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A D D R E S S

ON THE

PAST AND PRESENT POSITION OF HOMŒOPATHY

AND THE

DUTIES OF ITS PRACTITIONERS.

DELIVERED AT

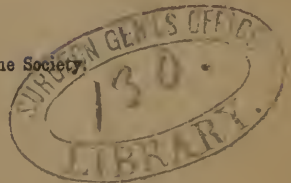
THE INAUGURATION OF

THE HOMŒOPATHIC MEDICAL SOCIETY OF THE STATE OF NEW-YORK,

Held in Albany, Feb. 28, 1861,

By Wm. H. Watson, M.D.

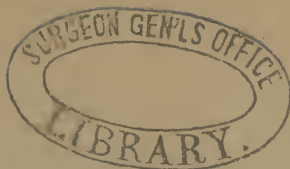
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A D D R E S S .

The Past and Present Position of Homœopathy, and the Duties of its Practitioners.

GENTLEMEN OF THE HOMŒOPATHIC MEDICAL SOCIETY OF THE STATE OF NEW-YORK:—Invited by the partiality of my colleagues to address you at the Inauguration of the Homœopathic Medical Society of the State of New-York, it has seemed to me not an inappropriate occasion for directing your attention to the present position of our profession, as contrasted with its past history, and for making a few suggestions in regard to the duties of its practitioners.

The period allotted for the life of man has not yet passed away, since Samuel Hahnemann, the founder of our school, first promulgated his discovery of the great law of cure.

After an eight years' practice, pursued, (as he writes in a letter to his friend, the celebrated Hufeland) with conscientious attention, Hahnemann had so learned the delusive nature of the ordinary methods of treatment, as to be induced to relinquish his professional pursuits.

For several years he now devoted himself to literary labors and to the study of chemistry,—publishing several valuable articles upon the latter science, of which the most celebrated, a treatise upon poisoning by Arsenic, is quoted as authority, even at the present day, by Prof. Christison, and other writers upon toxicology.

In the year 1790, while engaged in translating Cullen's "Materia Medica," to his great surprize, he discovered, that Peruvian Bark was capable of exciting upon a healthy subject

symptoms similar to those of fever and ague—a disease for the cure of which it had long been deemed a specific.

A new light, like that which flooded the mind of Newton as he gazed upon the falling apple, or quickened the intellect of Galileo, as he beheld the swinging lamp at Pisa, now dawned upon the brain of Hahnemann. With the true spirit of inductive philosophy, he set himself resolutely at work—examining the records of ancient medical writers, to ascertain whether other examples might not be found of remedies which had cured symptoms similar to those which they were capable of producing. He soon found, that the case of Peruvian bark was not a peculiar one, and that the archives of medical history furnished the apparently singular disclosure of many cures, accomplished by drugs capable of producing symptoms similar to those which had been cured, and administered by physicians who had never dreamed of any such rule of guidance, but yet strictly in accordance with the homœopathic principle.

Hahnemann soon announced his great discovery to the world in his “Essay on a New Principle for Ascertaining the Remedial Powers of Drugs, with a Few Glances at those hitherto Employed.”

By the commencement of the present century homœopathy was fully presented to the investigation of the medical profession. Let us for a few moments glance at its position in those early days as contrasted with its present state and influence.

The reception of homœopathy may best be seen by the treatment which Hahnemann himself received. The man who had gained the esteem of some of the first physicians of his time—who was distinguished as a linguist and a classical scholar, who was intimately conversant with the Hebrew, Greek, Latin, Arabic, Italian, French, and English, who was deeply read in the literature of the medical profession, both of his own and ancient times—the able chemist, the experienced physician, was at once charged with the opprobrious epithet of “*illiterate quack*.” Medical men took but little notice of the hundreds of patients from every portion of Europe and America, whom his skill restored to health, but every *failure* was magnified

and distorted. "He had to endure a pamphlet, journal, and newspaper war, both from laymen and physicians, and much of it was carried on with a bitterness, sarcasm, and contempt, that would have crushed a man of less heroic mould. His person was ridiculed, his family slandered and calumniated; it was sought to cover his name with shame, and to debase him in the eyes of the world."

Finally, after the death of Prince Schwartzberg, the Austrian Field-Marshal, and one of Hahnemann's most illustrious patients, in December, 1820, hostile legislation was enacted against him; he was forbidden to dispense his own medicines, and was thus effectually banished from Leipsic. Although this city has now the honor of containing Hahnemann's statue in ever-enduring bronze, and although her magistrates and municipal dignitaries united in swelling the pomp of the inauguration of his monument in 1851, the stain of bigotry and intolerance which attaches to the town whose authorities permitted the expulsion of its greatest citizen thirty years before, can never be entirely effaced. From Saxony, his fatherland, he went to Cœthen, where he practised for fourteen years, comparatively unmolested, and thence removed to Paris.

This picture is not, however, without its cheerful shades. Notwithstanding the torrent of abuse above referred to, his practice constantly increased, the number of his medical disciples continually augmented, patients flocked to him from every part of Europe, and even from America, and when in Paris, during the last eight years of his life, although desirous of avoiding his then oppressive celebrity, and obtaining that repose which his age demanded, he was literally besieged by thousands of patients of every age and class, and his practice is said to have yielded him forty thousand dollars per annum. He was also complimented by royal grant with the full privileges of medical practice.

Both in Germany and in France he received the kindest attentions from his disciples and his friends. His birthday and the anniversary of his graduation were always celebrated, and on the 10th of August, 1829, when the fiftieth anniversary of his graduation as Doctor of Medicine was celebrated, his disciples assembled at Cœthen in great numbers, and evinced

the warmest proofs of their esteem for him. The medical faculty of Erlangen, where he had been graduated fifty years before, presented him with an honorary diploma. At this festival the first collection of money was made to establish a free dispensary or hospital at Leipsic. On this occasion also the Central Homœopathic Society was founded, with Hahnemann for its first and perpetual president.

Such was the position of homœopathy during the life of Hahnemann, as reflected by the treatment which its founder received—a man who, in the language of his biographer, “has established a school, that has gained more adherents, roused up more assailants, written more books, and exercised a more important influence on the art of medicine, than any school or sect since the days of Galen.”

Alas! Samuel Hahnemann is not the only benefactor of his profession who has suffered for the cause of scientific truth. William Harvey and Edward Jenner likewise paid the severest penalties of innovation. Harvey was persecuted until the day of his death. It is a well-known fact, that no physician who was forty years of age at the time of the promulgation of his great discovery of the circulation of the blood, ever afterwards became a convert to his doctrines, and it has even been asserted, that for many years after its announcement, medical students were compelled to swear, that they would not believe this heresy, in order to obtain their diplomas.

Even in generous England, Jenner's discovery of vaccination was opposed by nearly the whole of the medical profession, even after the general public had become fully impressed with the great importance of the protection it afforded. It was not until the king and large numbers of the nobility of England, had given him their countenance and support, that the Royal College of Physicians and the profession generally could be induced to treat Jenner, or the discovery which has immortalized his name, with even decent respect.

The treatment which Hahnemann received from his colleagues had a transforming influence upon his character. “He who was by nature modest, conciliating, and diffident, became in his later years bitter, sarcastic, intolerant, and dogmatic. His early efforts to reform medicine had been received with

shouts of derision, the bitterest taunts, and the most odious insinuations. He had been hunted from town to town, and from country to country, by the persecuting fury of his enemies. Every attempt which he made to obtain a fair hearing of his views from his professional brethren was met by torrents of abuse and showers of sarcasm. His earnest appeal to his colleagues to repeat his experiments, and let *them* decide whether he was right or wrong, were responded to by every variety of opprobrious epithet. For having revealed to the world what he believed to be an improved method of treatment, of the utmost simplicity, and the strictest rationality, he was vilified by his brethren, persecuted by corporations and governments, driven from Königsutter to Hamburg, from Hamburg to Leipsic, whence he had to fly from his enemies, and accept the hospitality of a foreign prince, who appreciated his worth, but was unable altogether to protect him from the violence of his own subjects—excited against him by the physicians, who received him with execrations and showers of stones, if he dared to venture across his threshold.

What wonder, that the milk of human kindness in Hahnemann's nature was soured by this treatment; what wonder, that from being genial, benevolent, social, and conciliating, he grew morose, bitterly sarcastic, and imperious toward his opponents? When we read the harsh invectives he hurled against them in his later days, we must remember the treatment he received in his earlier years. Against the few bitter words he utters, we must weigh the years of abuse, the malevolent insinuations, the material persecutions, proceeding even to personal violence, of his enemies. We shall then cease to marvel at Hahnemann's bitterness, and we shall then understand how it was that he insisted on his disciples renouncing all connection with that school of traditional medicine, whose professors had treated him as a pariah, and trampled him under their feet.

What a contrast to this picture, my colleagues, is presented by the position of homœopathy at the present day, honored by the adherence of the gifted in every land, who yield their implicit confidence to its tenets, and entrust themselves and all to them most precious and endeared, to the influence of its mild yet potent remedies.

Alike successful in the frigid regions of the North, in its conflict with the most malignant types of erysipelas, and in the torrid South, in its triumph over the dreadful scourge of yellow fever; it also meets and conquers the bilious affections of the Western wilds, and the pulmonary scourges of the Eastern coast. And, my brethren, is not the *character* of the early patrons of homœopathy, and of by far the greater portion of its present patients a striking fact in the history of the progress of our system, and a most convincing argument in its favor. Did propriety allow, I might individualize, the gifted poet, the eminent man of letters, the hoary administrator of justice, the astute philosopher, the successful devotee of art, who know and desire no other means of relief from suffering and disease. If not in the number of its practitioners, still in the number and respectability of its adherents, homœopathy has nothing to fear from its rival.

Its literature now forms a large library, its advocates are to be found in every society; the most noted men of science employ it to the exclusion of all other methods. No college or university is without professors who adhere to it; no corporation, board of guardians, or hospital committee, but numbers among its members some partisans of homœopathy. Yet, as disease acknowledges no privileged exemptions, but in the beautiful words of the Latin poet:

“Pallida mors æquo pulsat pede
Pauperum tabernas, regumque turres,”

neither does medicine admit the distinctions of pride and place when dispensing its favors. The poor and the rich, the king and the peasant must be equally the recipients of its benefits. While homœopathy, therefore, always commends itself primarily to the reception of the intelligent, it gradually permeates the masses, and dispenses its blessings in the homes of the humble and the ignorant.

In America the progress of homœopathy has been most magically rapid; while in the year 1830 there were but two solitary pioneers of our system in the city of New-York, in 1860 we find in that metropolis and its suburbs more than two hundred zealous practitioners of our school. Everywhere

throughout the length and breadth of our own fair land, the homœopathic physieian pursues his philanthropic mission, amid the benedictions of the poor, and the grateful patronage of the rich. "Go where you will—to our respectable hotels, on our steamboats and railroads, into our churches and courts of justice, into our banks and counting-houses, and almost every second person whom you meet is a homœopathist; while on the other hand, the steadily increasing number of sick poor, who apply at the private homœopathic dispensaries for relief, shows their appreciation of its benefits."

Already there are five homœopathic colleges in successful operation in this country. Everywhere in point of early success do they surpass all other schools; one of them in five years arose from a class of fifteen students and six graduates, to a class of one hundred and four students and fifty-five graduates. The University of Pennsylvania, the oldest and first in point of reputation among the allopathic schools, was in existence forty years before she graduated fifty students. The Jefferson School of Philadelphia, which has now larger classes than any other allopathic school on this continent, with all the reputation of a McClellan and a Mütter to attract students to her lecture-rooms, was in existence eight years before she graduated fifty students.

Our homœopathic graduates are everywhere winning for themselves reputation and the most enviable positions in society. They display their benevolence and their skill alike where the forester battles with the sturdy pine, at the foot of the Rocky Mountains, in the far-off fields of Oregon and California, on the green sea isle—wherever the star-spangled banner flaunts the breeze, or the white sails of American commerce spread over the wave. They have penetrated into all parts of those dominions which are under the protection of the banner of St. George.

In this country there are upwards of three thousand homœopathic physieians, the majority of whom are converts from the allopathic school. The statement has been made, and I believe it to be true, that not a single instance can be found of the return of a converted homœopathic physieian to the practice of allopathy. There are eight homœopathic jour-

nals in this country, and in all of the larger cities there are homœopathic hospitals or dispensaries. In many of our states homœopathy has been sanctioned and encouraged by special legislative enactment, such as the act of the legislature of our own state, passed in 1857, incorporating homœopathic county societies, and conferring upon them all the powers and privileges enjoyed by allopathic societies, in obedience to which enactment, we, as delegates from the county societies, are now assembled here.

Homœopathy is now recognized in England, France, Austria, Prussia, Bavaria, Saxony, Wurtemberg, Baden, Hanover, Bohemia, and nearly all the smaller states of Germany; in Spain, Russia, Belgium, Holland, Denmark, Sweden, Naples, and other states of Italy; in Hungary, Brazil, and several South American states. It has now its professorships in European universities, and its numerous court-physicians and counsellors at the continental courts. There are seven homœopathic journals published in Great Britain, six in Germany, and several in France and Italy. There are homœopathic hospitals in most of the countries of Europe, among which the following may be cited, as especially worthy of notice. In Russia, those at St. Petersburg and Moscow; in Austria, at Vienna, the Gumpendorf, under the charge of Dr. Fleischmann, who has been knighted by the King of Bavaria in honor of his signally successful treatment; the Leopoldstadt, under the charge of Dr. Caspar, one of the most learned physicians of the age; and the Seehaus, under the charge of Drs. Müller and Jaehimovich; the hospital of the Sisters of Charity at Linz, and the hospital at Brieg; in Hungary, the hospitals at Güns, Gyöngyos, and Kremsier; in Italy, the hospitals at Turin and Nice; in Sicily, the hospitals at Palermo, Montreal, Pietraperzia, and Mistretta; in Germany, the hospitals at Bremen, in Hanover, at Munich in Bavaria, and at Leipsie in Saxony; in France, the Beaujon at Paris, under the charge of Dr. Tessier; one at Bordeaux, under Dr. Mabit, who has recently been created a Knight of the Legion of Honor by the Emperor Napoleon; the Convent of Refuge at Marseilles, under Dr. Chargè, who has recently received the order of the Legion of Honor from the French

government, and that of St. Gregory the Great, from Pope Pius the Ninth, in consideration of the services which he rendered during the cholera of 1849. In Prussia there is a homœopathic hospital at Berlin; and in Spain it is practised at the general hospital in Madrid. In England there is a homœopathic hospital at London, and there are dispensaries at Liverpool, Dublin, and Birmingham. In the United States there are several hospitals under homœopathic treatment, among which may be specified the Mississippi State Hospital at Natchez, and the Good Samaritan Hospital at St. Louis. There are also many other charitable institutions under homœopathic treatment, among which I may mention the Home for the Friendless, and the Protestant Half-Orphan Asylum, of New-York; the Brooklyn City Orphan Asylum, and the Orphan Asylums at Syracuse and Oswego.

That homœopathy has increased in influence far more rapidly than any other reform in the history of medicine cannot be denied, and when we reflect upon the mortality under our own practice, as compared with that under other modes, we cannot but wonder that it is not already universally adopted. To the vast superiority of our school in the treatment of those terrible scourges of childhood, *scarlatina* and *diphtheria*, I need not here allude. Were it generally known, that in *Asiatic cholera*, statistics have shown, that the mortality under the allopathic treatment is just *twice* as great as under the homœopathic, that *inflammation of the lungs* is nearly *three* times as fatal, and *typhus fever twice* as fatal under the former as under the latter, and that the diseases of children are *twice* as fatal under the treatment of the dominant school as under the homœopathic, this desirable result could not longer be delayed. There is indeed not anything more certain in the history of medicine than the fact, that to the acknowledged and remarkable success of the homœopaths in the treatment of cholera more than to any one circumstance is owing their now favored position with the public. During the ravages of this fearful epidemic in Europe, the cures of the homœopaths were so surprising, that government commissions were established in several countries for the express purpose of inquiring into the causes of this remarkable success,

and, although these commissions were in most instances composed of physicians opposed to homœopathy, they were compelled to acknowledge its superiority and astonishing efficacy.

And now, my colleagues, what are our duties as homœopathic physicians are our duties, both to the community and to ourselves? Homœopathy, as has been well said by another, "has now passed through its first two stages of opposition from the profession—viz. : that of raillery and ridicule, and that of abuse, and is now on the threshold of the third, that of general adoption"—and what are *our* duties in regard to it?

1. Our duty alike to the homœopathic public and to ourselves is by all legitimate means to exert ourselves for its advancement. Let us concentrate our energies, and demand in that spirit which cannot be denied, that homœopathy shall be duly represented in all our great public charities. It is obviously unjust, that we, who are taxed for the support of these institutions, are not represented in their medical management. There are hundreds of applicants at their gates, who prefer the homœopathic treatment, but who are now compelled to receive the treatment of the dominant school, and if they escape with their lives, continue mournful specimens of the ill effects of over-dosing.

2. Let us seek to introduce and maintain a higher standard of professional requirements. By our organizations we shall be enabled to determine the number of properly qualified practitioners in our ranks, and to separate ourselves in the eyes of the community, from those who by their want of qualifications, are casting a reproach upon our cause.

There are very many who claim to be homœopathic physicians, as there are of those who claim to be allopathists, who are entirely unfitted by qualifications, and often by moral character, and even by nature, for the profession of medicine. While we have no organizations, it often happens, that in the eye of the public, we are confounded with these persons, but by an efficient organization we may be separated from them.

Although we cannot always prevent illiterate and unprincipled men from offering their services to the people as medical advisers, we can still do something for the cause of sound medical education by refusing to such all attestations of merit,

and resolutely declining to affiliate with them, leaving to the ignorant and wrong-thinking individuals who employ them the whole responsibility.

The standard of medical education has confessedly become too low. While, as a school, we have nothing to fear on this score, from a comparison with the allopathic—and indeed, I think such a comparison would result in our favor—still, even among ourselves, the proper requisitions have not always been fully complied with.

While every physician should understand Latin, moral, intellectual, and natural philosophy, chemistry, the mathematics, and all the English branches, it is very desirable for the homœopathic physician to superadd to these a knowledge of French and German. I would myself desire, that the time required for the study of medicine should be extended to four years instead of three. Let us, at all events, insist, that from the homœopathic colleges at least none shall receive a diploma who have not fully complied with the requisitions of the present law.

3. We should complete our local organizations and render them more efficient. We shall thus be the better enabled to act in concert in every direction, and especially in the improvement and perfection of the materia medica. If Hahnemann had done nothing else he would be entitled to the lasting gratitude of mankind, for his suggestion in regard to acquiring a knowledge of the medicinal powers of drugs by proving them on the healthy subject. This is *par excellence*, the glorious mission of the homœopathic physician.

While our allopathic brethren, under the guidance of Rokitansky and his colleagues, are rendering great service to the world by elucidating the effects of disease upon the system through their researches in the domain of pathology, to us belongs the greater honor of discovering and accurately applying those remedies which will relieve the diseased conditions brought to light by the knife of the pathologist. It is only by large numbers of persons that reliable provings of drugs can be carried on. The constant symptoms obtained by hundreds of individuals from the administration of the same drug, must necessarily be its characteristic symptoms,

whereas many of the symptoms obtained by a single prover might be purely imaginary, or the result of some accidental cause, and have no relation of cause and effect to the drug which had been administered. There is obviously no standard by which to correct errors from this source; but when one hundred persons in good health are all affected in a certain manner after taking a particular drug, the conclusion is irresistible, that the symptoms thus produced are the effects of the drug which had been administered. The importance of this whole subject has been clearly set forth in an able paper, read before the Oneida County Homœopathic Medical Society, by my friend, Dr. H. M. Paine, of Clinton, and subsequently published in the *American Homœopathic Review*, to which I would beg leave to direct your attention.

4. Our duty towards our rival school of medicine. Time will not permit me to enter fully upon the consideration of this subject. Suffice it to say, that we should always maintain towards it the attitude of respectful and dignified courtesy. Most of us were of necessity graduates of its schools; *all* of us are largely indebted to its scientific men for the results of their labors in the field of pathology. Those of their number who are most enlightened and liberal will ever extend to us the fullest respect. It is only from the ignorant and bigoted among them, that we to-day or hereafter shall receive the slightest discourtesy.

5. Finally, gentlemen, we should be fearless and independent, both in thought and action. Dealing, as we do, with subjects of the utmost importance to the human race, we should be ever studious, vigilant, and active. We should search the records of the past, while we peruse the writings of the present, and when we have conscientiously formed an opinion of our own, we should never be made to swerve from it through the opposition of our enemies, or the solicitations of our friends. Such has been and such must ever be the character of all who have been active in the reformation of error, in the annals of our noble profession. The world owes it to the firm and conscientious, yet daring spirit of our Hahnemann, that it has been freed from the oppressive yoke of opinions, venerable only by their age, and strong by our voluntary weakness. His was that majestic spirit before whom

all the cumbrous machinery and gorgeous array of Galenic lore crumbled like the baseless fabric of a dream. He has left to others ample and unconfined space for erecting a noble structure, and bequeathed a rich legacy of materials for the accomplishment of his great design. Let not any of us, his successors, slumber at our posts in the wrappings of philosophic indifference or selfish tranquility. Let not any of us, taking shelter under the veil of imagined obscurity, shrink from contributing our mite to the great cause of medicine, the cause of literature and philanthropy.

