
ANESTHESIOLOGY REFLECTIONS

An “Olefiant Gas” Two-Dollar Receipt

According to this two-dollar receipt (left), one method for generating “The Olefiant Gas” was patented on the Ides of March in 1858. (The most successful anesthetic associated with this “oil-making” gas was ethylene, which would be popularized 70 yr later.) This printed note cautioned that the “holder of this binds himself under a penalty not to divulge the secret of this Receipt” for $2. The “Directions” for “The Olefiant Gas” read: “2 Quarts of Alcohol. / 1 Pint of Camphene. / 2 Ounces of Alum. / 1 Teaspoonful of Curcuma Liquid. / Mix, let stand 12 hours, then Use.” Scrawled on the reverse of this receipt (right) is the secret key to actually using this prescription: “Put this Powder in one quart of alcohol or fluid then use one Teaspoonful to the other three Ingredients.”

George S. Bause, M.D., M.P.H., Honorary Curator, ASA’s Wood Library-Museum of Anesthesiology, Park Ridge, Illinois, and Clinical Associate Professor, Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, Ohio. UJYC@aol.com.