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### **Contributors**

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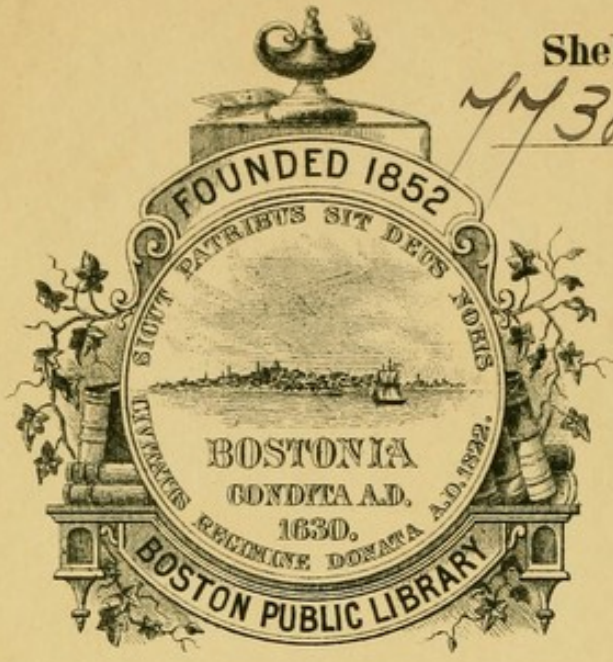
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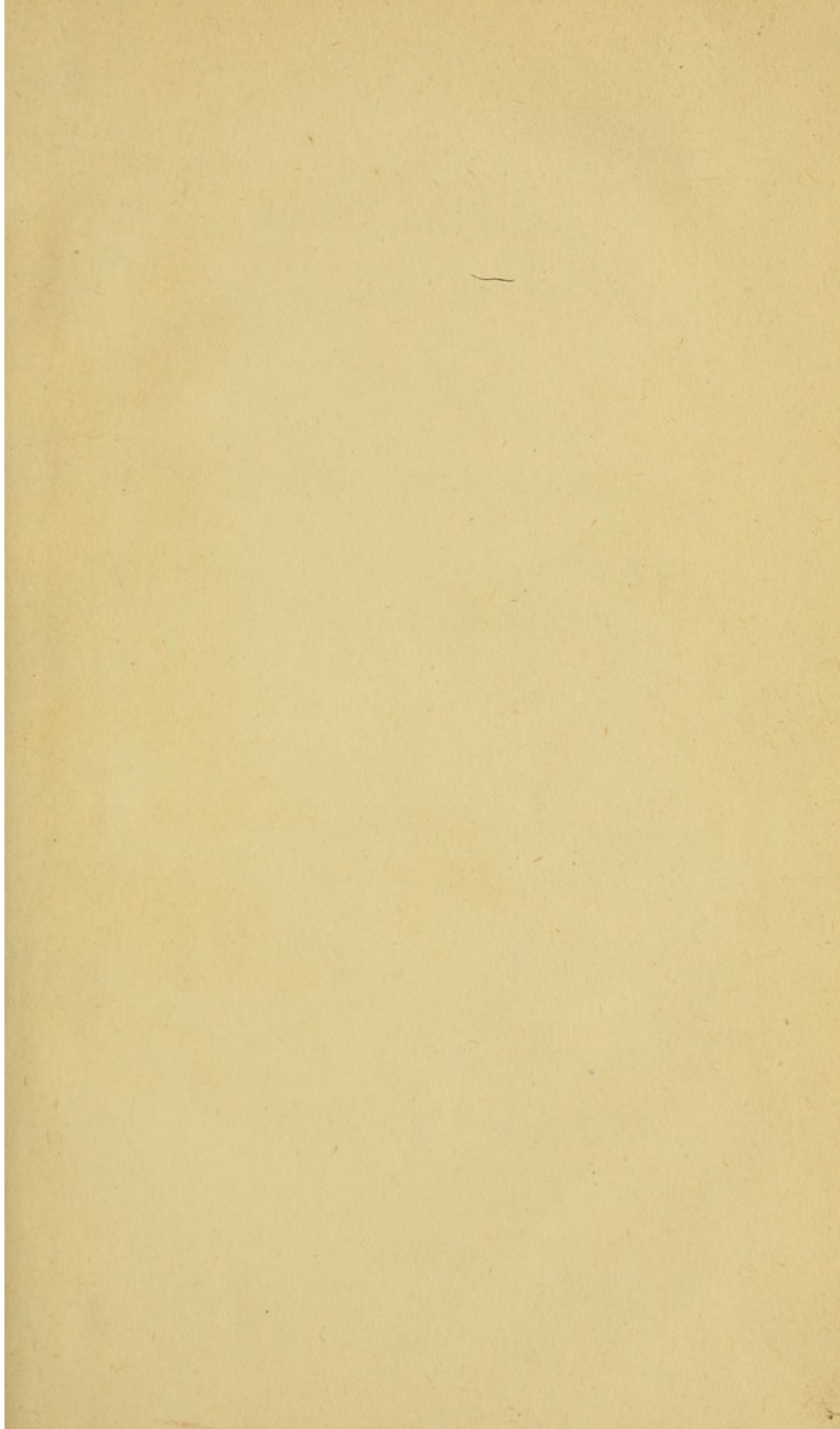
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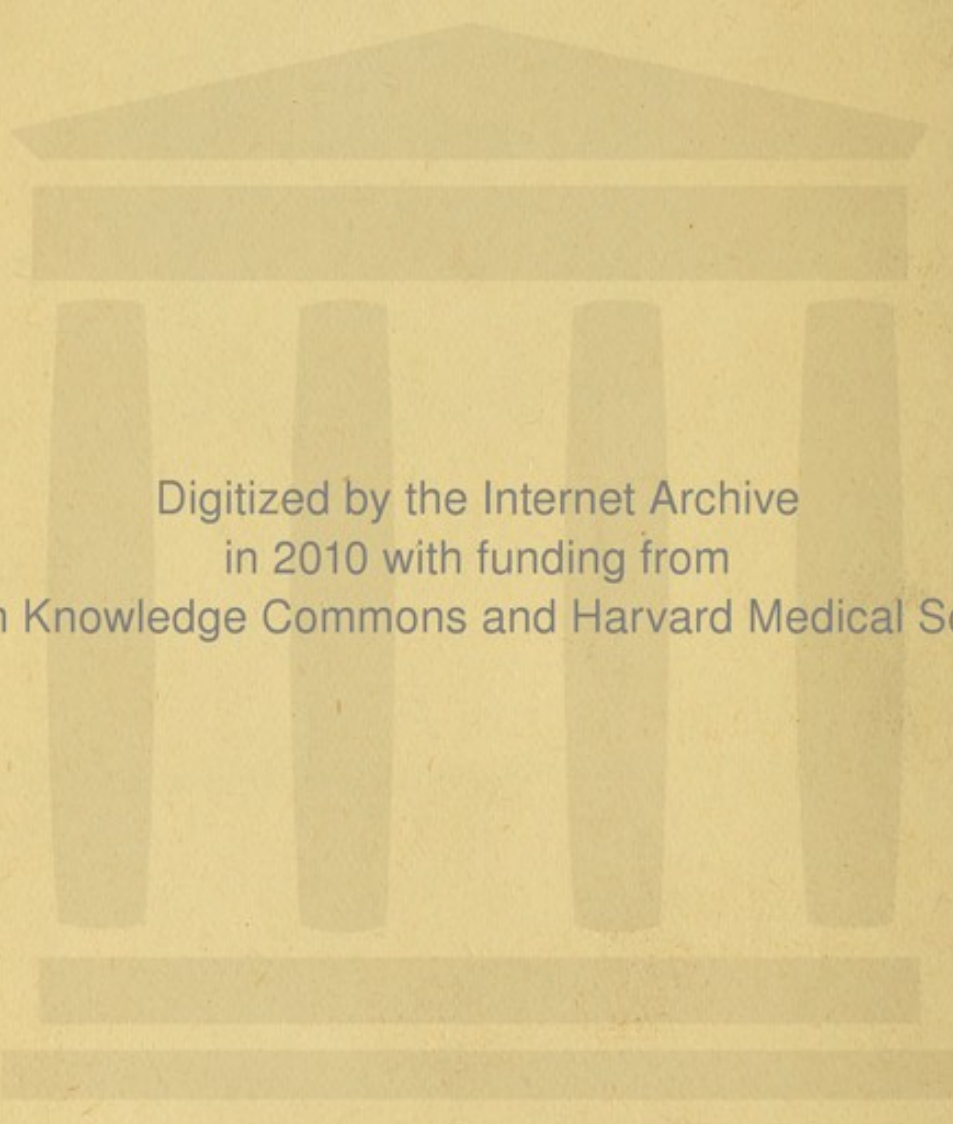
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# ANNUAL ADDRESS

BEFORE THE

## NEW-YORK STATE MEDICAL SOCIETY.

FEBRUARY 6, 1838.

*[On Homoeopathy]* 7788.108

BY JAMES McNAUGHTON, M. D.,

President of the Society.

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## ADDRESS.

GENTLEMEN,

Agreeably to the ordinances of this Society, it becomes my duty, as its presiding officer, to address you on the present occasion.

In my discourse of last year, I attempted to give a brief sketch of the progress of medical education, and of the origin of the several medical schools of this State; to this I subjoined some suggestions, for the consideration of the Society, relative to the preliminary education of students, and the course of medical instruction to be pursued, before admitting candidates to examination for license, or the degree of Doctor of Medicine. On this latter subject, much might be usefully added, were there any prospect that the Legislature would co-operate with us in carrying our views into effect. Nothing has been done since our last meeting to amend the existing regulations of our profession, or to facilitate medical improvement. Until, therefore, the amendments which are on all hands acknowledged to be called for, are effected, I forbear entering on the discussion of topics, which, though interesting to us, would not be likely to lead to any useful results, in the present state of public sentiment. I cannot,



however, omit to press upon the Society the necessity of petitioning the legislature to sanction some of the alterations suggested in my address of last session, more particularly, those relating to the pursuit of practical anatomy. Without some further facilities for the prosecution of that fundamental branch of a medical education, our medical colleges can never attain to such a standing as will comport with the character of the Empire State.

Leaving to the wisdom of the Legislature, matters over which we have no control, permit me to call your attention to some subjects relating to the practice of our profession, which the last few years have brought into notice. It is not my intention, on the present occasion, to enumerate the several improvements, which have of late years been made in the practice of physic and surgery; for, even if I possessed the ability to do so, the limits to which I am restricted, would not permit me.

Since the days of Hippocrates, our profession has undergone numerous mutations. System after system has seen the light, and after strutting its period upon the stage, has passed into oblivion. Hippocrates, the father of medicine, was for many ages allowed to govern the practice of physic, until he was superseded by Galen. The system of Galen retained possession of the schools from the 9th to the middle of the 17th century; although early in the 17th, Paracelsus, the noted mountebank and alchemist, had, to a considerable extent, shaken his authority, by the introduction of several active remedial agents, the effects of which he explained on principles in direct opposition to those of Galen's system. Both Galen and Paracelsus agreed in the explanations given of the actions of the body in health and disease, in referring them to the agency of the fluids. Towards the middle of the 17th century, the discovery of the circulation of the blood became generally known; and that was followed by the discovery of the thoracic duct, and of the lymphatic sys-



tem of vessels. These led to the final overthrow of the Galenic system.

In the course of the same century, Galileo introduced mathematical reasoning, and Bacon proposed the inductive method of investigation. These new modes of philosophizing doubtless had some influence on medical enquiries. The study of the circulation led to the application of mechanical philosophy to explain the phenomena of life. Mathematical reasoning long continued the favorite mode of treating medical subjects. Still, the fluids of the body, played the principal part in all these systems, whether chemical or mechanical, in accounting for the phenomena of disease, and the operation of medicines. A humoral and chemical pathology, entered largely into every system of medicine down to the beginning of the 18th century; and even to this day, prevails to a certain extent, and, perhaps justly, influences medical reasoning, and regulates medical practice.

The early part of the 18th century ushered in three new systems, differing widely in many points from each other, both in theory, and in the practice recommended. Two of these emanated from Professors in the University of Halle, in Germany, and the third from Leyden, in Holland. Stahl and Hoffman were the authors of the two first, and Boerhaave of the third. The influence of the works of Stahl and Hoffman was in a great measure confined to Germany; but that of Boerhaave's extended over the civilized world, and swayed the minds of physicians to a greater extent and for a longer period of time, than the works of any writer since the days of Galen.

Hoffman first pointed out the important influence of the *Solidum vivum*, or nervous system, in explaining the operations of the animal economy, and the effects of medicines in modifying these. He seems to have led the acute mind of Cullen to the examination of the influence



of the solids in the production of disease, as well as in their removal. Cullen laid the foundation of the system of the *solidists*, which superseded for a time all the preceding systems, and still maintains, in a great measure, its ascendancy in the schools. It is impossible to read the works of that distinguished physician without admiring the clearness of his reasoning, and the elegance of his style. Whether one is convinced of the truth of the opinions he advances or not, he cannot fail to be struck with the ingenuity and talent evinced in maintaining his positions. Every thing is well digested and well considered — so different from the crude and clumsy productions of many of those who have succeeded him. There are doubtless many weak points in his system, and many defects in the practice recommended. But these defects are attributable to the age in which he lived, and do not derogate from the transcendent merit of Dr. Cullen. An edition of his works with additions corresponding to the advanced state of medical science, would be one of the most valuable gifts to the medical profession. But where shall we find one who is worthy of the task, and capable of performing it? The attempt has often been made, but thus far with no very great success. In most instances, the simple text is a safer guide than the commentary.

The system of Stahl prevailed to a considerable extent in the German States, but not so extensively in other parts of Europe, as that of Boerhaave. The leading principle in the system of Stahl is, that the rational soul of man governs the whole economy of his body.

From the earliest period, physicians have observed, that the animal economy possessed within itself, to a certain extent, a power of warding off dangers that threatened it, and was capable of exciting certain motions or actions calculated to relieve itself from existing diseases. This kind of action was attributed to the operation of what they vaguely called "nature," and the influence of



this agent continued to be recognized in the schools under the name of *vis conservatrix*, or *vis medicatrix naturæ*. In all systems such a power has been, and must always be, allowed; but the school of Stahl was somewhat distinguished from others in trusting to the wisdom of this organic action as a remedial agent. Confiding in this power, they thought it the duty of medicine to aid nature in her efforts, if they did not trust to her entirely. Hence they taught the method of *curing diseases by expectation*; and, when they employed medicines, only used the most inert and inefficient. They opposed the use of some of the most efficacious remedies, such as opium and bark; and very rarely had recourse to bleeding, vomiting, or any of the powerful general remedies. The followers of Stahl interfered but little with the operations of nature, by the exhibition of medicines, but they were attentive to regimen, and close observers of the phenomena of disease. Hence we are indebted to them for a more correct history of the symptoms of disease than are to be found elsewhere.\* Experience, however, determined the fact, that nature, or the *vis medicatrix*, when left to herself, was even more destructive of human life, than the active interference of the physician — hence the more energetic practice recommended in the systems of Cullen and Brown, gradually superseded the method of *curing by expectation*.

The present century has witnessed the introduction of two systems, which inculcate in a great measure, the curing of diseases, by expectation, avoiding like the followers of Stahl, powerful medicines, and energetic general remedies. The founders of these systems are, Broussais, of France, and Hahnemann, of Germany. The former has many followers, particularly in France, and the latter not a few, not only in his own country, but in seve-

\* Introduction to Cullen's Practice of Physic.



ral other countries on the continent of Europe, and even in these United States.

We do not deem it necessary to make any further remarks on the views of Broussais, as they are already well known to the profession in general.

The peculiarity of the system of Hahnemann and its being almost new to the profession, and to the public, entitles it to more notice, on the score of novelty, if not on that of utility. Although this system has not attracted much attention, until within a few years, out of Germany, it has been gradually spreading in the country of its birth, since the early part of the present century.

Hahnemann, a man of science and learning, was regularly bred and educated as a physician, and seems to have been led to the discovery of the fundamental principle of his system, rather by accident, than by any process of reasoning a priori. In the year 1790 while making some experiments upon himself, with Cinchona, or Peruvian bark, Hahnemann discovered to his surprise, that it brought on a paroxysm of intermittent fever. It is fair to presume, that he satisfied himself, that this paroxysm was *caused* by the use of the bark, and was not an accidental occurrence while under its influence. This discovery made new light to break in upon the darkness which had hitherto obscured his ideas of therapeutics; and proved, in his judgment at least, the dawn of the brightest day that has ever opened upon medical science. He regards his discovery as among the few that have immortalized their authors, and to be placed in point of importance, side by side, with those of Copernicus, Sir Isaac Newton, and Harvey. The work in which he gives an exposition of the principles of his system, is denominated the *Organon of the Art of Healing*, in imitation of the title adopted by the great author of the Inductive Philosophy.

His system is founded on the strictest principles of induction — observation and experiment; and if his facts



are correct, some of his conclusions cannot be controverted. But here lies the difficulty; and it was well and wisely said, long ago, by Dr. Cullen, that there were more false facts, than theories, in physic.

Having found out that bark possessed the property of causing intermittent fever when given to a person in health, he was induced to extend his experiments to other medicines, to ascertain their effects on persons in health, and found, that, when given in large doses, they invariably produced symptoms *analogous* to the symptoms of the diseases which they were known to cure:—For example, that sulphur produced a sort of itch, and that mercury produced symptoms resembling syphilis. From these observations, he deduced the fundamental principle, which characterizes his system—namely—that medicines are useful in curing diseases, only in so far as they possess the property of producing in persons in health symptoms analogous to those of the disease for which they are administered; and that that medicine is the most efficacious remedy, the collective symptoms caused by which in a person in health, bear the strongest resemblance, to the collective symptoms of the disease for which it is exhibited. Agreeably to these principles diarrhœas are best cured by medicines of a purgative nature, vomiting, by emetic remedies, and costiveness by opium and astringents.

The name by which this system is distinguished from others is that of Homœopathy, derived from two Greek words, (*ομοίου παθος*) meaning analogous suffering. The followers of this system designate that followed by the generality of medical practitioners by the name of Allopathy, (*αλλου παθος*) different suffering, as they sometimes use medicines which produce effects analogous to the disease, as purgatives in diarrhœa; or contrary to them, like cold to burns, or blisters to local inflammation; or antipathic, like giving an acid to correct an alkali, or the contrary.



The Homœopathic practitioners adopt as an axiom, the maxim, *Similia similibus curantur*—the sense of which may be expressed by saying, that the same symptoms which medicines produce in a state of health, are those which they are capable of removing, when they spontaneously occur in disease. Hahnemann adduces a great number of instances, from the practice of physicians, in different ages, of cures effected upon the principles of his system ; but observes, that, notwithstanding the obvious results, and their discordance with the principles of the systems these several physicians believed in, none of them were led to the discovery—the true key, to open the secrets of therapeutic medicine.

In a few instances, indeed, physicians had adopted the method of treating diseases by remedies producing symptoms analogous to those of the existing disease, and some suggested the probability of such being the true method in the generality of cases. He quotes Stahl, of Denmark, as one of those, and it must be confessed, that the *Organon* itself, does not more distinctly or clearly express the Homœopathic principles, than that quotation. The following is a translation of the passage referred to: “The rule adopted in medicine of treating diseases by remedies which produce effects contrary to those of the disease (*contraria contrariis*) is entirely false and absurd. I am persuaded on the contrary, that diseases yield to remedies which produce an analogous affection (*similia similibus*)—burns are cured by keeping the parts affected before the fire—frostbite by applying snow or cold water—inflammations and contusions by spirituous lotions. It is in this manner I have succeeded in correcting a tendency to acidity by very small doses of sulphuric acid, in cases in which a multitude of absorbents had been exhibited to no advantage.”

“Thus,” says Hahnemann, “the great truth has more than once been approached. But they have never had



more than a passing glance, and in this manner the indispensable reform which therapeutics ought to undergo, to give place to the true art of healing,—a system of medicine, pure and certain, has never been found until now.”

Hahnemann frankly acknowledges that he is not entitled to the credit of originality in discovering his great therapeutic principle; but considers himself entitled to the whole merit of having established the applicability of it, to the greater part of the diseases to which mankind are subject. Whatever may be thought of the system itself, no one can deny the patience and perseverance with which Hahnemann has pursued the investigation of the effects of medicines upon himself and others, in a state of health, for more than forty years, and the zeal with which he has watched their influence in the removal of disease. Several of his followers have been no less diligent, and are scarcely considered second to him in upholding the system of which he is the acknowledged founder.

It will be perceived that the fundamental principle of the Homœopathic system is not new in the practice of medicine. It has been the opinion of many eminent physicians that nature, or the *vis medicatrix naturæ*, when the system was threatened with injury, caused certain actions calculated to ward off danger, or remove the offending cause, and that it was their duty to aid nature in her efforts. Hence when there was diarrhœa, it was promoted by laxatives, and if there occurred spontaneous vomiting, it was encouraged by drinking tepid water, or by the exhibition of an emetic. These were considered auxiliary to the efforts of nature, and were generally found salutary, when given with proper discretion. There were other cases, however, in which nature was found to be proceeding rather too fast, and required a check; as when the reaction caused a severe inflammation of the lungs or bowels. In those cases, no fuel was needed to increase the flame, and nature, if left to herself, in her



efforts to throw off the disease, would succeed in doing so only by killing the patient. Hence it was deemed proper to moderate this reaction by various means. When the action of the heart was too great, it was lessened by bleeding — when the heat was excessive it was lowered by cooling means — and when inflammation was great in an organ essential to life, an attempt was made to create a diversion to another part less important, by applying blisters and sometimes red hot irons, on the established principle, that the greater pain swallows up, or renders less perceptible, the smaller. In other cases some acrid substances were swallowed, and acted as poisons. For some of these there existed antidotes, and these were given, as for example, an acid to neutralize an acrid alkali. When no antidote was known, it was deemed prudent to throw off the contents of the stomach, by exhibiting an emetic, on the principle of removing the offending cause.

In these several instances, physicians have been guided according to circumstances, in the selection of remedial agents, sometimes using remedies which produced symptoms analogous to the disease — sometimes those which produced contrary symptoms, and sometimes using remedies which acted as antidotes ; — and reason and common sense would seem to sanction the propriety and wisdom of such a procedure. The peculiarity of the Homœopathic system is, that it applies the principle of *similia similibus* to a much more extensive class of cases than is usual with the followers of other systems ; and that it has recourse to doses so very small as to have received the designation of *infinitesimal*, from their excessive minuteness. It is also somewhat distinguished from other systems by the regimen prescribed while under treatment. A few observations on the mode of preparing medicines, and on the diet recommended, will, I trust, prove not uninteresting to the Society.



After Hahnemann had ascertained the symptoms produced by taking medicines in a state of health, in full doses, he began to try their effects in the removal of diseases, agreeably to the principles of his system. He began, like ordinary practitioners, by giving large doses; but found, that though they removed the diseases, they produced an unnecessary aggravation of the symptoms, and consequently prolonged the sufferings of the patient. He gradually diminished the doses, until he reached the last point at which the medicine retained its power over the disease. In this manner, he ascertained the degree of dilution in which the medicine should be given to be at the same time prompt, efficacious, and mild. When the medicine was perfectly Homœopathic to the disease, that is, when it was such as would produce in health, all the symptoms of the disease and cover them, as one triangle of equal sides, and equal angles covers another triangle, he found that it removed the disease with the slightest possible aggravation of the symptoms, which in a short time disappeared with those artificially produced by the medicine. The Homœopathic system differs from others in using only one medicine at a time, eschewing religiously all kinds of mixtures and combinations, such as constitute the prescriptions of what he calls "the vulgar practitioners." In his investigations concerning the minutest possible doses which could be relied upon, he found it necessary to reduce them so excessively, that he began to suspect, that the mode he had adopted of rubbing them intimately with the medium in which they were administered, somehow added to their medicinal properties, until at length the conviction was forced upon his mind, that he had stumbled upon a discovery, even more important and unexpected, than that of the grand axiom of *similia similibus*. And that was, that friction, and shaking imparted to medicines, which in their crude state possessed little or no virtue or activity, a degree of en-



ergy in influencing the vital movements, resembling the operation of a virus, more than than that of an ordinary remedy.

He adduces as evidence of the surprising influence of friction on bodies, the familiar facts of striking fire from a flint, and the heat produced by rubbing metals. Even savages know that fire may be kindled by rubbing against each other, two dry sticks. "Will the man," he says, "who seizes his steel to light his pipe believe, that that cold body contains within itself a magazine of heat, which only requires friction to disengage it? He will not: and yet, the fact is so. Count Rumford has shown us that a room can be heated, by rapidly rubbing two plates of metal against each other, without the necessity of having recourse to any of the ordinary means of keeping up a fire."

"Friction produces," he further observes, "an influence so powerful that it developes not only, the physical properties of bodies, as heat, odour, &c., but still more, a fact unknown until now, it exalts to an astonishing degree the medicinal powers of substances. It appears that it was reserved for me, to discover this property, the influence of which is such, that by virtue of it, substances which were never known to possess medicinal properties, acquire a surprising energy. Thus, gold, silver, and wood charcoal, are without action upon man in their ordinary state. The most delicate person could take several grains of gold or silver foil, or charcoal, without the least medicinal effect. From the constant rubbing for an hour of one grain of gold with one hundred grains of powdered sugar of milk, there results a preparation already possessed of considerable medicinal virtue. But, take a grain of that preparation, rub it for another hour, with a hundred grains of sugar of milk, and continue the same process until each grain of the last preparation shall contain only the *quadrillionth part of a grain of gold*, you will then possess a preparation in which the medi-



cinal virtue of the gold will be so developed, that it will be sufficient to put one grain of it into a phial, and to cause a melancholy person whose disgust of life has brought him to the verge of suicide, to breathe it for a few seconds, when in one hour, the wretched being will be relieved from the wicked demon, and restored to a relish of life! \* Such are the effects of rubbing, "that it is necessary to be careful not to exalt the virtues of medicines too much by such means. One drop of drosera diluted thirty times, each of which dilutions has been shaken twenty times, put in jeopardy the life of an infant, to whom it was given; while the same medicine, when each dilution has received only two shakes, given in a quantity just sufficient to moisten a globule of sugar, of the size of a grain of millet, will cure the disease easily and promptly!" These extracts sufficiently show the wonderful influence of thirty hours rubbing upon gold, and that of twenty shakes, on each dilution of drosera!!

Let us now come to the dietetics of the system, the most rational, and perhaps the most valuable, part of it. It by no means resembles that of the renowned Dr. Sangrado, or that of his no less celebrated successor Broussais. It allows of plain, substantial fare, such as would suit any reasonable honest man, or woman, who wished to live, as revelation informs us mankind were destined to live — by the sweat of the brow. Good beef and mutton, if sufficiently old, domestic fowls, venison and other game, fish, and plain bread, are allowed in moderation: but no spices, no wine, no spirits, no infusions of substances possessing medicinal properties, whether fermented or unfermented. No onions, garlic or celery are permitted: tea † and coffee are forbidden. The gentlemen

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\* Organon De L'Art de Guérir par S. Hahnemann, &c. &c. par A. J. L. Jourdan, Paris, 1832, p. 338.

† On this side of the Atlantic, Homœopaths have so far conformed to custom as to allow patients to drink *black tea*.



must forsake their snuff and cigars, and the ladies their scented soaps, their honey waters, their musk cosmetics, their otto of roses, and their pure cologne. All these are too powerful to give fair play to the wonderful virtues of the almost immaterial medicines of the Homœopathic school. Exercise in the open air, cheerfulness of mind, and a rigid subjection of the turbulent passions, are sedulously enjoined.

No one can deny that there is good sense and propriety in most of these injunctions, and as the course is not to be rigidly followed except while under the influence of the medicines, no great harm can, in any case, result from strictly following them. The precise course of regimen to be pursued in each case is to be modified according to circumstances. In no instance, however, is the starving system pursued by the disciples of Homœopathy, to the same degree as is sometimes done, by the practitioners of the school of Broussais.

The mode of proceeding when called to the examination of a case of disease, is to make a minute examination of all the symptoms. The patient is closely questioned; every symptom, whether internal or external, whether affecting the mind or the body, is noted. It is also necessary to know whether the uneasy feeling, or the morbid symptom, which seems most entitled to consideration, occurs in the morning or in the afternoon, in the evening, or on going to bed — whether it be more troublesome before eating, than after eating — whether more when walking than when at rest — whether worse sitting than standing, or on lying down — and a thousand other minutiae, which time would not permit me to enumerate.

After having thus made out a catalogue of all the symptoms, then comes the research after the most suitable remedy. If the search has been successful, and a medicine is found, under the head of which, all the symptoms of the



disease are enumerated among its characteristic effects, the true specific is found. When given in a suitable dose, the medicine produces an aggravation, for a short time, of all the symptoms, upon the subsidence of which, the disease disappears.

How the aggravation of a disease is to cure it, may be somewhat difficult to account for; and in any other system such an occurrence would be considered an evidence that the remedy was not well chosen; but it is the regular effect expected and wished for in this mode of practice. It may be, that the aggravation of the symptoms, is not the direct effect of the medicines, but an organic riot, to nullify or expel the infinitesimal intruder—or it may be, that a regular battle takes place between the disease and medicine, in which, at first, the disease seems to have the mastery, but that at last the medicine quietly conquers—or it may be, that, like the Kilkenny cats, the one eats up the other, not leaving, as in that celebrated combat, even a tail as a memorial of the struggle. If no medicine exist, to cover all the symptoms of the disease, recourse is had to the one that covers those which seem characteristic; and when these are killed off, another medicine is given to finish the residue. The first medicine must have completed its functions before another is given.

In acute diseases the remedies are not exhibited in general more than once or twice in twenty-four hours, the interval depending upon the duration of their respective effects. In chronic diseases, again, they are not given oftener than once a week, fortnight or month—sometimes only once in two months. The millionth or ten-millionth part of a grain, once in two months, and that given in sugar, is certainly a very gentle mode of treating a disease; and if experience should prove it to be as successful as the Allopathic method, it is certainly entitled to the preference. One would suppose that such small doses



could not exert any influence on the vital actions. The most virulent poisons known to us can be taken in doses a hundred times larger than the doses of the Homœopathic medicines, with impunity. Making, therefore, all due allowances for the influence of friction in imparting new properties, nothing short of the most unquestionable experience could induce us to believe, that the remedies of the new school would do either harm or good.

The fundamental principle of curing diseases by remedies which aggravate for a time the symptoms, is not calculated to make a favorable impression on physicians brought up in the Allopathic schools, even if the doses of the appropriate remedies seemed sufficiently large to produce some decided impression on the system. But the principle of action, and the infinitesimal size of the doses prescribed, have together contributed to prevent physicians from paying any attention to the new science. Generally speaking, they have at once pronounced the whole subject absurd—a delusion—or a gross imposition upon public credulity. Now, is this the proper mode of treating it? Is it philosophical to call any thing absurd, professing to be founded on observation and experiment? If it be false, it should be proved to be so, by showing that facts do not warrant the premises, or the deductions drawn from them. Is it true that medicines, which are known to act as specifics in the cure of diseases, produce, when given in large doses to persons in health, symptoms resembling the diseases which they cure? Will quinine in large doses cause a fit of intermittent fever? Will sulphur bring out a crop of the itch? What is the experience of the profession on the subject? Granting that large doses of quinine cause something like a chill, will not any medicine, or any food that disorders the digestion do the same? Granting that sulphur in large doses brings out an eruption on the skin, does not eating clams and other shell fish often do the same? Will the eating of these



cure the itch? We have often seen quinine given in large doses for weeks together, but have never seen any thing like a paroxysm of intermittent fever caused by it. We have also seen sulphur used somewhat liberally, but though we have known it to cure the itch, we have never seen it to cause it. True, these were not given to persons in health. But such persons are rather scarce, and when found, are not fond of being made the subjects of experiments so repulsive. Several of them, however, were so nearly in health, that the medicines might be expected to produce their characteristic effects.

But the greatest objection to the reception of the doctrines of the Homœopathic school has arisen from the infinitesimal doses. Few have been found willing to believe, that such small doses could have any influence whatever on the animal economy. It is not to be wondered at, that persons accustomed to give twenty or thirty grains of a medicine, not only without injury, but often to the great benefit of their patients, cannot believe, that the millionth part of a grain of the same substances should produce such wonderful effects as are attributed to them. But then, such people do not know the great influence of friction in imparting new energy to medicines which in their crude state are almost inert. The fact seems improbable — but it may nevertheless be true. It is therefore the duty of physicians to ascertain whether it be true or false.

There are more things in heaven and earth —  
Than are dreamt of in *our* philosophy.

Who would believe that the insertion of the point of a lancet into the skin, armed with an infinitesimal dose of vaccine virus, could prevent, and that forever, such a formidable disease as the small-pox? Yet such is the fact. Who could believe that by rubbing a plate of glass, a man could be made to give out sparks of fire, at every



point of his body where one could touch him, and yet be unconscious all the time that he was getting charged with such strange fire? Could either philosopher or fool be made to believe such a thing without witnessing the proof? Electricity, galvanism, and electro-magnetism, make us acquainted with facts which at first appear less probable than the effects of the Homœopathic medicines. Most philosophers are believers in the infinite divisibility of matter. We sometimes see reagents detect so small a quantity as one grain of some salts in a larger quantity of water than all the circulating fluids of the body. It is then possible, that the infinitesimal doses may be carried to the extremities of the minutest arterial branches, where the molecular movements take place, and may cause a change or modification of the vital actions, incompatible with the vital movements which constitute the disease. It is possible that the Homœopathic reasoning may be erroneous—it is possible that the medicines may act as specifics, like the vaccine virus, and that the mode of action may be altogether inexplicable, in the present state of our knowledge. We are therefore more interested in determining the correctness of the alleged facts, than that of the theory offered to explain them. Many of these facts are of such a kind as admit of easy examination—and can be readily proved or refuted. It will not be amiss to state a few by way of illustration.

1st. It is said that belladonna is as infallible a preventive of scarlet fever, as the cow-pock is of small-pox: but the duration of its action is only two months.

2nd. That drosera is a specific in whooping-cough.

3d. That inhaling the odour of gold cures melancholy when so severe, as to bring the sufferer to the verge of suicide—and in the short space of one hour.

4th. That aconite will cure in twenty-four hours the severest inflammatory fever, or the severest inflammation of the lungs—without bleeding or any evacuant what-



soever. In all the above cases, the medicines must be given in the doses, and prepared in the manner directed in the Homœopathic system.

Permit me to cite a single case from the work of Dr. Gueyrard, a French Homœopath, illustrative of the energy of the practice:—“An actress, aged forty years, strong, yellow, and plethoric, troubled for eight years with chronic inflammation of the tonsils and pharynx, which had resisted all kinds of Allopathic remedies and for which removal by operation was proposed, consulted a Homœopathic practitioner on the 1st of August, 1832, and took in the morning of that day a dose of belladonna of the thirty-first dilution. The patient anticipating no disturbance from it, experienced no exacerbation until night, but then most violently. The disease increased rapidly to an acute state, menacing suffocation, with difficulty of swallowing, salivation, fever, and sharp shooting pains through the tonsils. Frightened, she sent for the Doctor, who could not come until morning. When he called she received him smiling, and announced to him her cure. Scarcely could one on examining the mouth discover any redness or any vestige of the enlargement of the tonsils.”\*

Here is certainly a strongly marked case. There was not only a sudden increase of action in a part long the seat of chronic inflammation, but an equally sudden subsidence of inflammation; followed by the removal of a chronic enlargement, without any suppuration.

Having heard reports of numerous cures effected at home and abroad by the Homœopathic medicines, my attention was drawn to the study of the system about two years ago, and I was induced to make trial of it in a few cases, in which its efficacy was most extolled.

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\* *La Doctrine Medicale Homœopathique examiné sous les rapports Theorique et Pratique* — Par Le Docteur H. C. Gueyrard, &c., Paris, 1834, p. 141.



In some instances I thought that it answered remarkably well, but in others its effects so entirely disappointed me, that I abandoned it for remedies of more activity, with the effects of which I was better acquainted. The medicines were given in cases in which the delay of a few days would not be injurious to the patient even if the remedies should fail. They were given in the sugar of milk, in the doses directed, and from a medicine case prepared by a Homœopathic apothecary. That the imagination of the patient might not play any part in the matter, no intimation was given that any novel course of practice was pursued.

I have not deemed it proper to trust these medicines in any severe cases of fever or inflammation of the lungs, and therefore cannot say what might have happened, if I had more faith and patience. I have now and then prescribed them in less urgent complaints at the request of patients; but the result has not been such as to give me any great respect for the system, or any desire to abandon the old practice, without some further proof of the superior efficacy of the new. Did my limits permit, I could give several cases to illustrate the great difficulty of deciding upon the effects of remedies, and the great liability to error in making deductions from medical experiments. In some cases, after prescribing the Homœopathic remedies, I have been struck with the rapid recovery of my patients, while in other cases in which I administered the sugar of milk alone, and put the patients on a suitable regimen, recoveries as striking took place. It is, therefore, only by the most patient and careful observations, made on a large scale, in some public institution, for a considerable length of time; and by sedulously guarding against drawing conclusions which are not warranted by repeated experiments, the fallacy of which cannot be called in question, that the value of this, or of any other system of medical practice, can be es-



tablished. We still want such proof of the efficacy of the Homœopathic practice in the removal of diseases. Such a trial has been made in some European hospitals, but the Homœopathists complain, perhaps justly, that the institutions were under the management of those who were unfriendly to their system, and who, in various ways thwarted the success of their experiments. In other instances, in which diseases were treated upon Homœopathic principles, the medicines were prepared by Allopathic practitioners, and were neither prepared in the proper manner, given in the proper doses, nor exhibited with a sufficient knowledge of the principles of the new method. Whether Homœopathy be true or false, it is entitled to have its claims fairly investigated. The object of the profession is to ascertain the truth; and if it should turn out that in any disease the Homœopathic remedies are more efficacious than those known to the ordinary system, they ought unquestionably to be used. It will not do for the members of the profession to wrap themselves up in their dignity, and to call the new system absurd, without further enquiry. The history of the profession presents many lamentable instances of the obstinacy with which errors have been clung to, and improvements resisted. Harvey was persecuted by the College of Physicians of London for maintaining the doctrine of the circulation of the blood, and Jenner was laughed at for proposing vaccination as a preventive of small-pox. Numerous other instances could be adduced, from the history of medicine, and other sciences, of similar obstinacy in adhering to error and in resisting truth.

As this Society was instituted for the purpose of improving medical science, I would respectfully suggest the propriety of making the comparative merits of Allopathy and Homœopathy the subject of a prize dissertation. The experiments should be made in some hospital, under their respective professors, with all the advantages



to each necessary for a fair trial ; and an accurate record of the cases should be kept, acknowledged by impartial judges to be correct, that others could form an opinion for themselves of the propriety of the conclusions deduced from the results of the cases.

But while I am indisposed to pronounce judgment too hastily upon the Homœopathic system, I have no hesitation in condemning the charlatanism practised in its name. From the founder of the system to the lowest of his followers, it is the fashion to vilify and caricature the older systems of practice. This feeling extends to the believers in the new system as well as to its practitioners. While perfectly ignorant of the principles of both, and without even taking the trouble of enquiring into the facts upon which either system is founded, we find them going about as zealous missionaries, recommending the new method, and unhesitatingly condemning the old. We have seen much of this ; and it is deeply to be regretted, that some of the clergy, have been among the most conspicuous, in this officious zeal. These would consult the interest of their order, by attending to the duties of their sacred calling, and leaving the mysteries of physic, to those who make them their study : in all friendliness, we would bring to their recollection the adage —

*Ne sutor ultra crepidam.*

We deny that sufficient evidence has been adduced either in Europe or in this country to prove that the efficacy of the Homœopathic practice is superior, or at all equal, to that of the ordinary system. Do we deny that remarkable cures have taken place under this mode of treatment ? By no means : but we deny that these have been more frequent, more striking, or more prompt, than under the ordinary methods. But some will tell us, that cures have been effected under the new method, which



had not been effected, after a fair trial of the old. We grant the fact. The same may be said, in numberless instances, where the old and the new methods have been alike unsuccessful, and where time and nature effected cures. The like remark may with truth be made in respect to almost every quack nostrum which has ever been brought forward — namely, that persons given up by the faculty, have recovered while using it. But there is much difference between a *recovery* and a *cure*. I know of no disease acknowledged to be incurable by the regular faculty that has been rendered curable by Homœopathic means.

The first thing that gave any currency to Homœopathy in this city, was a pretended case of this kind. A gentleman affected with *fungus hæmatodes*, for the removal of which, amputation was recommended by several eminent surgeons, was universally reported to be on the point of being cured by the new practice. The fame of this wonderful cure was blazoned abroad, before the case was a fortnight under treatment. Nobody doubted the fact, except the few who knew the intractable nature of the disease. And what was the result? Just what might have been expected — the limb had to be amputated. In many other cases, exaggeration, and in others downright misrepresentation, were had recourse to, to elevate the new practice and to depress the old. But time, which brings all things to their proper level, has had the usual effect in the present case, and the truth has gradually found its way to enlighten the public mind.

No medical man will deny that great changes in the state of general health will take place by a change of diet. Abstaining from wine, spirits, spices, tea and coffee and taking regular exercise in the open air, will remove many of the most obstinate and most troublesome diseases that “flesh is heir to;” but the regulation of diet



is what the Homœopathic system has no exclusive claim to.

Imagination will cure other diseases — the mental stimulus of hope is one of the best of medicines, and if it can be exhibited in a globule of Homœopathic sugar, the latter will effect wonders. Does any one doubt the powerful effect of the mind upon the ailments of the body? No one will deny the reality of suffering in tooth-ache, yet how often do we see it suddenly cease at the sight of the surgeon's instrument. No one will deny the severity of childbed suffering; but there is nothing more common than to witness the cessation of labor pains for hours on the arrival of the physician.

When Mesmer first came to Paris, cures innumerable were effected by animal magnetism, so much so that the medical faculty took the alarm, and applied to the government to appoint a commission to investigate its true value. — Our illustrious Franklin was one of that commission. — They decided that animal magnetism was nothing in itself, and that the cures were the effects of the imagination on the body. From that moment animal magnetism sunk as rapidly as it arose. No more wonders were effected by it, until recently, when, like a mental epidemic, it threatens us with another visitation. We have all heard of the great cures effected by Perkins' metallic tractors, when first introduced; but from the time that Haygarth showed that similar effects were produced by tractors of wood or bone, painted like the metallic instrument, the tractors lost their virtue. Need I adduce in addition to these, the powers of charms and incantations in curing and preventing diseases, to convince the most sceptical of the influence of the mind on the ailments of the body? While, then, we acknowledge the powerful influence of the mind upon diseases, and the value of securing the confidence of our patients, and the importance of sustaining their hopes, let us be



careful that we do not confound effects purely mental, with the inherent properties of medicines — the power they possess over the vital actions, alike without the aid or the opposition of the mind.

Even if Homœopathy were superior in some diseases to Allopathy, it is by no means sufficient to furnish of itself all the remedies necessary to treat the several diseases to which mankind are subject. It is only in cases in which there is reaction, that it can be applied; for its medicines only profess to aggravate for a time the existing symptoms. Now, there are cases in which there is no reaction — others in which there is a total want of action — as in fainting.

Hahnemann in his examination of the different principles by which ordinary physicians are guided, condemns them for imitating the precepts of nature, calling her a blind goddess without reason or judgment — in short, little better than an old fool. But in giving medicines which produce symptoms analogous to those of the disease, and which increase the existing morbid symptoms, what does his own system suggest, but an imitation of this same blind goddess?

Again, in the numerous class of cases in which poisons are swallowed, or in which acrid substances are taken, the continuance of which in the system, would either be very detrimental, or even fatal, what is the Homœopathist to do? If one has taken a large quantity of arsenic, is he to give him infinitesimal doses of some medicine, which produces analogous symptoms? If one has been bitten by a mad dog, will he do nothing but trust to some remedy that produces analogous symptoms — or give him “a hair of the dog that bit him?”\*

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\* Homœopathy has several remedies for hydrophobia, probably as efficacious as the scores of specifics that have, in different ages, been extolled in that disease.



In these and several other cases, Homœopathy is confessedly insufficient. This, even Hahnemann acknowledges. Is not this, then, virtually acknowledging that there is more than one principle of action necessary in the treatment of diseases? It is further acknowledged in the fact, that almost every one of nearly three hundred specifics discovered by Homœopathy, has an antidote which is to be given in case the medicine is ill chosen, or produces violent symptoms. What are these violent symptoms but a disease artificially produced? If then these antidotes calm the morbid symptoms, is the fact not an acknowledgement, that there are other modes of curing or relieving diseases besides those which produce analogous symptoms? Several of the most intelligent disciples of Hahnemann, as Hartmann, Rummel, and Gueyrard recommend Allopathic or antipathic remedies where Homœopathic are inapplicable or insufficient. I have myself seen several instances in which much injury resulted from trusting exclusively to Homœopathic remedies. In one instance I have seen the sight of an eye almost entirely lost, with a deep ulcer on the cornea, while the Homœopathist paid no attention to the local affection, but for weeks continued to give internal remedies, to get at what he considered the root of the evil. But the eradication of the evil would have come rather too late, if the humors of the eye were in the meantime allowed to escape.\*

If Homœopathy be true, it may be denominated a "system of physic made easy to the meanest capacity;" for be it known that there are little books called repositories, like pocket dictionaries, in which a remedy is found for almost all human ills. For example, if one has a head-ache, let him look up that word, and under it he

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\* This is not the only instance either in physic or surgery in which I have witnessed the mischief done by allowing diseases to take their course, while attacking an imaginary cause.



will find the remedy adapted to it, whether it affect the forehead or the temple, the top of the head or the back, whether it occur in the daytime or in the night, before eating or after, &c.

The disconsolate swain can find a remedy for the torments of jealousy, the love-sick maiden for unrequited affection, and the bashful, blushing youth a cure for diffidence. It is not to be wondered at that such a system should commend itself to the favorable regard of the ladies, and it is still more natural, that the Homœopathists, or, as they denominate them, the Sugar Doctors, should be decided favorites with children. A system patronized by two such powerful interests, must not be despised or treated with contempt. We have endeavored to give a fair and candid exposition of the principles of the system, without favor or prejudice. As a chapter in the history of our eventful profession it deserves to be studied.

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Since our last meeting the Society has to deplore the loss of three of its honorary Members:— Dr. Eli Todd, of Connecticut, Dr. Alfred T. Magill, of the University of Virginia, and Philip Syng Physick, of the University of Pennsylvania, all of them men of the highest distinction in the profession. Dr. Physick was the last surviving pupil of the immortal John Hunter, and a fit representative of so distinguished a master. The Society will of course pay such tribute of respect to the memories of these distinguished men as is due to their high moral and professional characters.

In conclusion, permit me, before retiring from the honorable office of presiding over your deliberations, to return you my most cordial thanks for the indulgence, with which you have always been pleased to regard my imperfect efforts to discharge the duties imposed upon me as your President.



## NOTE.

In the foregoing discourse, I have endeavored to give a fair exposition of the Homœopathic system, and have adverted to some of the objections made to it, by physicians of other schools. I have also endeavored to show, that, notwithstanding these objections, it was still *possible*, that there might be some truth in the system, and that it was a proper subject for philosophical enquiry, and therefore only to be determined by careful observation, and cautious experiments. I have deemed it my duty to call the attention of the profession to it, not because I entertain any high opinion of it myself, but rather for the purpose of aiding in divesting it of the mystery, which quacks and pretenders have thrown around it.

The system may be practised by persons totally ignorant of the structure and functions of the human body, as well as the history and characteristic symptoms of diseases, as known in popular language, or in the nosological systems of the profession.

Homœopathy professes to know nothing of —

all feverous kinds,  
Convulsions, epilepsies, fierce catarrhs —

but of the component parts, or detached symptoms of which all diseases are made up. Possessed of one of the numerous *Repertorioms* or *Vade-Mecums*, and a case of Homœopathic medicine, there is nothing to prevent a Jew pedler, or a discharged *Valet de Chambre*, if possessed of (what is seldom wanting) a good share of modest assurance, from passing himself off as a distinguished professor of the new science. It is more than probable that the system is destined, for a while, to make some progress; it is therefore the duty of physicians, to make themselves acquainted with it, if for no other purpose, than to expose the impositions, practised in its name, upon a credulous community. Some flagrant instances we could name, but for the present forbear. In medicine, it unfortunately happens, that the ignorant, and the learned, the great vulgar, and the little vulgar, are equally prone to become the dupes of the most contemptible quacks.

I have been recently favored with a copy of a precious specimen of quackery, entitled 'The Homœopathist, or Domestic Physician.' I believe it to be substantially, if not literally, a translation from the German. It deals in the usual phraseology of empirics, in condemning mercury; and speaks of opium, emetics, cathartics, &c. as poisons, to be religiously avoided. We are gravely told that 'Homœopathic medicine is so prepared that it will help, when it is the right one, but it will not injure, should a mistake occur.' This is certainly a comfort to those



who take, as well as to those who give, the medicines; but does not accord with what is stated by other writers, or with some of the cases stated in the text.

The 'Domestic Physician' further says: — 'Let every remedy operate for the time indicated in the book, (the book refers to a medicine case containing 47 little phials marked No. 1, 2, 3, 4, &c. to 47) and should it afford some relief, give nothing, or, if the patient does not, or only slightly improve, give at most one (globule) of No. 30 diluted in a spoonful of water every day, or every hour, before you proceed to another remedy. In this manner you can never do harm.' The medicine will, most assuredly, do no harm, whatever the delay may. Having been favored, as one of the initiated, with a key to the names of the medicines contained in this mysterious chest, I had the curiosity to look up the name of this medicine, which might be taken once a day, or twenty-four times a day; and found it to be "*globulus sacchari*" — a globule of sugar! of the size of a small pin-head.

In another place, treating of cases of poisons or acrids requiring removal of the contents of the stomach, with characteristic dread of the ordinary emetics, he directs to 'chew some bread, and mix it with half a table spoonful of snuff (!) put this on his tongue till it excites vomiting and *let him drink tepid water upon it.*' If that will not do, he advises as a substitute, 'finely powdered mustard seed mixed with a tea spoonful of kitchen salt, in a tumbler full of water, to be drank off at once.' These may be pleasant prescriptions in Germany, but on this side of the Atlantic, except where no choice is left, a regular Allopathic emetic would be preferred. If the above remedies should all fail, further directions are given, which the curious can find in page 101 of the 'Homœopathist.' The mere reading of it, if the patient have any sensibility or delicacy left, ought to act as an emetic.

On the continent of Europe, we are informed, that in several Veterinary schools, the Homœopathic system has had a most happy effect ('*une heureuse application,*') in the diseases of *horses*, and we have no doubt it is equally valuable in the diseases of *asses*.

In conclusion, without believing a tenth part of the lofty pretensions of Homœopathy, we cannot altogether deny its merits as a system of medicine. If it be quackery, and if the medicines are altogether useless when given only in the doses recommended, so far as the medicines are concerned, it is harmless quackery. There is reason to believe, however, that many of the professed followers of the system, are in the habit of using the medicines of the ordinary physicians, where they can do so without detection. With some of the most powerful remedies, it is easy to deceive patients, as many of them are now prepared in such a manner as to be easily disguised in the sugar of milk, which constitutes the vehicle of the Homœopathic medicines.

If diseases can be removed by mere regimen, and the influence of



imagination, with safety to the patient, it is better and pleasanter to do so, than to disturb the system by powerful remedies. In the regular profession, there are two kinds of practitioners: those who trust to nature chiefly, and cure diseases *by expectation*, and those who dislodge diseases by storm. The community will gain something, if the latter should study Homœopathy, and the former understand the principles of Allopathy, more correctly. The two extremes are almost equally to be avoided; for a severe disease, unchecked, is more dangerous, in general, than the harsh practice, of a too energetic physician. In this, as in many other cases, the safest way is in the middle, between the two extremes.



