

## THE BASIC MEDICAL SCIENCES

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Often it is fascinating and often it helps to look back over a stretch of history. Someone accused the present day of immediacy and thought it a sign of shallowness. Taking things as they come and when they come and letting them go by with no regrets; not aware of the past; not wondering about the future; robs our time, he thinks, of its gauge of progress. To him it seems a bit passive and lazy. There is no spur to get up and be doing.

In Stuart Close's *Lectures on Homœopathic Philosophy*, he tells us that in 1883 the German government sent Robert Koch on a mission to India to make a special study of Asiatic cholera. "He discovered and was able to demonstrate the presence, in the intestines of cholera patients, of a spiral, thread-like bacterium which readily breaks up into little curved segments like a comma, each, less than 1/10,000 of an inch in length. These microscopical living organisms multiply with great rapidity and swarm by the million in the intestines of such patients. Koch showed that they can be cultivated artificially in dilute gelatine broth and obtained in spoonfuls. He also showed that cholera can be produced in animals by administering to them a pure, concentrated culture of these germs, although it was only done with great difficulty after many experiments. He therefore held that the germs were the cause of cholera.

"Other investigators, however, for a time failed to duplicate his results and refused to accept Koch's conclusion. Pettenkofer, of Munich, who did not believe that the comma bacillus was the effective cause of cholera, to prove his contention, bravely swallowed a whole spoonful of the cultivated germs. His assistants did the same and none suffered any ill effect. This somewhat spectacular demonstration did not impress others, however, many of whom realized that it must

be necessary for the human intestine to be in a favourable or susceptible condition, an unhealthy condition, for the bacillus to thrive and multiply in it.

"A little later Metchnikoff of Paris repeated Pettenkofer's experiment. He swallowed a cultivated mass of the bacilli on three successive days and had no injurious result. Others in his laboratory did the same with the result of only a slight intestinal disturbance. But of a dozen who thus put the matter to the proof in the Pasteur Institute, *one individual* acquired an attack of the Indian cholera which very nearly caused his death. That put an end to such experiments and conclusively demonstrated that Koch's comma bacillus is really capable of producing true cholera, *when right conditions exist*.

The announcement of Koch's discovery made a furore in the medical world. Glowing hopes of cure were based upon it, soon, alas! to be disappointed. It seemed such a simple proposition in those days: 'Kill the germs and cure the disease!' At last cholera was to be 'stamped out!'

"It was very easy to kill the germs—in a test tube; but to kill them in the living organism of the cholera patient without killing the patient was quite a different proposition, as they very soon learned. In spite of all attempts to cure based upon such crude reasoning, cholera continued its ravages with undiminished mortality. Now hear what Hahnemann said more than fifty years before all this happened.

"When Asiatic Cholera invaded Europe in 1831 and began ravaging the population, it was realized that it was of the utmost importance to learn its modes of propagation and extension. Hufeland, the great leader of medical thought in Europe at that period, believed and taught that cholera was of atmospheric-telluric origin, from which there could be no protection. Against this awful error Hahnemann protested in a vigorous essay on 'The Mode of Propagation of the Asiatic Cholera,' in which he held that it was '*communicable by contagion only, and propagated from one individual to another*.' Illustrating and explaining its mode of origin and propagation he says: 'On board ships, in those confined spaces, filled with mouldy, watery vapors, the cholera miasm finds a favourable element for its

multiplication, and grows to an enormously increased brood of those *excessively minute, invisible, living creatures*, so inimical to human life, of which the contagious matter of the cholera most probably consists.' He refers again and again to 'the invisible cloud' that hovers around those who have been in contact with the disease, 'composed of probably millions of these miasmatic *animated beings*, which, at first developed on the broad marshy banks of the tepid Ganges, always search out the human being.'

"Consider this amazing statement in which Hahnemann again, by more than half a century, anticipates the conclusions and demonstrations of modern science.

"Remember, Hahnemann had no microscope. That instrument, except in its crude form as a magnifying glass, used as a sort of plaything, did not exist. His conclusion was a deduction of pure reason from observed facts, which he states at some length in his essay. Moreover, Hahnemann by an exercise of that same thinking faculty which his wise old father had so carefully trained in his childhood and youth in the old home in Meissen, also discovered and announced the true curative remedies for the disease, and that before he had ever personally seen a case."

Close goes on to develop the thesis that disease is not a thing, but only an altered state of health, a perverted vital energy. He says that disease is immaterial and invisible, that it cannot be touched, seen, handled, weighed, though by its effects and outward evidences it can be measured.

"The foundation is a condition for the house, but it is not the house nor the cause of the house. Much less is the house identical with the foundation. The bacillus is the proximate cause of cholera but it is not cholera, nor the sole cause of cholera. It is only one of several conditions necessary for the production and propagation of cholera, all of which must be considered if we are to form just conclusions about the nature of disease . . . ."

All those who write or speak out of a thorough grasp of the fundamentals bear down on the invisibility of disease and identify disease with some perversion, disorganization or dis-

order of the vital energy. Roberts is emphatic on this. Kent devotes a whole chapter to the simple question, who is the sick man and what is it about the sick man that the physician must try to cure? Kent's analogy is the government of society. Just as there is a central government to a nation which reaches out to all its precincts and keeps them in harmony and order, so is there a central government to a man keeping all his tissues and organs in harmony and order, even down to the last living cell. Kent points to the type of thinking that accepts bacilli as causes of disease, just as Close points to that type of thinking considers bacilli "the cause, but we will be able to show that disease cause is much more subtle than anything that can be shown by the microscope. We will be able to show you by a process of reasoning, step by step, the folly of hunting for disease cause by the implements of the senses."

Still pursuing the question, what is it in the sick man that is to be cured, but on another page, Kent says this: "Many physicians waste their time searching after the things that make their patients sick. The sick man will be made sick under every circumstance, whereas the healthy man could live in a lazaretto. It is not the principal business of the physician to be hunting in the rivers and the cellars and examining the food we eat for the cause of disease. It is his duty to hunt out the symptoms of the sickness until a remedy is found that covers the disorder."

... But the easy notion that disease comes from somewhere, mostly in the form of microscopic or submicroscopic living germs always poised to strike us down, is a dazzling fantasy that dies hard. Students in medical schools find their professors immersed in it and see it outside as the basis of lavish and glittering financial foundations, drawn from the pockets of the well-meaning, and dedicated to promissory research. They are instructed that by that theory of causation great diseases have already been wiped out, that it only remains to wipe out the rest of them and there will be perfect health. Generally the idea prevails that all this is ultra-modern and breathlessly up-to-date. Actually it dates back to a time long before Homœopathy and Homœopathy with its truer ring and its

more thought-demanding insight has so far made too little a dent in it. Due allowance can be made for the rosy glow of presidential rhetoric in the annual report addressed to the governing board of a university and still the evidence is there of this ancient and unproven assumption that it is in swarms of evil microbes that we must hunt for the roots of disease and we must thank large endowments in university research for their determined warfare against the swarms. For instance, this is the way it is put in the *President's Report to the Board of Overseers of Harvard University for the Academic Year 1957-1958*:

Page 2 near the bottom turns to the Division of Medical Sciences under the Faculty of Medicine and the Faculty of Arts and Sciences jointly, and takes a glance backward over the fifty years of its existence. Mentioned are the distinguished processions of teachers and research workers from the doors at Harvard to all corners of the earth. "Abundant fruit has come from their efforts, for teachers and students in the Division have made notable contributions to knowledge of the bacteria and viruses which attack human beings, to the understanding of the body's intricate mechanism, and to the comprehension and use of hormones and elements of the blood for healing the sick. And basic studies conducted in this division opened the way to the development of polio vaccine and a measles vaccine . . . ."

The Report gives this kind of endeavour a name. It is called work in "the basic medical sciences."

So much of this is modern and employs such shining intricacies of apparatus in high rooms, leading off of monumental corridors that it takes the young into a new world of marvels and initiates them into an exclusive fraternity almost too remote to be touched by the unsainted. Shut off from contact with sources at any variance with their curriculum, they point their efforts toward the goals set before them and uncritically accept the body and its components as their field of inquiry. This is the temptation-against which youth has to struggle if there is any idea of looking above it, and almost universally the temptation overpowers the idea.

The task of cracking through the shell and bursting into the largest world has to be undertaken, as the hatching chick must undertake it, unaided. Pitifully few try, much less succeed. Though dedicated to Homœopathy from the beginning, one who keeps that dedication in his heart to the end steps forward to tell the older homœopaths that it is now time to look at modern drugs and modern procedures with appreciation and to give due credit where they have made brilliant records in contagious maladies like small-pox, diphtheria and pneumonia, and where they are at the threshold of another conquest, poliomyelitis. Homœopathy is sometimes accused by its own younger friends of carrying an antiquated theory too far and remaining blind to what goes on around it. New wisdom dictates recognition of modern triumphs, they argue, and even the resort to wonder drugs in a pinch where they will save a life.

Understandable and even appealing as this plea is, it seems to take perhaps too lightly the modern spread of poliomyelitis from childhood to take in middle age, the contemporary shift of cancer from past middle age to take in childhood, the modern appearance of cerebral palsy, muscular dystrophy, multiple sclerosis to take up so much of the horizon, the mounting incidence of heart disease, mental insanity and nervous imbalance, to give only some examples. Modern trends seem to be converting lighter maladies such as the contagions into chronic states that are harder to cure, to the extent that hospitals cannot be built fast enough and the cost of medical care zooms.

One thing that Homœopathy has set as its goal from the beginning is that each individual case shall be so administered that the patient is thereafter better able to remain well by reason of the treatment. This is what Hahnemann meant when he said at the very outset: "The highest ideal of cure is rapid, gentle and permanent restoration of 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."

Such an aim as that in the practice of medicine, pursued zealously, can have no less effect than the steady improvement

or enhancement of the ability to stay well, and could not drive light maladies into deep, serious, chronic maladies or set up an insatiable need for hospitals.

The story that Close tells of Koch with his microscope and of Hahnemann with his brain and no microscope puts thought ahead of apparatus. It was not thundrous apparatus in our own day that brought about that frightening release of sub-atomic energy, but rather the unequipped thinking of an Einstein.

The older homœopaths have had time and experience to show them when the origin of disease is and what it is that is to be cured and what forces are available to produce cure. The older homœopaths have seen true remedies under test enough to appreciate their possibilities and to compare them with the weapons for merely killing germs. The older homœopaths have had chances to see the faster action of the dynamic remedy in a desperate pinch and to learn the lesson of science that the physician's job is to use the dynamic. For his equipment, the older homœopath has gained a better knowledge of the remedies and a better talent for choosing the right one under pressure. The younger homœopath, instead of panicking in a pinch and forsaking the remedy for an antibiotic, would do better to take up another hole in his belt and go for the right remedy in the emergency—by himself if he must, but with an older helping hand if possible.

—*The Layman Speaks, March, '59.*

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