funerals. By 1785 it appeared in the *New Medical Dictionary*, attached to marginal practices of medicine.

One of the earliest recorded examples of the placebo effect in medical literature dates from 1794. An Italian physician named Gerbi made an odd discovery: when he rubbed the secretions of a certain type of worm on an aching tooth, the pain went away for a year. Gerbi went on to treat hundreds of patients with the worm secretions, keeping meticulous records of their reactions. Of his patients, 68 percent reported that their pain, too, went away for a year. We don't know the full story of Gerbi and his worm secretions, but we have a pretty good idea that the secretions really had nothing to do with curing toothaches. The point is that Gerbi believed they helped—and so did a majority of his patients.

Of course, Gerbi's worm secretion wasn't the only placebo in the market. Before recent times, almost all medicines were placebos. Eye of the toad, wing of the bat, dried fox lungs, mercury, mineral water, cocaine, an electric current: these were all touted as suitable cures for various ailments. When Lincoln lay dying across the street from Ford's Theater, it is said that his physician applied a bit of "mummy paint" to the wounds. Egyptian mummy, ground to a powder, was believed to be a remedy for epilepsy, abscesses, rashes, fractures, paralysis, migraine, ulcers, and many other things. As late as 1908, "genuine Egyptian mummy" could be ordered through the E. Merck catalog—and it's probably still in use somewhere today.[9]

Mummy powder wasn't the most macabre of medicines, though. One seventeenth-century recipe for a "cure all" medication advised: "Take the fresh corpse of a red-haired,