

A layman's experience of homœopathy / by John Gordon.

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A LAYMAN'S EXPERIENCE

OF

HOMŒOPATHY.

BY

JOHN GORDON,

OF PITLURG.

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PRICE ONE PENNY.  
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ABERDEEN:

D. WYLLIE AND SON.

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1868.

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“GIVE A DOG A BAD NAME AND HE WILL
KEEP IT.”

“So Homœopathy has got into the Hospital, and must be turned out,” it is said.

“What atrocious system is this which must be at once knocked on the head?” will be asked by many.

“Why is it that while almost every doctor has his plan of cure, the Homœopathic doctor is not to have his?”

To all this the only answer as yet vouchsafed is “We who have the power have decreed against Homœopathy, and therefore because we say it, the thing must not be.”

“Decreed against what?”

“Why, against Homœopathy!”

“But what is Homœopathy?”

“Oh, why, it is just Homœopathy—humbug and nonsense.”

“But if this ‘humbug’ and ‘nonsense’ cures people, why not let it cure?”

“Because it is quackery, and this we cannot authorize.”

“But are not many quack medicines, such as chlorodyne, &c., the composition of which is unknown, often prescribed by the Faculty?”——

I was told in the shop of Mr. Epps, the London Homœopathic Chemist, that people often came saying “I am not well, and there is no use going to the doctor, give me some of your humbug; I know it is all nonsense, but still it cured my friend, and I daresay it will do me good.”

Drs. HARVEY and SMITH say that the plan of curing people by smaller doses of medicine than the authorized dose must not be allowed.

“What! are not many medicines poison, and may not a doctor cure his patients with *small* doses of poison instead of *large* ones if he can?”

“Yes, outside the Infirmary, but among the poor people there, as they pay nothing for their advice, they must take the full quantity of poison our grandfathers thought necessary.”

“But,” again I ask, “what *is* the full quantity, for we hear some say that their practice is not to give *any* medicine?”

Now the upshot of the matter seems to be that the doctor who gives a great quantity of poison at a dose is a right doctor, and a doctor who disapproves of drugs and gives *very little* or *none* is a good doctor, but another doctor who gives *small* doses, *only on a certain fixed principle*, with the “bad name” of Homœopathy, which the condemning doctors seem *unable to define*, is to be turned out, even though he cures his patients and wins their confidence.

This is the contest presently going on in the Aberdeen Infirmary, and the Managers will have to decide this question at their approaching meeting. I trust that they will do so in a liberal spirit, and in an enlightened way, judging according to the evidence before them, so as to approve themselves in the sight of all right-thinking men,—that the County of Aberdeen, which a short time ago was held up for an example to all the country for its wisdom and energy in using successful, though unusual, means for defending itself from the ravages of the Cattle Plague, will not be found expelling a tried and most successful plan of arresting human disease,—that the city of Aberdeen, so liberal in other ways, will not be found illiberal only in this,—and that the city of the northern University devoted to the study and progress of science will not decree, that in the healing art we shall allow of no advancement.

The Managers of the Infirmary are informed by the complaining physicians "that great license is allowed and taken by medical men in these days," but, say they, "license to practise Homœopathy is not to be permitted." The two consulting physicians appeal to them as the guardians of the Infirmary to banish this system as hostile to its interests, but surely the interests of the Infirmary depend on its popularity; and the administration of small quantities of almost tasteless medicine will *in the end* be more popular than large doses of noxious drugs, and that which tends to the more successful treatment of disease will scarcely impair its usefulness. The successful treatment of disease under Homœopathy has been shown forth most triumphantly in Dr. Reith's pamphlet, and the mere statement that these statistics are not trustworthy, *unaccompanied by any attempt to refute*, will certainly not be listened to by any intelligent and honest mind.

Unbelief in Homœopathy as being the superior mode of medical treatment is, to my mind and according to my experience, synonymous with ignorance of Homœopathy. I have asked scores of people, both professional and non-professional, "do you believe in Homœopathy?" and in every instance of a negative reply, further enquiry has plainly proved that the cause of their unbelief has been their ignorance. One thing is quite certain that no one does or can understand Homœopathy so as to form a just opinion of its merits, who has not practically tried, or seen it tried. Here it is that medical men err. I once said to an eminent medical man in established practice, "I suppose you have never tried Homœopathy! If you would do so, I will lend you a case of remedies, and a book of directions how to administer them. Your own knowledge will guide as to the best cases to test its

powers. I will find you patients willing to be prescribed for, and you can judge at the end of a month as to its effects." "Oh," said he, "I know all about Homœopathy, and I never could be a Homœopathic doctor." He *thought* he knew all about Homœopathy,—but it was much in the same way as the infidel knows all about Christianity, that is by confounding its errors with itself, and reading more largely what is written against, than what is written in its favour; however, he had not and would not make himself acquainted with it *in the only way* in which he *could* know it, that is by experiment, and subsequently showed how little he really did know of it by having never heard of one of its most common and useful remedies.

I believe in Homœopathy because I have tried it, and found its beneficial efficacy in well nigh a hundred cases. When I first heard of it, like most, if not like all, I ridiculed the very idea of the thing, but when I considered that those among its adherents with whom I was acquainted were those who evidently judged for themselves, and formed their own opinions with independent minds, I thought it worth while to examine the subject for myself. Being ignorant of all theory of medicine, I could only test it by its practical results, which after all is the most satisfactory way; and as it does not require a man to be a shoemaker to judge whether a pair of boots be good or bad, so no more is it necessary to be a physician to form an opinion upon the relative merits of Homœopathy and Allopathy.

My first experiment was upon myself. For some derangement of the system, I applied to an Aberdeen physician, who prescribed Nux Vomica, at the same time greatly praising the efficacy of this drug. My experience was a certain amount of benefit, which was, however,

very temporary, and accompanied with uncomfortable sensations in other ways. Happening to find that Nux Vomica was also used in Homœopathy, I tried No. 3 dilution, and was at once struck with the superior benefit I derived from this preparation. So much in the way of *dose*, for what Drs. HARVEY and SMITH designate "the inert and negative system of Homœopathy." As to the *principle*, I believe that it was in this case as in many others, that the Allopathic physician was (ignorantly, we hope) practising Homœopathy, while at the same time abusing it. A still more remarkable instance of this occurred to a lady of a well-known family in Edinburgh. She had had small-pox, the dregs of which still remained in her system, either to kill or to make her a confirmed invalid for life. The whole Edinburgh Faculty exhausted their skill upon her, for not a medical man of any note was left untried. At length, the family being wealthy, they sent for Dr. JENNER, one of Her Majesty's physicians, from London, but he could do no more than they. "Nux Vomica," said they, "Nux Vomica," said he; but though they tried this in every form and way that ingenuity could devise, she was unable to take it. At length, one member of the family, thinking the case hopeless, and that the patient might as well die under "humbug" as die under Doctors, determined to give "humbug," in the shape of Homœopathy, a trial, and sent for Dr. HENDERSON, who at once said, "As to the remedy, I and those gentlemen are quite agreed, it is in the *dose* that their practice fails." He prescribed Nux Vomica, which dilution I cannot say, but the result was that she at once began to recover, and under Homœopathy has since become quite well.

My next case was that of my own child under Scarletina, in the course of which one night he became quite

delirious. We were in a relative's house at the time, and friends advised us to send for the doctor. "No," said I, "let us try what Aconite and Belladonna are able to do." And it was wonderful and delightful to see how these Homœopathic preparations subdued the fever and brought out the eruption.

Very soon after this, I had a case of Scrofula in a child. Its face, with the rest of its head and neck, were all covered with sores. The parents had applied to several doctors, but without success. The child began to amend from the very beginning under Homœopathy, and in a few months got quite well, and has remained so ever since, now some years ago.

I have also had experience in Chronic Pleurisy. A man of middle age, when I first brought Homœopathy to bear upon him, was considered by his family and neighbours to be dying. The medical man of the district had done what he could for him, but failed in a cure, and he was then following out the do-nothing system, under which the poor man felt himself gradually getting worse. At first, I mistook the nature of the disease, and treated him for a wrong complaint. This I discovered by the fact of my remedies having no effect at all, either for good or evil, which I fear can scarcely be said of Allopathic doses. At this point, I had him examined by another medical man, who told me the true character of his disease. He began to get better at once under proper Homœopathic treatment, and after a time was eventually cured.

Another case was also that of a man of middle age, who was considered to be dying by doctors and friends. Physicking and doing nothing had both been tried, but without success; the man was evidently sinking, and to all appearance it was only a question of hours. I procured the

doctor's leave to prescribe, who, I suppose, thought that if I did no good, I would at least do no harm. From the moment of Homœopathy coming in there was an improvement, and after a long time of illness, and much blundering on my part, Homœopathy brought him through. I consider this instance very strong evidence in favour of Homœopathy. I traced clearly afterwards all the back-goings that occurred to be the result of my departing, through ignorance both of medicine and anatomy, from the practice of true Homœopathy, and the success ultimately crowning the case to be due to Homœopathy—and to Homœopathy only. Does any other system of medicine combine equal probability of success when practised properly, and harmlessness in other ways when mistakes are made? Of course, the question of mistakes is only comparative;—the best physician may and does err, but happy is the patient of a Homœopathic physician, when he knows that mistakes thus made have none of those serious consequences which so often attend Allopathic practice.

Besides the cases I have mentioned, I have known of headaches and coughs of years' standing cured by Homœopathy, after the do-nothing system, and medicine in other ways, had been tried without success.

In one word, so superior is the system of Homœopathy to Allopathy, that I have little doubt but that, within the limits of an amateur's experience, disease will be treated far more satisfactorily by him with Homœopathy, than by the best physician practising Allopathy. Why is this? Is it that physicians are fools, or that a medical education goes for nothing? Certainly not; but we know that if a boy ten years of age be put into a pit to shovel sand with a spade his strength can wield, he will do far more work than the biggest navvy living, if he only has a walking-stick;—the

difference lies in the tool. So here the virtue is in the system.

I observe that the consulting physicians consider that Homœopathy has not the confidence of the public. Some years ago, I tried, in Edinburgh and in London, to hear of a Homœopathic doctor who would be willing to settle in Aberdeen, but without success. So generally were the public in the south, at least, converted to prefer the practice of Homœopathy, that many lucrative positions were standing open for properly qualified Homœopathic physicians. Should, therefore, the decision of the Managers of the Infirmary be to exclude Dr. REITH from his position there, and should this result in his having to leave Aberdeen, the loss will certainly not be his but ours.

It is very sad to see how persistently many, both of the public and profession, wilfully refuse to examine the claims of Homœopathy. There may be some excuse, though no justification, for that portion of the public who ridicule it without knowing what it is; but that any member of the profession should blackball it as they do, without having given it an honest trial, notwithstanding the testimony in its favour by hundreds of their brethren equally as honourable and as able as themselves, would seem incredible to one who did not know human nature. The fact is, that it is just as true in medicine as in religion, that men may have eyes and not see, ears and not hear, and from habits and education be so wedded to their old ways which they love, even though wrong, and *because* they are so, love the darkness which hides, better than the light which would expose, and thus it is that they will not come unto the light to have their evil ways made known. In saying this I do not wish to make out medical men to be sinners above other men; this is the character of man

as man, which each of us must in our own way guard against and conquer. We are all more ready to see one another's faults rather than our own, and the height of wisdom, according to one of the old Greek sages, was for a man to know himself. Let medical men then pause and think. It is of the nature of man to err. It is of the nature divine to confess and mend our errors. It is of the nature of the wicked one to defend and stick to them. That there is much error in medical practice, as presently carried on, medical men themselves admit, as abundantly shown by Dr. REITH. We often find one doctor speaking slightly of the practice of another elsewhere, who, in his locality, bears at least a reputation equal to his own, and who again in his turn speaks of his professional brother in much the same terms. All this shows the want of confidence that is felt by members of the profession in their own system and in one another. Thus they mete out the same judgment towards Homœopathy, and think that because *their* drugs do not cure, *no* drugs can; consequently that he is a charlatan who says they can, and that the greatest charlatan of all is the man who professes to cure with small quantities. Thus it happens that when any cases of cure under Homœopathy are brought forth they are at once rejected as proving nothing. "Oh it was nature that did it all, or it got well by itself;" anything rather than that Homœopathy should have the credit,—but let any such case occur under *their* management, and there is no difficulty then felt of giving the credit to their prescriptions. Lastly, faith and not medicine, some people think, affects the cure, but let any one try it on young children, cattle, or horses, in each of which cases there can of course be no faith, and where its effects, where properly administered, are perhaps more marked than in adult man; and

take along with these the cases, not a few, of *unbelieving* men and women who have nevertheless been benefited by it, *even in their unbelief*, any candid mind will be at once constrained to acknowledge that there is more in it than the theory of faith will explain.

Sometime ago, a letter appeared in the *Aberdeen Journal*, professing to give twelve reasons why Homœopathy should not be admitted into the Aberdeen Infirmary. I close this with the statement of a few facts in reply to these reasons, which have been sent me by a physician in the south.

“Though Homœopathy is not taught in any recognised school in this country, it is in America and Canada.

“That the judgment of College Physicians and Surgeons is not *infallible*, is shown by their expelling HARVEY for his discovery of the circulation of the blood, and their sending to Newgate Prison the physician who introduced Antimony, now one of the most generally used medicines.

“As long as thirty years ago, there were Homœopathic Dispensaries in Paris.

“The late Emperor of Russia was always treated Homœopathically; and a Ukase has just been published in St. Petersburg, officially sanctioning the formation of the Homœopathic Medical Society, and this was granted in spite of the active opposition of the Medical Council of the Empire.

“Notwithstanding the existence of the laws against Homœopathy in Austria, a private Hospital was opened in 1832, in the suburb of Gumpendorf, in Vienna, where the treatment was conducted entirely on the Homœopathic principle. On the approach of the Cholera epidemic of 1836, all the Hospitals in Vienna were ordered by the Government to be fitted up for the reception of patients

affected with that disease. Among the rest, the Homœopathic, Dr. FLEISCHMAN agreed to continue his charge on the condition that he was to be permitted to adhere to his Homœopathic plan of treatment. To this the Government assented, and two distinguished physicians (Allopathic*) were appointed to report on the nature of the cases taken into the Hospital, as well as to observe their course and treatment. Upon comparing the report made upon the treatment of Cholera in this Hospital with that of the same epidemic in the other Hospitals in Vienna at the same time, it appeared that, while two-thirds of those treated by Dr. FLEISCHMAN recovered, two-thirds of those treated by the ordinary methods in the other Hospitals died. This very extraordinary result caused Count KOLOWRATH, Minister of the Interior, to repeal the existing laws against the practice of Homœopathy in Austria.†

“ In an official report of the administration of the Hospital of Roubaix (Nord), Dr. LIAGRE states that, having received their permission to use Homœopathic medicines, he now submits their results :—

“ ‘ In the first six months of 1863, I had already, as I informed you in my letter of 9th July, modified my manner of treating certain diseases, principally slight affections, or other maladies of a more serious nature, for the cure of which I knew the ordinary treatment to be powerless. I trusted to the experience of a great number of medical men who, in Europe and America, had renounced Ancient Physic to adopt Homœopathy. In the second half of 1863, empowered by your authority, I did at the Hospital that which I was doing among my private patients—that is to

* One of these was led to adopt Homœopathic practice from his observations at this time.

† Austria: its Literary, Scientific, and Medical Institutions. By Sir W. R. Wilde. Dublin, 1843.

say, I treated almost all my patients by the new method, still, however, having recourse to some ordinary therapeutic means, as I did not wish to act at haphazard, and being unwilling to make any more experiments on my patients, either in my private practice or at the Hospital.'

“ ‘Still I placed the results of 1863 to the credit of Homœopathy, because, besides having had recourse to old-school remedies very rarely, I had already made great modifications in their employment, in reference both to the rule of *similia similibus curantur*, and to the dose given.

“ ‘But, in 1864, emboldened by the success obtained, and strengthened by increased experience, I treated all my patients by the new method, only employing some of the old remedies very occasionally, and those of the most innocent character in incurable cases, when it was necessary to give some “placebo” to satisfy the patient’s mind.’

“ He then submits two tables, the one showing the comparative mortality during nine years of his service at the Hospital of Roubaix, seven years from 1856 to 1862 inclusive with the ordinary treatment, during two, 1863 and 1864, with the new.

“ I need not give here the full and detailed tables, but briefly state Dr. LIAGRE’S conclusions.

“ ‘During 1863 and 1864, when I treated my patients Homœopathically, I lost six patients fewer in the one hundred than when treating them by the old method, which I did for seven consecutive years. It further appears that my patients remain a shorter time in the Hospital, and, consequently, they recover more rapidly. In the last three years, the number of my beds has not increased; there were forty at the end of 1861, and there has been a like number during 1862, 1863, and 1864, and you are aware, gentlemen, that my beds were always full. In 1862, I had

only three hundred and forty-eight admissions ; in 1863, I had four hundred and sixteen ; and in 1864, four hundred and seventy-nine. On comparing these three figures, it will be seen that in 1863 sixty-eight patients, and in 1864 one hundred and thirty patients, would be received into the Hospital, in consequence of the Homœopathic treatment, who would have been excluded for want of room had the old system of treatment been continued.*

“Thus, to resume,—fewer deaths, more recoveries, shorter convalescence, consequently shorter stay in the hospital, and more patients treated in the same number of beds. You will thus perceive that it is not without weighty reasons that I have decided, after thirty years of study and medical practice, to change my mode of treating my patients.’

“TESSIER for many years treated his patients in various hospitals, in Paris, homœopathically. As soon as the profession knew he had adopted this system as the basis of his medical treatment, the outcry against him became very violent. The Board of Administration caused an inquiry to be made into the matter, but, in spite of the urgent solicitations of the Hospital Staff, they declined interfering, *as they found that M. TESSIER’S patients recovered in larger numbers than those of the other members of the staff.* The following are abstracts from the Reports presented to the Secretary of State in Paris under whose jurisdiction Hospitals are placed :—

“Report of the patients treated in the Hôpital St. Marguerite, Paris, during 1849, 1850, and 1851, by homœopathic medicine in the wards of St. Benjamin and St. Anne, containing one hundred beds, and by the ordinary system in the wards of St. Augustin and St. Genevieve,

* Dr. Liagre, Roubaix, May 1, 1865.

containing ninety beds.—During these three years there were in the homœopathic wards three hundred and ninety-nine deaths, four thousand six hundred and sixty-three admissions, or 8·55 per cent. In the allopathic wards four hundred and eleven deaths, three thousand seven hundred and twenty-four admissions, or 11·03 per cent. During 1849 numerous Cholera patients were admitted.

“ ‘In these three years in the homœopathic wards containing one hundred beds, there were admitted four thousand six hundred and sixty-three men and women, or 46·63 patients for each bed.

“ ‘In the same time into the allopathic wards of ninety-nine beds, were admitted three thousand seven hundred and twenty-four patients, or 37·51 patients for each bed.’

“ Thus, in the same period of time, the patients in the homœopathic wards recovered so much faster that each bed was able to accommodate 9·12 more patients than those in the allopathic wards, or, in other words, with only one more bed, M. TESSIER could receive in the three years nine hundred and thirty-nine patients more than his allopathic colleagues. With such results his position was unassailable ; he was not only retained at St. Marguerite, but soon promoted to the Hospital Beaujon, and from there to the well-known Hospital for sick children. In the charge of this Hospital he died in 1862.”

With facts like these before us, the truth of which, I believe, none can gainsay, the bad name which Homœopathy still bears, assuredly exemplifies the truth of the homely proverb at the head of this paper. Let us hope that, as “ a word to the wise ” is sufficient, this may now be a thing of the past, and that brighter days and a better name are in store for Aberdeen and Homœopathy.