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**SOME OF MY FAILURES AND
NON-SUCCESSSES**

By J. ELLIS BARKER

When we read articles in the medical journals, both orthodox and homœopathic, we find nothing but successes, and we imagine that the writers must be supermen, or at least super-doctors. Unfortunately this is not the case. With humility we all must confess not only that we have often failed to cure, but that we have failed when we ought to have succeeded. Some years ago I had tea with the late Sir Arbuthnot Lane, the celebrated surgeon. There were eight or nine of the most famous doctors and surgeons in the room and the talk drifted towards failures. One said: "I killed a poor devil with such and such a disease by making the following stupid mistakes," and he described his mistake. Another told us: "I had quite a simple straight-forward operation to do but I made a blunder which ought not to have happened to a beginner in surgery. It was quite unaccountable to me, but the poor devil lost his life." Confession is good for the soul. So

they all confessed their mistakes, and they were many.

The readers of the medical journals read them for information and guidance, and the writers of the articles, not unnaturally, describe their successes of which they are proud, desiring to teach others how to cure by medicine, diet, manipulation, operation, etc. Even the most successful medical man has a considerable percentage of failures, partly because many cases are actually incurable, partly because he is not sufficiently skilled or is unlucky. One can occasionally learn as much from failures as from successes and sometimes more, especially from the failures which might have been avoided.

There are the homœopathic doctors who follow, possibly without knowing it themselves, the principle "I want to cure brilliantly with a few high potencies and the fewest doses or not at all". Those who act in this manner frequently fail utterly. We cannot cure every case in the super-Hahnemannian manner with a few doses in infinitely small quantity given at long intervals. When you have failed curing your patient who has strong *Sulphur* symptoms with *Sulphur* in the 10,000th potency, a single dose, don't give up but try again, swallowing your pride and Hahnemann's directions by humbly giving him *Sulphur* 3x or 6x. It is a wicked thing to dismiss a patient uncured, when one might have cured him. The psychic injury is occasionally very serious. The man may say: "The orthodox doctors have failed completely. My friend advised me to try a homœopath. He has done me

no good. I dont want to go on any longer." I would not care to be responsible for that man's despair because in my pride I had said to myself "I will cure patients either with high potencies, like a genius, like Hahnemann, or not at all." My maxim is *Salus aegroti summa lex*.

Sometimes one fails to cure because not sufficient trouble has been taken. One can successfully treat homoeopathically many cases after an interview of five minutes. This man needs *Rhus tox.*, that one *Digitalis*, another one *Nux vomica*, that woman needs *Pulsatilla*, that *Sepia* and that *Caulophyllum*. But there are cases which one cannot cure with a first sight snap prescription, and if that is the case the busy practitioner who has a room full of people waiting for him, while his wife is impatiently waiting for him with luncheon, must not rely on a snap shot prescription but must ask the patient to come again and he must study for an hour or more his repertories and materia medica, and in case of need must ask a colleague to advise him. The good practitioner will hardly ever give up a patient, unless an emergency compels him to send the patient to a surgeon.

The homoeopathic materia medica is so vast that even the most experienced practitioner may forget the existence of a vitally important drug. I had a case of cancer of the oesophagus, the swallowing tube, in a patient of 78. He could no longer swallow food and drink, but he brought up with the greatest difficulty enormous masses, up to a washbasin full, of ropy phlegm.

I had tried in vain *Hyoscyamus* and a number of drugs which seemed indicated for the closing of the tube and I was in despair for I live for my patients. During a sleepless night, while thinking about that poor sufferer, I suddenly remembered that about 70 years ago I had seen an old fashioned book on animals with old fashioned woodcuts, and among them there had been an illustration of a dog suffering from hydrophobia. The dog looked ill and mad, had a staring coat, a badly arched back and yards of ropy phlegm lay on the ground. Next morning I sent him some *Hydrophobinum* 30. It cured him. He lived five years and died eventually of influenza.

I had a cancer case some years ago which began in the throat and which steadily extended downward to chest, stomach, abdomen. I treated him for a long time in the best way I knew, studying the repertories and the materia medica without any appreciable benefit. At last it occurred to me that I had not tried *Natrum cacodylate* which was little used but which the late Dr. George Burford had recommended to me years ago in desperate cases. I had unfortunately forgotten the existence of that drug and I reproached myself bitterly for my carelessness. At any rate that medicine took hold of that desperate case which promptly improved very greatly.

A very promising case often becomes a disastrous failure if the patient progresses too quickly. A Mrs. L., aged about 70, was desperately ill with Hodgkin's disease, a terrible disorder. I would rather tackle ten cancer cases than one of Hodgkin's disease. Her

doctor had given her up. She was obviously dying. Mrs. L. had always led a life of the greatest self-indulgence. She had always been afraid of the fresh air. When she sat down to dinner her servants placed a large screen around her. She was terrified of the slightest draught. I took away the doctor's Arsenic, put her on a strengthening vegetarian diet and gave her some homœopathic medicines. She improved miraculously, her hearing and sight returned, she got out of bed and in the joy of her newly-found strength insisted on sitting on a balcony on an icy windswept day, disregarding the entreaties of her nurse. She got pneumonia and was dead in three days. Too rapid a recovery makes the patient reckless. Many a patient, doing remarkably well, has cut short his treatment and has cut off his life. So one must warn patients very strongly against ceasing treatment prematurely.

One must select not only the right remedy but also right potency. Some years ago a woman came to me with progressive paralysis of the legs. I took her case very conscientiously and studied the materia medica thoroughly and came to the conclusion that *Plumbum*, lead, was the indicated remedy. I gave her *Plumbum* 3 and had not the slightest success. Then I tried *Plumbum* 6 and again failed completely. *Plumbum* 9 and 12 did not touch her either, nor did 15 and 20. Undismayed I tried *Plumbum* 30 and she could walk! Then I tried various potencies above 30 which proved useless. I went down once more to 30 with excellent results. Then I tried once more potencies lower than 30 and failed completely. The 30th potency was the

only potency that benefited her. Inexplicable, perhaps, but true.

While writing this article I received a letter from a young doctor in Bombay who had been suffering from varicocele and from hydrocele of the testicles for nine months. He had been treated in vain by a homoeopathic doctor during all that time with various medicines, all given in the 200th potency. That doctor, in his pride, obstinacy or shortsightedness was determined to produce a "brilliant cure" à la Hahnemann or no cure at all, and he did the latter. If he had modestly tried to cure with a few low potencies, he would probably have succeeded. There are patients who do not react to the high and very high potencies. The safest way is to start low as I did in the paralysis case with *Plumbum* and gradually go higher. One must never give up prematurely if the selected drug or potency fails at the beginning of treatment but must try and try and try until one succeeds.

Besides one must always remember that symptom covering in the most approved manner is not everything. If the patient's symptom compellingly points to *Arsenic*, *Arsenic* should, of course, be given. But if he has only one motion a week, is terribly toxic, lives on the wrong diet which is impossible for his illness, or if he lives and works in foul air, takes no exercise and has a tubercular inheritance, then the *simillimum* alone may prove extremely disappointing and the regulation of the diet and of the bowels, of exercise etc., may prove infinitely more potent than the most masterly prescription of *Arsenic*. Hahnemann was

probably the most eminent common sense specialist of his time. He insisted on an appropriate diet, fresh air, exercises of every kind and he insisted upon the common sense regulation of the life of his patients before he prescribed for them medicinally.

Years ago I read about a child whom Hahnemann treated in Paris. The little one was supposed to be incurable and to be dying. So Hahnemann was sent for. The little patient was lying thickly clothed in a stuffy four-poster bed with the curtains tightly drawn, the room was overheated and unwholesome, the patient feverish. With indignation Hahnemann tore away the bed curtains, bedded the child coolly, opened the windows, prescribed a light diet and then went away bringing his medicine only hours and hours later, but he saved the child, and it is more than doubtful to me whether the simillimum alone would have done any good, while, possibly common sense regulating alone might have been sufficient to save that flickering life.

—Heal Thyself, September, 1946.

WHAT POTENCY?

By H. FERGIE WOODS, M.D. (Brux.), M.R.C.S.

The question, which potency to prescribe in any particular case, is one that will probably never be scientifically settled except through the use of an instrument of precision, such as the Emanometer.