

## SAMUEL HAHNEMANN

DR. CHARLES C. BOERICKE, M.D., CALIFORNIA

While the 18th Century was progenitor to many great minds, today we have come to this Nation's Capital to pay homage especially to the genius of Samuel Hahnemann. The wreathing of his monument in this beautiful city is a fitting action, for history records that Samuel Hahnemann was one of the really great men of that Century, a scholar of scholars, a philologist of repute, a philosopher whom neither adversity nor honor had power to change, and above all a physician of the highest standing whom other physicians both honored and feared.

Samuel Hahnemann was born on the morning of April 11, 1755 at Meissen, Saxony, about fourteen miles from Dresden, Germany. The date of his birth usually has been given as the 10th instead of the 11th of April; however the town register of Meissen states the 11th; moreover, at the centennial celebration at Meissen in 1855 the 11th was the day officially decided upon.

Young Hahnemann's father was a porcelain painter in one of the factories at Meissen which, then as today, is justly famous for its exquisite pottery. The baby was the first-born of what proved to be a family of ten. Born amidst circumstances where the mere struggle for existence demanded every energy, he early acquired those habits of industry, thoroughness and perseverance that laid so broad a foundation for his future mental growth. It is the disguised blessing of low living and high thinking that is ever formative of a character destined for great things; so Hahnemann's life began with struggle and it was almost an incessant battle throughout, at first with poverty and then with prejudice.

Samuel spent several years in the public schools of Meissen, but the time came when the boy was forced to leave school because his father was no longer financially able to keep him there. However, the early spark of genius had already been detected by his teacher, and so he interceded; he

pleaded with the father to allow the boy to continue his education without fees! The father's pride would not permit this, however, and it was not until the teacher suggested that the young scholar could earn his tuition by teaching other boys that the father consented. So, in his 12th year, Hahnemann was entrusted to teach other boys the rudiments of the Greek language. Very early in life Hahnemann showed his perseverance; for notwithstanding every obstacle and difficulty, he thus obtained a classical education in spite of his father's inability to provide it.

At the age of twenty the young scholar went to the University of Leipsic where he supported himself by giving instruction in German and French, and also by translating English books; two years later he went to Vienna in order to study medicine clinically. As a medical student young Hahnemann gave lessons and earned his sustenance by translating far into the night. Finally, at the age of twenty-four, he obtained his medical degree from the University of Erlangen in 1779. The new doctor now practiced his profession in different towns, moving to Dresden in 1784 where for one year he had charge of the City's only hospital. In 1789 he located in Leipsic; then in 1792 he was put in charge of the insane asylum at Georghthal. There he discarded the use of physical force, and employed the principal of moral restraint in the treatment of the insane.

During this time the physician did some original research in chemistry, and spent much time translating works in the fields of chemistry, agriculture, medicine and literature from English, French, Italian and Latin into German.

At this period, Hahnemann withdrew himself from active practice for he was disgusted with the uncertainties of medicine as practiced at that time. Preventive medicine was not known! He rebelled at the common practice. In those days, for example, the fever patient was kept in a closed room on a feather bed with few changes of linen, and without the refreshing draft of a glass of cool water. Disease, regarded as some mysterious entity, some morbid matter in the blood, stomach or bowels, was to be removed by copious bleedings, vigorous

emetics, and/or cathartics. Polypharmaceutical prescriptions of nauseating drugs were compounded in prescriptions, and administered without any knowledge of their single or combined capabilities.

Hahnemann's distrust of such medical practice grew with his experience. His thoughts and reading were ever bent on a search for a cure or cures for the diseases of the body. Being of a religious nature, he felt that our gracious God in His wisdom had something more positive to offer ailing mankind, if only it could be discovered.

For forty years it was Hahnemann's custom to sit up the whole of one night out of four working, studying, translating, writing. It was while translating the *Treatise on Materia Medica* of the celebrated English physician, Cullen, that he fell into such indignation at the confused attempts of the author to explain the way in which cinchona bark suppressed ague that he determined to make a trial of the medicine on his own body. How great was his astonishment when he found himself suffering from a paroxysm of ague. There flashed through his alert mind the query, "Does cinchona bark, which cures ague, produce ague also?" In the words of Dr. John Clark cinchona bark was to Hahnemann what the falling apple was to Newton, and the swinging lamp to Galileo. From the inception of this thought there followed six years of constant and untiring study, observation, experiment, and reflection. Then he published in Hufeland's *Journal*, the leading medical periodical of the day, his first essay on the subject. He entitled it "On a New Principle for Ascertaining the Curative Properties of Drugs." That historic essay, Ladies and Gentlemen, marks the birth of Homœopathy! With the enunciation of this principle Hahnemann became the first homœopathist, and the promulgator of the great natural law for all true healing, *Similia Similibus Curentur*, "Let likes be cured by likes." It should be stressed that this therapeutic principle was not original with Hahnemann. Indeed, it was known to Hippocrates 2,500 years before, but it remained for Hahnemann to rediscover and to rededicate this immutable law of

nature that had lain dormant and unrecognized since the days of the ancient Greeks.

At the time when his essay was published Hahnemann was a physician of the highest reputation. At forty-two, he was in the very prime of life, ready to face the storm that was gathering. He possessed the genius, the knowledge, the patience, the faith, the fortitude, and the physical stamina that was needed to withstand all the powers that were to be arrayed against him. His contentions were so radical, and so revolutionary, that they jeopardized the whole institution of medicine as it then existed. It was a threat to the apothecary shop, since the small doses of single remedies rendered their services very limited. That threat, together with Hahnemann's merciless onslaught on the universal practice of bleeding, was the real secret of the opposition to Hahnemann and his method. When, in 1810, the *Organon*, containing a systematic arrangement of the doctrines of his new school, was published, the hopelessness of the acceptance of his radical teachings became more apparent than ever. The storm did not distract Hahnemann from his work, however, for all this time he continued to test the action of drugs, make provings, and extend his system on the solid ground of his observed results.

For eight years Hahnemann taught medicine in the University of Leipsic, basing his lecture on his *Organon*, and he gathered about him a group of enthusiastic disciples who co-operated with him in his drug provings and spread his theory.

Moreover, publication of the *Materia Medica Pura* in six volumes occurred during his life in Leipsic and extended his large practice. But, through envy, malice and persecution, his rivals sought the opportunity of attacking him. This they did through the druggists. The Apothecary Guild denounced him. "Is he not a heretic upsetting the existing order of things and interfering with our rights and privileges?" The pharmacists eventually invoked a law on their behalf so that Hahnemann was forced to move from town to town to escape this ban. Finally, he was invited by the Duke of Anhalt-Coethen to become the Duke's private physician. Here Hahnemann

was granted freedom to practice and to dispense his own medicines.

This experience marked the beginning of Hahnemann's success. His principle began to be recognized and his methods were being tried successfully by others. He acquired followers among other physicians and Homœopathy began to spread.

At the age of 80, five years after the death of his first wife, Hahnemann remarried an influential young French woman and moved to Paris. This move proved to be a climax to an already full life. There the people flocked to see him. His fame spread and honors were thrust upon him. The newspapers took up his support, now that he was great and popular and patronized by the nobility. Hahnemann practiced actively and successfully in Paris for eight years when he finally succumbed to an old chronic bronchial infection on July 2, 1843 at the age of 88. He had lived to be honored, to grow wealthy, and to see his labors crowned with success and the practice of Homœopathy thoroughly established throughout the world. Hahnemann's teachings, born into the world in the dawn of the 19th Century, are still aglow with light and vitality in the middle of the 20th Century. A law of nature, eternal and immutable, sired Homœopathy and rules her destiny.

The results of Hahnemann's discovery were far reaching. In 1843, the year of his death, the British Homœopathic Society was founded, in 1943, 100 years later, it was incorporated as a Faculty of Homœopathy and Sir John Weir was elected the first president and served three years. In 1920 there was witnessed a picturesque ceremony in the House of Lords (which itself is 600 years old), when the Royal Assent was given to the passing of a bill incorporating the Faculty of Homœopathy by act of Parliament. This gave Homœopathy a unique position as no other medical body had ever been so incorporated by an act of Parliament.

A second result of Hahnemann's work was its spread to the new continent. In 1825 Dr. Hans Burch Gram sailed across the seas to bring Homœopathy to America. Of much

greater importance, however, was the arrival of Dr. Constantine Hering and his comrades, and the opening of the Allentown Academy, afterwards to become the Hahnemann College in Philadelphia. This institution quickly became the nucleus of the homœopathic school in America. From the efforts of these two men we may trace the growth of Homœopathy throughout the United States.

With the passage of time, the tenets of Homœopathy have been adequately validated. The first step came with the development, by Sir Almroth Wright and his colleagues, of vaccine therapy. It was impossible to deny the analogy between vaccines and similar remedies. Hahnemann's initial aggravation from the similar remedy followed by a period of amelioration is confirmed by modern science as negative and positive phases of drug action.

Further, in 1922 Professor August Bier, of Berlin, published a brilliant paper entitled *What Shall Be Our Attitude to Homœopathy*. In this paper he confirmed the fact that the sick individual reacts to smaller doses than does the normal individual.

Then the *Arndt-Schulz Law* came to the support of Homœopathy, and medicine became aware of the opposite effects of large and small doses. The small dose is no longer questioned, as witness the dosage of radium, vitamins, colloids, ions. Is this not a demonstration of the immense potentiality of the infinitely little?

It has taken over a century and a half for ordinary medicine to catch up with Hahnemann and to digest all that he gave us. Hahnemann taught that the physician must study not disease *per se*, but the diseased man because the diseased state varies with the constitution, the inherited tendencies, the antecedents, and the environment of the sick man in question! As Sir Willian Osler succinctly puts it, "Ask yourself not only what kind of sickness has the man, but what kind of man has the sickness?"

Let us reflect for a moment on the contribution which Hahnemann has made to human knowledge. It was Hahnemann who first experimented with drugs on the healthy, hence

the science of pharmacology dates from him. It was Hahnemann who gave us the key to unlock the medical forces in the molecule, who taught the dynamics of biochemistry in medicine, and recognized the law, *Similia Similibus, Curentur*, for what it was, one of the great discoveries of the age.

His definite instructions on how to examine the sick and to distinguish between pathologic theories and symptomatic facts as bases for treatment were entirely new in the history of medicine. Hahnemann as the embodiment of a great truth, Hahnemann the investigator, discoverer, and reformer—like Columbus, Versalius, Copernicus and Pasteur—belongs to that inspiring order of men forever enshrined in humanity's Valhalla. His creative genius was united with a critical mind of the highest order, enabling him to expose the false teachings that had become common practice in the medical world; and, like Pasteur, he freed medicine from the blind adherence to false dogma, enabling it to come under the vivifying influence of a new century just then dawning upon mankind. It was by the astute use of the inductive method of research that he was able to discard all preconceived notions and to walk with a simple faith in the light of natural truth. His method was to question nature and await her reply.

Hahnemann's teachings have been a veritable torch of light; they are so thoroughly established on experimental fact, so anticipant of modern thought, that today in the middle of the 20th Century they still glow with the radiance that has been theirs for over a century and a half. Indeed the name of Samuel Christian Friedrich Hahnemann will forever shine as a star of the first magnitude in the firmament of science.

In all verity, Dr. Hahnemann, the sense of justice of the 20th Century has substantiated your claims, and in humility we recognize the truth of the epitaph on your grave: *Non inutilis vixi*: I have not lived in vain.

—*Jourl. of the Am. Inst. of Homœopathy, Dec., '55—Jan., '56.*