

WHAT IS HOMŒOPATHY ?

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What is Homœopathy? This may seem an unusual question at this time but the fact is that, notwithstanding a century and more of recognition and acceptance as a school or system of medical practice, Homœopathy has never been authoritatively defined.

The nearest approach to this is the definition of a homœopathic physician, adopted by the American Institute of Homœopathy many years ago. Innumerable definitions have been proposed and homœopathic journals keep asking, from time to time, for new ones but all of them are more or less inadequate and none, including those of our dictionaries, has received official adoption or even general acceptance.

The reason for this is, probably, that they are all essentially definitions of the law of similars. The word Homœopathy could indeed be narrowly and technically limited to the application of this law but, as a school or system of medicine, Homœopathy is much more than this. Certainly this was the concept held by the founders of the early homœopathic medical colleges when they were free to establish their own curricula without dictation from any state or medical society. This was the concept of those homœopaths who organized the American Institute of Homœopathy in 1844 and limited its membership to physicians holding the degree of doctor of medicine, when this degree was not even required of practitioners and the only

AUTHOR'S NOTE—Recently the *Journal* published a series of excellent articles on the *Organon*. However, in his zeal for the interpretation and application of the law of similars, the author, like most of those writing on the same subject, paid inadequate attention to the opening articles of the *Organon*. These Hahnemann devoted to a statement of some underlying principles of the practice of medicine, as a sort of foundation for his thesis on the law of similars.

Because of the neglect of this important part of the *Organon*, I have long intended to prepare a paper on this subject but have not until now gotten around to doing so.

colleges which were granting it were the so-called "allopathic" medical colleges. It was clearly the concept of Hahnemann himself when he wrote *The Organon of Medicine*. In the common understanding of the laity, the medical profession and the laws of the state, Homœopathy is a complete school or system of medicine and surgery and this fact should be recognized in any definition of it. An over-simplified but none the less a good working definition might state that Homœopathy is the practice of medicine according to the principles laid down by its founder, Samuel Hahnemann, M.D. in his work, *The Organon of Medicine*.

To refresh my memory of those principles, I have restudied the *Organon*, using the last or sixth edition. This edition was revised by Hahnemann in 1842, one year before his death in 1843, but the manuscript was lost and not translated and published in English until 1921. However, it differs from the fifth edition of 1833, only in some interpretation and application of the law of similars. The statement of the general principles with which the work begins remains unchanged. Since these have been so largely overlooked in the zeal for the study of the law of similars, it is the purpose of this paper to give them the recognition that they deserve.

This study has renewed my appreciation of Hahnemann: his marvelous mind, his wide erudition, his fantastic memory, his thorough and accurate observation, his keen insight and logical reasoning, and his rare ability to reach correct conclusions, without the advantage of modern laboratories and instruments of experimentation and diagnosis, which not until a century later could be confirmed with scientific precision. Every student of medicine would do well to study this *Organon* with an open mind; but to get the most out of it, one should approach it with an appreciation of the following facts:

1. This is really an ancient text, the first edition being dated 1810, and the last one a hundred and sixteen years ago. Hence the language and style and medical concepts in general are those of over a century ago. Moreover, Hahnemann was a German and he possessed his nationality's propensity for long and involved sentences.

2. Hahnemann lived in a day when the best medical

knowledge was crude ; general science was in its infancy and medical science was nil ; and treatment was empirical and highly speculative. All he had to work with were his powers of observation and reasoning.

3. The treatment of his day was exceedingly crude and irrational, according to our standards, and Hahnemann was among the first to recognize this and denounce it. But his references to it in the *Organon* are meaningless to present day physicians because every thing he denounced, and very largely because he did so, has been abandoned, and so completely that even the terms are forgotten. The young physician of today probably understands that there was a bygone treatment of bleeding, and he may have a vague idea of such things as cupping, leeches, and blisters, but how many of them know what was meant by an issue, a seton, or a miasm?

4. It is very unfortunate that Hahnemann did not simply state his thesis in clear and simple terms supported by records of his experiments, observations, and case histories and let it rest upon its merits. Actually, that is just what he did in the beginning presenting it to the medical profession through the best medical journals of his time. But, alas, the scientific approach to new ideas had not then been developed, and he was judged by standards of tradition and emotion. Not only was his theory rejected, untried, but he, himself, was ridiculed and persecuted. One of less courage of his convictions would have just quit, but Hahnemann carried on indefatigably, albeit with increasing bitterness, and every paragraph bristles with defensive animosity.

Hahnemann was undoubtedly acquainted with Sir Francis Bacon's *New Organon* (*Organum Novum*), the work with which he revolutionized the study of philosophy by introducing inductive reasoning into it. Hahnemann tried to do the same thing for medicine and his choice of the title, *Organon of Medicine*, was hardly a coincidence. But the medical profession was not then ready for it. Unfortunately, for inductive reasoning from careful observation was the forerunner of modern science with which it is still blending. Consequently it is not surprising that Hahnemann, before presenting his discovery of a law of

cure (the Law of Similars), devoted the opening articles of the *Organon* to a statement of definitions and general principles, as a sort of foundation for it. These are so logical and axiomatic that they would grace a present day text book on internal medicine.

Article 1 states that the physician's high and only mission is to restore the sick to health and a footnote warns him against becoming bogged down in a quagmire of theoretical considerations with insufficient foundation for their support.

Article 2 is the excellent definition of a cure as a "rapid, gentle, and permanent restoration of the health, or removal and annihilation of the disease in its whole extent, in the shortest, most reliable, and most harmless way, on easily comprehensible principles."

Article 3 states that to be "a true practitioner of the healing art," the physician must perceive clearly what is to be cured in disease, what is curative in medicine, and how to apply the one to the other, and not in a general way but specifically, for each individual case of illness and each individual medicine, as well as its dose and method of administration. He should also know the obstacles to recovery in each case and how to remove them. Moreover (*Article 4*) he should know the things that derange health and cause disease and how to remove them from persons in health.

Indeed (*Article 5*) he should know the particulars of the most probable exciting cause in acute diseases and the most significant points in the whole history of chronic diseases in his efforts to discover the fundamental cause of these. This article concludes with these words:

In these investigations, the ascertainable physical constitution of the patient, (especially when the disease is chronic), his moral and intellectual character, his occupation, mode of living and habits, his social and domestic relations, his age, sexual function, etc., are to be taken into consideration.

Consider what these articles require of the physician in modern terms. To know what is to be cured in disease requires diagnosis; *not merely by supplying name and classification but*

by understanding what tissues and functions are abnormal, and how and why and to what extent. (Italics—J. K.). This in turn demands an understanding of tissue and of function in health (anatomy and physiology) and in disease (pathology). It also requires an understanding of prognosis, the normal course of the different diseases—whether they are self limited or even reversible. It calls for a knowledge of etiology (which is obviously a much larger subject now than it was in Hahnemann's time); nursing; dietetics; and general hygiene, and even preventive medicine. Hahnemann's instructions regarding the minute details in taking the patient's history, even to the mental and emotional ones, is prophetic of our present day interest in psychosomatic medicine.

In *Article 6*, Hahnemann declares that disease is not a physical entity to be expelled from the body but a derangement of health to be restored to normal. For all practical purposes, disease consists in the sum total of all of its manifestations (for which he used the word symptoms), and treatment, therefore, should be directed against all of them. As he writes, "a single one of the symptoms present is no more the disease itself than a single foot is the man himself", and throughout the work is repeated his insistence on the consideration of the "totality of the symptoms." In *Article 8* he says "it is not conceivable that, after the removal of all the symptoms of the disease, and of the entire collection of the perceptible phenomena, should or could remain anything besides health."

Therefore, in his words (*Article 6*) the physician

... takes note of nothing in every individual disease, except the changes in health of the body or mind which can be perceived externally by the senses; that is to say, he notices only the deviations from the former healthy state of the now diseased individual which are felt by the patient himself, remarked by those around him, and observed by the physician.

Because Hahnemann made no reference to any aids to one's senses, some of his followers have taken this to mean that he disapproved of them. The real reason is that there were none in his time to be used. The microscope had indeed been in-

vented but its possible use in medicine seems not to have occurred to anyone. Also Laennec had invented the stethoscope during the latter part of Hahnemann's life and he is known to have used it in his practice. Undoubtedly, if he were living today, he would also be using the other modern aids to the senses: the x-ray, electrocardiogram, laboratory tests, etc.

What the patient himself complains of are obviously subjective symptoms; those noticed by others are similar; but those things noticed by the physician in his examination, such things as changes in appearance, color and temperature of the body; moisture of the skin; character of the pulse; appearance of the throat and tongue; involvement of one side or the other and of various organs or tissues; abnormal swellings; abnormal discharges or abnormal changes in normal discharges; etc., etc., these things are definitely objective symptoms; gross pathology, if you please. But that they are to be noted, not merely for diagnosis but also as indications for treatment, is shown by the fact that, when they have been produced by provings, they have been recorded in the materia medica as indications for the similar remedy, and the *Organon* expects them to be considered as part of the "totality of the symptoms" against which treatment is to be directed and covered as far as possible by the similar remedy.

Hahnemann did, indeed, recognize that some symptoms are of more value than others as indications for the similar remedy and therefore should be given precedence when all of the symptoms cannot be covered by a single remedy. Even materialistic modern medicine is beginning to agree with Hahnemann in recognizing the very high evaluation that should be placed on non-material emotional symptoms, but this does not mean at all that pathological symptoms should be ignored. They are most assuredly a part of the "totality of the symptoms."

Article 7 is particularly illuminating. It begins with the following words: "Now, as in a disease from which no manifest exciting cause has to be removed" and then Hahnemann goes on to present his thesis on the curative action of medicines in accordance with the Law of Similars. It is the study

of this law and its application that has been so thoroughly studied as not to require mention in this paper.

Following the opening words of *Article 7*, above quoted, is a reference to a footnote which starts out as follows: "It is not necessary to say that every intelligent physician would first remove this [the exciting cause] where it exists; the indisposition thereupon generally ceases spontaneously." Curiously enough, this is substantially the philosophy of the dominant school of medicine today, so far has it progressed from the practices which Hahnemann so vigorously condemned. Actually, if this statement were to be followed literally, there would be little field left for treatment with the homœopathic medicine because the causes of so many diseases are now known and removable. Nevertheless, it is the universal experience of homœopathic physicians that, even when the cause has been found and removed, as well as in diseases of self-limited nature, patients recover more quickly, more comfortably, and with fewer complications under homœopathic treatment than without it. Incidentally, this is full Hahnemannian authority for the use of antiseptics and antibiotics for the removal of infectious causes of disease, not routinely or indiscriminately but with considered judgment of all the factors involved in each individual case.

This footnote goes on to list, as examples, a variety of causes and the means of their removal. Recognizing the field of surgery, it lists numerous surgical procedures from the obviously necessary one of opening the imperforate anus of the new born infant to the debatable one of crushing the vesical calculus. Now in Hahnemann's time surgery was crude. With inadequate anesthesia and, especially, no conception of sepsis or antisepsis, crushing a vesical calculus was not only a very painful procedure but a very dangerous one as well. And yet, Hahnemann, the master prescriber, says that "every intelligent physician" will "crush the vesical calculus,"¹ instead of trying to dissolve it by internal medicine. Would he not also have advised the surgical removal of the renal and biliary calculi, if he could have had the technique of modern surgery at his command?

Mention might be made here of two other items in the *Organon*. The first one is that of Jenner's methods of vaccinating against small pox. I have never been able to understand the violent opposition to this procedure held by so many homœopaths in view of Hahnemann's endorsement of it. In *Article 46*, Hahnemann approves this vaccination as homœopathic in principle, and in both this article and in *Article 56*, he goes out of his way to give it extravagant praise.²

The other item is the use of drugs for their physiological action. In *Article 67* he not only recognizes the value of such medication but actually advises it in desperate cases where the patient might die before a homœopathic remedy would have time to act. He denounces vigorously (and rightly) the indiscriminate use of such treatment, not, apparently, because of any interference with the action of the homœopathic remedy (which he does not even mention) but for a much more valid reason which he does give.

He is afraid that superficial, not to say lazy physicians, observing the ease and speed with which unpleasant as well as dangerous symptoms can be suppressed, will claim emergency when none exists, in justification of such procedure, and with both physician and patient lulled into a false sense of security thereby, will make no effort to prescribe the curative, homœopathic remedy, with disaster to the patient and discredit to the new system of homœopathic practice.

That this is not an idle fear is illustrated by a case that came to my personal attention not long ago. An indigent patient applied to the free dispensary of one of our outstanding hospitals for the treatment of his cough. After a very few questions and no examination, he was given a sedative cough syrup. This did not cure his cough but it did relieve it enough for him to return week after week for more of it. It was almost a year before someone took enough interest in this man to examine him and thus learn that the cause of the cough was tuberculosis, by then in an advanced stage. This is what Hahnemann was afraid of.

All this shows that Hahnemann's concept of the practice of medicine was much more than the administration of reme-

dies in accordance with the Law or Similars. It justifies the official definition of the American Institute of Homœopathy: "A homœopathic physician is one who adds to his knowledge of medicine, a special knowledge of homœopathic therapeutics and observes the law of similia. All that pertains to the great field of medical learning is his by inheritance, tradition and right."

It leads me to suggest a parallel definition: "Homœopathy is the practice of medicine, augmented by the use of drugs for their curative value in conditions similar to those which they will produce, in accordance with the law of similars."

This definition is not only accurate but comprehensive and easily understood. It is inviting of investigation in this day of the scientific approach to new ideas by physicians of other schools who are disturbed by the deficiencies of their own schools in curative medicine, and who are increasingly interested in Homœopathy.

In my humble opinion, the future of our school depends not upon *trying to continue as a separate system of medicine—(Italics—J. K.)* but upon our ability to sell to the dominant school the idea that *curative* medicine rests upon the Law of Similars, and to persuade the physicians of that school to accept this field of curative medicine, not as a substitute for their knowledge of mechanical, surgical, palliative and preventive medicine, but as a valuable supplement to them.³

—*The Jounl. of Am. Inst. of Homœo., Jan.-Feb. 58.*

EDITORIAL COMMENT

¹ If we read these short excerpts with careful reference to the full context of the Article 7, it becomes obviously clear that, this 'Crushing of Vesical calculus' is permitted only when we fail to find a remedy covering the totality of symptoms of the case (including the calculous diathesis), governed by the characteristics of the individual. It is a common affair that ordinary homœopaths of our calibre, have too often the satisfaction of observing calculi of fair size, anywhere in the biliary or Urinary passages being completely dissolved by a few doses of the similimum. It might be a fact that in the time of Hahnemann these cases might require mechanical interference more frequently than ours, due to comparative paucity of proved medicines. (J.K.)

² Hahnemann practised in a period when proper assessment of the real efficacy of Jenner's Vaccine, as well as of its dangerous ill effects—was not even thought of. If Hahnemann had survived till the statistical

(Contd. on page 416)