

## HAHNEMANN'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE SCIENCE OF HYGIENE

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Hahnemann is well known as a scholar, as a scientist, as a great chemist and as a great linguist, apart from being known as a great physician and the discoverer of Homœopathy but very few appreciate him as a hygienist. Hygiene is an integral part of medical science and Hahnemann was far ahead of the men of his times in this field as in the science of therapeutics. Hahnemann's essays on "Friend of Health" will be a revelation to the students of Hygiene even today. Hygiene, the science of preventive medicine has been practised in some form or other by man since antiquity. The Ayurvedic literature is full of measures for preventing sickness and preservation of Health. Actually more emphasis is laid on the preventive aspect of medicine. The minutest details about the properties of fruits and vegetables are given with instructions as to when and how they are to be taken or avoided. How different weathers and seasons affect individuals and produce sickness. Even the details about the hygienic construction of living dwellings are given. A highly developed system of massage and yogic physical culture were practiced as an important means of preventing sickness.

Similarly habits and customs of the ancient Egyptians point out that they had quite a number of sanitary institutions and it is highly probable that their physical perfection was largely due to these. The Hebrews likewise had practices and regulations to prevent the spread of infectious diseases. The Greeks and Romans made great advance in practical hygiene. In ancient Athens the arrangement for water supply and disposal of sewage were simply wonderful. The physical-culture systems of the Greek made them strong and resistant to disease; made them fit for public life and invincible on battle-field. The public baths of the Romans remind us of the high value in which sanitation was held by the Romans.

During the later periods till the 18th Century practically, Roman and Greek legacies were forgotten and epidemic diseases ravaged the countries. They were considered as the wrath of God and nothing could or should be done against it. Hahnemann was born and brought up in such times when Hygiene practically had no place in therapeutics. Hahnemann was ahead of his time by a century. One is wonder-struck to know about his ideas, about cleanliness and prevention of diseases when one reads his "Lesser Writings". The English translation of this book appeared more than a century ago (1852) and is now a rare book. His first work when he gave minute and excellent details about hygienic measures was, "Directions for Curing Radically old sores and Indolent ulcers" (1784). In his essays on "Friend of Health" (1792 and 1795) which were later incorporated in his "Lesser Writings", Hahnemann discusses various hygienic measures in great detail and clearness. These measures could be up to date and applicable even today. It was Hahnemann's constant efforts to denounce the prevalent ideas amongst the people of his time regarding the causation of diseases. He took great pains to convince them that sickness was not due to witches or demons. In his "Friend of Health" he wrote, "My mission does not permit me to point out the means of ennobling the mind. It behoves me only to preach the greatest of corporeal blessings, namely, health, which scarcely any take the trouble to seek after and few know how to value it until it is lost."

One of the first things that Hahnemann emphasises is the value of pure air in the preservation of health and life. He pointed out the baneful effects of damp air of cellars and crowded rooms. Even death can happen if we continue to breathe in a over-crowded and a closed room. Once he wrote, "We should rather seek to save wood by using well-constructed stoves than by stopping up every hole and cranny in the doors and windows, exclude every breath of air, as is done by many persons of slender and of moderate means. Such persons must be ignorant of the incalculable value of air, who paste with paper every chink and hole, and even hang up clothes before their doors, and thus retain all the unwholesome exhalations

from the pores of the skin and from the lungs in their small room so as to respire, instead of life and health, disease and death. I have seen melancholy examples of this nature, and I fear that my warning will have some difficulty in penetrating to the miserable cellars they have themselves selected."

In the case of hospitals for the treatment of epidemic diseases he insisted that the windows of the sick rooms should be opened in the afternoon and kept open for at least one hour. One is apt to forget that in Hahnemann's times, in the treatment of highly epidemic or infectious diseases people used to keep the patients in over-heated and over closed rooms. Apart from his advocacy for large airy rooms for the sick he strongly recommended that even in prison homes, each prisoner should be allowed at least 500 cubic feet of air space for each.

For the continued preservation of health Hahnemann advised everybody to take walks in open air or to take moderate exercises in the open air. He strongly deprecated the habits of people of delicate health to spend too much time on the needle work or the "reading of enervating books". "Exercise promotes the appetite, strengthens the digestion and better than all purgatives, expels the excess of evil humours by the natural outlets of the body. Every movement of the limbs conduces to the strengthening of the circulation of the blood and to the completeness of the assimilation of the nutritive fluids—there can be no health without exercise."

Of course he recommended exercise and 'hardening' of the young people but he advised moderation in these. He advocated also the hygienic care of the skin etc. He strongly condemned the fashionable corsets and tight belts. He was of the opinion, this dress of the women was the frequent cause of amenorrhoea as this was due to compression of the abdominal and pelvic vessels.

Hahnemann was the first to introduce the value of dietetics as a branch of hygiene. Many of regulations regarding diet especially for those suffering from fever seem to be quite up to date even today. Even in dietetics he stressed the importance of individualisation. He emphasised "Moderation and what best suits our individual constitution in every condition.

Moderation, strict moderation, that is not apt to be bribed by a pampered, corrupt palate, is a sublime corporeal virtue, without which we cannot become healthy nor happy". The credit of first calling attention to the evil effects of coffee is due to him.

From Hahnemann's writings nobody can remain unconvinced regarding his thorough and scientific approach to the problem of public health. Even in his short essay on the bite of the rabid dog he clearly pointed out the foolish credulousness of the people for their faith in all sorts of remedies for its prevention. He advocated immediate killing of the rabid dogs and the dogs bitten by rabid dogs. In his writings about the scarlet fever he gives detailed instructions about segregation and the use of Belladonna as a prophylactic agent. From his study of cholera, scarlatina and other infectious diseases he had come to the conclusion that they were contagious and they possibly were due to a virus or a contagious miasm. Actually Hahnemann foresaw the science of bacteriology. His wanderings and experiences with epidemic and infectious diseases had well equipped him to study and publish his views regarding the spread, prophylaxis and treatment of the infectious diseases.

His conclusions are as modern today as they were in his time. In 1873 Hahnemann wrote about the epidemic of Asiatic cholera and his words were prophetic. Hahnemann, contrary to the learned opinion at that time asserted that cholera is a contagious disease and that the sick person is its chief propagator. He even said that the infecting material is made up of millions of these miasmatic animated beings which at first "developed at the broad marshy banks of tepid Ganges. They always search out in preference the human being to his destruction and attach themselves closely to him. When transferred to distant and even colder countries these animated miasms become habituated to these regions also, without any diminution either of their unhappy fertility or their fatal destructiveness."

With his intuitive perceptiveness Hahnemann advised young physicians to make frequent but *short* visits to patients

suffering from infectious diseases in their early stages of developments. They could thus slowly get accustomed and non-susceptible to the contagion. He wrote, "Nurses who have before attended patients affected with the complaint are more secure from infection than are those who have not." This was his ideas about what is known as immunisation today. During epidemic he recommended immediate separation of the patient on the appearance of the infection. He even recommended that it is the state's responsibility to enforce such segregation and that such patients should be kept in special hospitals. According to him this was the only means of checking the spread of the epidemics.

Hahnemann gave minute details about the destruction of the miasms of contagion. Clothing and linen of those who have attended or come in contact with patients suffering from infectious diseases, should not be used without being first immersed in hot water, preferably containing vinegar, and exposed to the open air or thoroughly subjected to the fumes of burning sulphur. The clothes of the patients are to be burnt, when they are allowed to go out of the hospital after recovery. He even give instructions about the sterilisation of clothes etc. "All the other linen or woollen articles which have been used by the patient, the straw mattresses, the towels, sheets etc. should likewise be exposed for fully an hour, to the same heat in the oven".

"The excrements of the patients should be carried in well covered vessels to the most distant part of the court or garden.....This should be done by those of the nurses who are most habituated to the contagious virus. The ordure should be placed upon a thick layer of sawdust and immediately covered with one or several bundles of lighted faggots or straw ; where upon the nurse should withdraw, and allow the excrement to be consumed by fire."

He gave details about the measures to be taken regarding the disinfection of the rooms occupied by the patients. One is at times dumb-founded to read Hahnemann's "Suggestions for the Prevention of Epidemics in general, especially in towns". His observations were thorough and his suggestions were much

ahead of his times. He recommended that even prisoners of war should be isolated and that rag-pickers should not be allowed anywhere except in isolated houses near the paper mills. Hahnemann also says, "It should be impressed upon the teachers not to admit any sick child to the classes whose altered appearance betrays the commencement of a disease. Besides, a sick child can learn nothing." "In times of prevailing sickness the clergyman should publicly warn the members of their congregations not to come to church when they are feeling indisposed, and thereby expose their neighbours to danger."

Hahnemann advised that in towns the roads should be wide and the walls of the houses should not be too high for the entry of fresh air. The damaged food stuff should not be allowed to be sold by the state.

Hahnemann in an open letter to the Minister of Police wrote his "plans for eradicating malignant fevers". Some of his suggestions could well have been followed even today. Hahnemann even if he had not discovered homœopathy would have been immortalised by his other contributions to science in general and medicine in particular, but in the field of Hygiene he was a pioneer and his contributions to Homœopathy should not cloud our appreciation of him as a hygienist.

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### SURGERY IN HOMŒOPATHY

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difficulty. He began to pass stools also without using his fingers.

The expression, "This case does not belong to me but to a Surgeon," by a homœopath in connection with any such development due to a natural disease is unsupportable, rather unthinkable.

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