

## ON HAHNEMANN'S SCHOOL-LEAVING SPEECH 'ON THE WONDERFUL CONSTRUCTION OF THE HUMAN HAND'

DR. K. S. SRINIVASAN, Madras

By far the most complete and detailed life of Hahnemann and his works, is Dr. Richard Haehl's two volumes *Samuel Hahnemann: His Life and Work*. In an earlier article of mine ('Notes and Translations from Some French and German Hahnemann Documents', H.G., June, 1981) it was suggested that all the literary works of Hahnemann scattered at different places and which came to light after Dr. Haehl's publication, may be collected and a 'complete works' be published. It is rather unfortunate to observe that there has been no response at all.

Hahnemann composed an address and delivered it, in Latin as was the practice in the days in 1775, while leaving the Prince's School, Meissen. It was his school-leaving speech. The subject was 'On the Wonderful Construction of The Human Hand'. Dr. Haehl has stated that this speech was not available. However, we are fortunate that it has become available later. And also that it has been translated from Latin into English by Stephen Hobhouse.

It is very interesting that Hahnemann chose for his speech the construction of the human hand. The recent evolution of man began when the ape-man stood up and became a biped and began the use of the hands. The development of the hands advanced as also the brain which was required to manipulate the hand. "The human arm would seem, taken all in all, to be the most complete limb which has been produced; it is too, we may think, one of the most recently evolved limbs" (Sir Charles Sherrington).

There is a saying in Sanskrit that the Goddess Laxmi (Prosperity) lies in the hands. What wonderful and marvellous things the human hands create! In fact the ape-man became tool maker by use of the hands and thus had great advantage over all other animals. "For the artist the hand is a major symbol and for the scientist a major gesture". The opposition of the thumb precisely to each of the fingers is a special human gesture. "And it can be done because there is an area in the brain so large that I can best describe its size to you in the following way: We spend more grey matter in the brain manipulating the thumb than in the total control of the chest and the abdomen". (*The Ascent of Man* by Dr. Jacob Bronowski). Speaking of the wonderful construction of the human hand Dr. Bronowski further says, "I remember as a young father tiptoeing to the cradle of my first daughter when she was four or five days old, and thinking—those marvellous fingers, every joint so perfect, down to the finger nails. I could not have designed that detail in a million years. But of course it is exactly a million years that it took me, a

million years it took mankind, for the hand to drive the brain and for the brain to feed back and drive the hand to reach its present stage of evolution. And that takes place in a quite specific place in the brain. The whole of the hand is essentially monitored by a part of the brain that can be marked out, near the top of the head". And Hahnemann says, "the whole subject is such a source of wonder and delight". It would seem that the 'wonder and delight' of the human hand expressed by Hahnemann in 1775 continues to be a 'wonder' to Dr. Bronowski nearly 200 years later.

Hahnemann seems to have had some thoughts of evolution of man when he speaks of the perfection of skill which is shown in the build of other animals and how aptly and fittingly their various senses and limbs have been planned and created so as to suit the diversity of character and strength in each creature. "But for man, who has the divine gift of a mind, hands have been created by Nature as the sole instruments of defence—hands which are adapted for his use and guardians of his safety. Man, accordingly, had no need of natural endowment of horns and claws, since the tips of his fingers were provided with nails and he could use sword and spear and other kinds of weapons, some of them sharper and some harder than horns. I need hardly add that, even from a distance, he is able to repel attacks and to wound another creature, with a stone, for example, or a club, or with those iron tubes which project leaden bullets, and with other similar weapon; while beasts unlike man, can only fight and protect themselves at close quarters. All these actions are in our powers with the help of the hands".

The evolution of life indicates that the ape-man developed upright stance and began using hands "to compensate lack of claws and teeth" and for defence "by hurtling stones and wielding sticks" (*Life on Earth* by David Attenborough).

If we overlook the archaic style of writing then prevalent (in 1775) and take the substance of Hahnemann's school-leaving essay 'On The Wonderful Construction of The Human Hand' we will see how closely he had analysed the subject and also perhaps hinted that he had some thoughts of evolution by adaptation.

---