficient tone and calibre of stomach to bear repeated drenchings of these nasty infusions, there is no difficulty in curing intermittent fever. But my troops were in field, and on picket drill every day....The infusions failed during a severe trial. I never gave the medicine for the men to take with them; while in camp they had to go to the steward’s tent and take it at the hours prescribed. If on picket or guard duty, the corporal or sergeant had the medicine with full directions. But to-day and night the sergeant would drench his picket, and to-morrow at eleven o’clock the patient would shake as if a turreted monster was about to exterminate him.

Source: Stiles Kennedy, “Turpentine as a Remedial Agent,” Medical and Surgical Reporter 16 (June 1, 1867), 458.