

HAHNEMANN AND THE AGE OF RATIONALISM

HILARIO G. MARQUEZ, M.D., California

In the history of our civilization, there is a segment of records generally known as the *age of rationalism* or as some historians call it, the *age of reason*. This era embodies practically all the years of the 18th century. It saw a remarkable aggregate of leading intellectuals. In this respect, perhaps, it was even more pronounced in mental refinement than the age of the renaissance, which ended two centuries before this period.

The age of rationalism, especially in the field of medicine, occupies a detached portion in the historical evolution in medical thought. This 18th century, in fact, represents the logical development of facts and ideas in their most complex manifestations. The age of rationalism is usually placed by historians from the passing of Louis XIV of France to the beginning of the French Revolution, in 1789.

During this period, most of the smoldering embers of caged thoughts blazed into flames and found bold expression against traditional thinking of the preceding eras. Thinking, according to Plato, is the talking of the soul with itself. Since self is the product of evolution, it follows that developmental movements of intellect are not and cannot be contained within sharply chronological limits; thus, we find that the age of rationalism continued to influence the 19th and even the 20th centuries.

In the very beginning of the 16th century a prevalent concept reigned that philosophers were considered scientists and scientists, philosophers. In other words, philosophy and science were welded together in rigid integration, called natural philosophy. This arrangement, of course, retarded the growth of each of these two entities. These philosopher-scientists gathered "masses of facts about classes of things"; arranged them as well as they could and simply formulated general propositions. They often observed facts from special points of view and this led to tragic errors. Traditionally, these philosopher-scientists were considered ultimate in their field of mentation processes and were also regarded as inviolate authorities in their field. It is obviously clear that with these existing conditions man soon fell into rigid furrows of traditional patterns of thinking and reasoning. It became his lot to accept axioms because they were axioms. He welcomed accepted 'truths' because they were accepted. He dared not wander away from the prevalent dictum of the time. Thus tradition saturated the centuries. It became a heresy even to question the validity of prevalent opinion of the time. Blinded by such authority, students found highest glory in agreeing with the masters.

The masters merely made assumptions. From these assumptions they formulated their hypotheses. They speculated largely on what 'nature' was or should be. 'Nature' was never placed on the witness stand for experimental

interrogation. When alien observations did not coincide with those of the masters, students refused to believe their own senses. These philosophers of the past may well be likened to Procrustes whose guests must be fitted to his famous Procrustean bed. At that period, any one breaking away from the masters' precept or concept was prosecuted, persecuted, punished and condemned.

One has only to recall Galileo's demonstration from the tower of Pisa. Observers did not believe what they saw because it did not conform with Aristotelean dictum regarding his formulation of the speed of falling bodies. So those 'savants' who witnessed Galileo's demonstration went home proclaiming Galileo was queer and absolutely wrong and that Aristotle was right. They consulted Aristotle again, and believed Galileo wrong. They resented Galileo's attack on Aristotle's pronouncement. They even showed open hostility when Galileo proved his contention by laboratory method. They felt ill at ease because Galileo was proving his position by actual experimentation. Indeed, that which makes man ill at ease makes him hostile and pugnacious. We recall with chagrin Galileo's trial before the inquisition which grew out of prejudice and intolerance. It is to be noted that any revolutionary doctrinal thinking in that period was crowned with unmerited vindictive persecution. Hahnemann was a case in point.

This audience is familiar with the various attempts by the powers-that-be to prevent Hahnemann from practising in Saxony because physicians there opposed Hahnemann's views which did not conform with the prevalent practice of the time. Hahnemann treated scarlet fever in Leipzig, an epidemic which struck that large city, with *Belladonna* contrary to the method others were using. Because of the results Hahnemann was getting, many observers aped, secretly and surreptitiously, Hahnemann in treating scarlet fever. Shortly afterwards a group of Leipzig physicians published an elaborate account of the value of *Belladonna* in the management of scarlet fever carefully omitting Hahnemann as its originator. These physicians claimed they had been induced to use that drug as suggested by Berndt and others in their own group. When Hahnemann reminded them that they had not given him credit as the originator in using *Belladonna* that group of 'august' physicians became not only 'indignant' but bitterly abusive.

How true, indeed, when reason fails, mouths utter words. They even attempted to expel Hahnemann by force. Hahnemann made a mistake in trying to reason with prejudiced persecutors. Apparently, Hahnemann forgot the futility of reasoning prejudice out of a man, since prejudice is not reasoned into a man, and, therefore, cannot be reasoned out of him. Indeed, all looks yellow to a jaundiced eye. Because opinions grounded on prejudice are always sustained with greatest violence, Hahnemann became the target of bitter denunciations. He was dubbed queer and eccentric. They called him a mad man. To be called a mad man was ever the common lot of original thinkers of that time. But there were some, although woefully too few, who cared

very little about opinions of bigots; men who braved the tide of traditional thinking and followed a course of independent deduction provoked by experimental evidence; men who refused to be guided by authority when this authority was proved wrong. These men were the brilliant products of the age of reason. Those of lesser minds preferred to remain content to follow the easier path of traditional dicta and postulates of authorities however wrong those proved to be.

It was during this period that the foundation of scientific thinking was laid; the beginning of medical experimentation even though the rebels of the period or pioneers of independent thinking were roundly abused. We have only to cite the formulator of the law of similars. Vesalius, another scientific rebel, like Hahnemann, found out that traditional ideas about anatomy were wrong and in most cases were in complete variance with his repeated and carefully recorded observations in the dissecting room. He corrected over two hundred errors Galen had made and passed on to the Arabs and the medieval scholars. During his professorship at the University of Padua, as we know, he actually made innumerable dissections on human bodies to check and recheck his findings in human structures. Vesalius' former professor in Paris, firmly convinced that Galen had exhausted the subject of anatomy, called Vesalius a mad man for daring to correct Galen's teaching.

For the scope of this paper, suffice it that we cite Hahnemann and Vesalius who bitterly suffered from gales of unmerited persecution, simply because they broke away from traditional patterns of thinking processes. Their contribution to modern medicine cannot be questioned. Original investigators of that time were ever mindful of Galileo's caution to obtain their facts and not follow blindly ancient authorities.

Hahnemann's independence from the then traditional practice is indicated by the following citation:

"It is this choice of a remedy and the manner of use which characterizes the true physician, who is sworn to no system, rejects nothing not investigated by himself, nor takes the word of another, and has the courage to think for himself and to treat accordingly."

Hahnemann's therapeutic law was in effect a scientific rebellion against blind conformation with the 18th century medical practice; blood letting, the inhuman treatment of the insane, nostrums and quackery, bigotry on the part of his patients and conspiracy on the part of his professional colleagues. In their turn, Hahnemann's enemies lashed back with concentrated fury against this doctor from Saxony. They tried their level best to banish and condemn him for overt rebellion against tradition. But progress could not be denied. Scholastic dogmatism was attacked in its very essence. The need for new concepts and classifications was being affirmed in all branches of political and intellectual life to replace those that courageous men felt should be changed or destroyed. The architects of new doctrines in all endeavours of life were those systematists who strove to bring about most

important problems in accordance with the results of such fundamental thinking. Carbon dioxide was discovered by Black, hydrogen by Cavendish, nitrogen by Rutherford, the formulation of homoeopathic law by Hahnemann. There were other contemporary theories in medical thinking during Hahnemann's time. Those theories, however, enjoyed but passing interest and soon were proven fallacious in their concepts. To mention but a few: there was the anenism of Stahl, the system of stimulants and sedatives of Brown, the irritants of Broussais and the vitalism of Borden. None of these theories could pass through the crucible of experimentation and actual observation. Hahnemann's system of medicine stood the gale of criticism and remains intact through the years and up to the present time through periods of rapidly changing therapeutic approaches. Some call these rapid changes progress rather than groupings. The criticism, even by some 'homoeopaths' that Hahnemann's law of similars or his concept of applied therapeutics has not advanced or progressed is definitely ill advised. Many homoeopaths of today, blinded by authorities and carried away by the ephemeral dreams in newly discovered 'wonder' drugs crave progress in their chosen tenet. It escapes this writer what kind of progress is wanted. Undoubtedly these men are not fully conscious of the fact that no change may be expected in fundamental truth. We may grow in knowledge of its meaning and in the mode of its application, but its great principle shall remain the same. The grand character of truth is its capability to endure the universal experience, and come out fundamentally unchanged through every form of discussion. The greatest homage we can pay to truth is to use it. Truth is constant and is never variable.

It is true that when Hahnemann advanced his law of similars he formulated a war cry that shook the foundation of medical practice prevalent at the time. Even today Homoeopathy seems to bother some prejudiced men. That such a law should still contribute to medical thinking reflects favorably to its founder. The validity to that tenet has often been assailed but never refuted. Hahnemann's postulate, having endured through over two hundred years of application, stamps it as one of the constants in the annals of medical thinking.

Hahnemann, indeed, was a brilliant product of the age of reason in the history of our civilization.

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