



The Fatal Effect of Godfrey's Cordial.

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*“ANOTHER VICTIM. An inquest was held at North Marston on view of the body of Thomas Walker, aged eleven weeks: the deceased was another victim of that child-destroying narcotic, Godfrey's Cordial, which was incautiously administered by an ignorant mother to prevent its crying. Two tea-spoons of Godfrey's and a decoction of poppy heads were duly given to the unfortunate deceased, who became emaciated and ill, and on the previous morning was found dead by its mother's side. The evidence went to show that the parents had otherwise treated the deceased very kindly. **Verdict: Natural death**”.*

Godfrey's Cordial was a patent medicine containing laudanum (tincture of opium) in a sweet syrup, which was commonly used as a sedative to quieten infants and children in Victorian England. Used mostly by mothers working in agriculture or industry, it ensured that the mother could work the maximum hours, without being disturbed by her child, to maximise the family income. Godfrey's cordial had long been recognised as leading to fatal cases of opium poisoning and there were numerous campaigns to restrict its availability.

In 1857, a parliamentary bill was put forward classifying opium and its derivatives as poisons. This was intended to restrict the sale of such compounds, but it failed to pass through parliament, *after being subject to intensive lobbying by trading chemists*. As a result, compounds such as Godfreys would not become restricted until 1908, presumably hundreds of other infants having died in the intervening fifty years.