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THE PHILOSOPHY
OF
HOMŒOPATHY.

A NEW EXPOSITION OF A
GREAT TRUTH.

BY
WILLIAM H. HOLCOMBE, M.D.,
OF NEW ORLEANS.



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THE PHILOSOPHY
OF
HOMŒOPATHY.

WHO has not heard of Homœopathy? From the little German city of Leipsic, in which it originated, this great medical doctrine with its novel practice has diffused itself in a vast rippling circle over the civilized world. It has been by turns the subject of ridicule, contempt, persecution, inquiry, wonder, faith, and love. Were it to perish in a moment, the mark it has already made would constitute one of the most wonderful pages in the history of human opinion. As it is the child of nature and the sure medicine of the future, it is proper and becoming for its friends to press its investigation upon every intelligent mind.

Its real merit may be partially measured by the strength of the obstacles it has overcome. Every thing truly great has passed to its final triumph through long and strenuous opposition. Homœopathy was persecuted from its birth. Hahnemann, its founder, was driven from his country by a combination of the apothecaries. Physicians who accepted its doctrines were denounced, insulted, and ostracized by their professional brethren. There is no baser record of bigotry in the pages of ecclesiastical history than that which is to be found in

the conduct of "regular" medicine toward homœopathy. Every thing in the beginning was antagonistic ; the doctors ridiculed it ; the people distrusted it ; appearances were greatly against it. It was assailed by professional jokes and by doggerel poetry. The novelty of its principle, the smallness of its dose, the apparent extravagance of its claims, the dogmatism of its founder, the eccentricities of its early adherents, and the exactions of its practice, all conspired to retard its reception.

The only real enemies of homœopathy are the allopathic doctor, the apothecary, the undertaker, and the homœopathic quack. This last is far more dangerous to the integrity of the new school than his allopathic brother-fraud is to the old system, because it is supposed by the public that when they have tried *him* they have tried homœopathy, and the system is condemned in the individual.

The homœopathic quack is a cunning, adroit, unscrupulous fellow. His stock in trade is a box and book, an electrical machine, a large amount of "brass," and a limitless capacity for lying. He boasts of an immense business in order to get one. He has always some new remedy "just from Paris," or some new machine from Germany. He affects electricity, magnetism, surgery, and sometimes makes a specialty of eye-diseases and cancer. He has no education, but exhibits a little diploma, which was obtained by purchase, without his attending a single lecture, from some obscure and disreputable college. He blunders in the homœopathic practice ; makes a thousand mistakes, which his patients of course can not detect ; fails to cure chronic or difficult cases, makes mild ones severe

and short ones long, and, ignorant of the real resources of our art, experiments with every new thing. It is astonishing what "a run" such a pretender can get, when well introduced by some of his respectable victims. He is always exposed and repudiated at last, but not until he has given homœopathy a bad name and a poor record.

In spite of false friends and open enemies, homœopathy lives and grows. Having truth for its basis, its vitality is indestructible. Persecuted from one place, it springs up in another. Extinguished here, it ignites there. Inquirers become converts, and converts, missionaries. What it has already become, is only a prophecy of what it will be. Time has falsified the predictions of its enemies, but has not softened their bitterness. The London *Lancet* lately declared that the system of Hahnemann, which began in delusion, had perished in fraud! With the evidences of youth, power, progress, before their eyes, they unblushingly declare that homœopathy is declining, dying, or dead.

Homœopathy dead! Our esteemed friend, Dr. John F. Gray, of New York, still living, was the first American physician converted to the New School. Fifty years ago, he stood the only American physician on this vast continent representing the new truth. What has he lived to see? In the United States alone there are five thousand physicians, most of them graduates of the Old School, who practice the homœopathic system. There are eight colleges to teach, eight scientific journals to disseminate, and many dispensaries and hospitals to verify its doctrines.

The witnesses to the spread and influence of homœopathy are numerous. We will call a few of them to the stand.

Witness the conceded fact, that it is not the practice of the ignorant and the incapable, or of the fantastic and hypochondriacal, but that it absorbs and holds the lion's share, in proportion to numbers, of the strong-minded, intelligent, and travelled portion of society, which recognizes and treats homœopathic physicians as honorable and enlightened men and benefactors to humanity.

Witness the great effort made by hundreds of the most distinguished and aristocratic men in England to have homœopathy introduced into the army and navy of their country.

Witness the official recognition of homœopathy by the State of New York in the recent law, directing that applicants for licenses to practice in that State shall be examined upon homœopathy as well as upon allopathy by the State Commissioners.

Witness the splendid banquet given by the City Council of Boston to the members of the American Institute of Homœopathy, on the very spot where, eighteen years before, Oliver Wendell Holmes had predicted the speedy and utter extinction of the infinitesimal heresy.

Witness the great fair in Boston, given while the Massachusetts Allopathic Association was expelling the homœopathic members from its body; a fair which it took three of the largest halls in the city to hold, and which realized eighty thousand dollars for a homœopathic hospital.

Witness how the New York Ophthalmic Hospital, one of the largest and best-endowed eye and

ear hospitals in America, passed entirely from allopathic to homœopathic hands.

Witness the people of Michigan insisting, through their Legislature, that homœopathy should be taught to the students in the Medical Department of their State University.

Witness the Legislature of New York appropriating three hundred thousand dollars to the establishment of a homœopathic insane asylum.

Witness how the Common Council of St. Louis compelled the allopathic professors to admit homœopathic students to the hospital clinics on an equal footing with their own.

Witness the decision of the New York Judiciary, fining an allopathic physician for calling a homœopath a quack, declaring quackery to consist in conduct and not in creed, and assuring the protection of the law to honest and capable men when assailed by the malignant partisans of another school.

Witness the utter defeat which the allopathic faculty have sustained in several of the States, where they endeavored to get control of the educational and licensing systems, with a view to the oppression of those whom they are pleased to term "irregular" practitioners.

Witness the indignant remonstrances of the people at the removal of a commissioner of pensions from office by his allopathic superior, on the sole ground that he was a homœopathist; remonstrances so wide-spread and influential that they induced the Government of the United States to declare that no distinctions should be made on account of differences of medical opinion.

Witness how a life insurance company has been founded and prosperously conducted on the basis that human life is safer and longer under the homœopathic system than any other.

Does any rational man suppose that all of this organized progress, this hold upon the confidence and respect of a most intelligent public, is based upon nothing? Can such an imposing and durable superstructure be reared upon sugar pills, water medicine, faith, imagination, diet, delusion, etc., etc.? In this practical age, men do not continue for fifty years to give their confidence, their love, their support, their money, their lives, to imaginary objects. If homœopathy had been the fraud or the delusion it has been said to be, it would long ago have perished and passed away under the terrible cross-fire of its enemies. It is not dead, nor dying, nor even sick; but has been decreed by Divine Providence to be perpetual. It has gained its high position by its merits and its conquests, and it will retain it by its continued beneficent progress.

See what it has already accomplished!

It has discovered a new law of nature, which has introduced light, order, beauty, and efficiency into the theory and the practice of medicine.

It has given a new and vast impetus to the study of the true action of drugs, by experimentation with them on the healthy system.

It has thus organized, we might almost say created, a new "*Materia Medica*"—a glorious monument of learning, industry, and self-sacrifice.

It has rendered pathology the highest service by making that great branch of medical science truly practical.

It has saved thousands of cases from surgical operations, and has introduced new comfort and safety into the lying-in room of woman.

It has been a blessing to children and to mothers incalculable.

It has cured thousands of cases of chronic disease beyond the reach of allopathic art, and has treated all acute affections with admirable success.

It has been found as useful in the diseases of animals as of men, and many veterinary institutions have been established for its practice.

It has shortened the average duration of disease, diminished the expense of treatment, economized the vital resources of the patient, and delivered its friends from the frequently baneful and long-lasting effects of large doses of medicine.

It has gradually and silently modified the theory and practice of allopathy, until some of the best text-books of that school are saturated with homœopathic ideas.

It has met all the great epidemics, and ever proved itself superior to the Old School. When people say that the medicines are too weak to trust in severe cases, they do not remember, or do not know, that the great triumphs of homœopathy have always been effected in the most malignant class of diseases, such as cholera, scarlet-fever, yellow-fever, croup, erysipelas, dysentery, diphtheria, etc., etc. The fearful epidemics of cholera in 1848-9, etc., gave the most astonishing impetus to homœopathy; and its special superiority in yellow-fever has, more than any thing else, established it on a permanent basis in the Southern States.

The homœopathic law of cure—"similia similibus curantur"—"like cures like"—is the vivifying principle of scientific medicine, the grand thought which is to revolutionize the medical world. It is worth studying, for it is the open door for the healing and the physical regeneration of mankind. I think I can explain what homœopathy is; what it really professes to be and to do; its essential nature and necessary limitations—without a particle of theorizing, in a plain, practical, and convincing manner.

In the first place, homœopathy is not a new and perfect science of medicine. It is no new gospel, no new revelation to the medical world. It is not science, but a part of it; it is not medicine, but a grand reform in one of its departments. It has no new anatomy or physiology, or chemistry or pathology. It has no new surgery or obstetrics, although it has made great improvements in the treatment of surgical and obstetrical cases. It does not reject the accumulated experience of ages, but is its last-born and healthiest child. It is not "the grave of scientific medicine," but its cradle. It holds fast to all that is good and useful in the storehouses of the past.

Secondly, there are many measures (not medicines) valuable or indispensable in the treatment of disease. For instance, hygiene is a most important branch of medicine, relating to the scientific regulation of temperature, light, air, water, food, exercise, habits, and the various influences which modify our mental and moral life. There, too, is the vast realm of hydropathy, a therapeutic world in itself, involving the operation of hot, tepid, and

cold water, of ice, steam, vapor, local and general bathing, packing, etc., etc. Electricity also, galvanism, magnetism, mesmerism, kinesipathy, and chrono-thermalism, are no doubt very valuable in some forms of disease. All those are not homœopathy. They neither exclude it nor are excluded by it. They constitute a collateral department of the healing art, in the most friendly alliance with the homœopathic administration of drugs.

Thirdly, homœopathy does not interfere with the use of *mechanical* measures, nor with the use of drugs for mechanical purposes. Vomiting may expel a poison from the stomach, a gall-stone from the biliary-ducts, or a false membrane from the windpipe. Ergot to arrest hemorrhage, belladonna to dilate the pupils, chloroform to relax the muscles, sulphur to kill the itch insect, vermifuges to destroy and expel worms, and in certain cases astringents, diluents, emollients, and protectives (such as collodion) are examples of drugs being used to bring about certain mechanical ends, all admissible in the strictest homœopathic practice. Injections, and even purgatives, to overcome great intestinal torpor, are simply mechanical agents.

Fourthly, there are certain *chemical* means of cure, operating according to the laws of inorganic or organic chemistry. The antidotes for many poisons are used on this principle, and, of course, in the doses found necessary by experiment—a certain quantity of antidote being required to neutralize a certain quantity of poison: quinine as an antidote to the malarial poison no doubt acts in this manner. Acids or alkalies for excess of alkalinity or acidity in the gastro-intestinal or urinary secretions; vege-

table acids for scurvy; alkalies to dissolve inspissated mucus in some bronchial affections; certain remedies which modify the chemical state of the blood (iron for instance); phosphate of lime when deficient in the bones; chlorine, charcoal, lime, carbolic acid, etc., to arrest or prevent putridity; all are examples of chemical therapeutics. This is not homœopathy, neither is it allopathy; it is vital chemistry, operating by laws of its own, and equally free to the advocates of any system of medicine.

Having thus briefly surveyed those departments of practice in which homœopathy, as such, does not profess to operate, we can approach more understandingly to the far greater and more important field in which it gives us a great natural law of cure. The only dispute between the two schools is about the vital or dynamic action of drugs and their application in the cure of disease. What is a medicine? Do you know that every medicine, weak or strong, is a *poison* which would make a well man sick? The simple dose of rhubarb, which overcomes constipation, would give a morbid diarrhœa to a case not constipated. The opium which is given to make a man with delirium tremens sleep refreshingly, would congest the brain of a healthy person, and perhaps destroy life. Think the matter over thoroughly, and you will find that *every drug is essentially a poison*, and that cures are effected by the skilful use of its poisonous or disease-producing properties.

Fix the fact in your own mind and teach it to others, that drugs have, of themselves, no healing, mollifying, or life-giving power, but, on the con-

trary, that they irritate, benumb, or derange all the vital functions. They produce *artificial diseases*, and the artificial disease so produced is the real medium or agent of the cure.

Now, you can see the fundamental difference between the two systems of medicine. They both use drugs or poisons to produce artificial, morbid states, and the only question is, where shall they be produced, and to what extent? The allopath, in accordance with his theories of disease and its cure, employs the poisonous properties of drugs to produce certain physiological perturbations, vomiting, purging, sweating, increased or diminished secretions, narcosis, depletion, stimulation, etc., etc., which he believes will effect his object. His general idea is to produce a state *opposite* to that already existing. The homœopath repudiates all this theory and practice, and affirms that diseases are cured by those drugs in very small doses, which produce *similar* diseases when administered in strong doses to the healthy man.

Both parties use the same remedies, but on opposite principles, and of course in antipodal doses. One gives mercury to purge; the other gives mercury in small doses to cure a bilious diarrhœa, for the very reason that in a large dose it produces one. The situation, extent, and character of the artificial disease produced by the chosen drug, are the only mooted points. A *slight, similar*, morbid impression *in* the diseased spot is the simple and beautiful law of homœopathy. The allopath, having no therapeutic law, nothing but his crude and often contradictory theories of disease to guide him, produces very strong morbid impressions,

sometimes similar and sometimes dissimilar ; sometimes in the diseased organ, sometimes in distant organs ; often in both. Sometimes one of his medicines produces one set of these symptoms, while another produces the other. Sometimes a second medicine is required to undo what he had effected by the first. He pulls down, and then builds up again. Now he blows hot, now cold, and so on. In fact, his philosophy is a labyrinth, and his practice a chaos.

A natural disease is best cured by producing a similar artificial disease in the same parts and tissues, which can only be done by drugs which produce similar symptoms. This is the fundamental idea of homœopathy, its true basis, its corner-stone, its only essential element. All other questions of large or small doses, of pellets or tinctures, of dynamizations, of what Hahnemann said, of what this or that disciple said or did, of imagination, or diet, or nature, or imposture, etc.—all these questions, and many other such, have no logical bearing on the question, and are altogether collateral and impertinent. No matter what solution they receive, homœopathy remains intact, vital, indestructible, and sure to be the medicine of the future, unless you overturn this grand pedestal, this great natural and vital law on which it has been erected.

We naturally propose to ourselves an explanation of every thing we see. We love to understand causes. Alas ! how seldom are we gratified ! Life and all its phenomena is a world of mystery about whose causes we know nothing. The apple falls to the ground, but we can not discover the cause

of the gravitation. The needle trembles to the pole, but we can not tell why iron is magnetic. We can assign no adequate reason for any one of the thousand wonders of chemical affinity. That "like cures like" is as fixed a fact as any thing in physics. *Why* or *how* it cures may never be fully known. There are, however, some curious phenomena in physical science which are at least remarkably suggestive. Two rays of light, similar to, but not identical with, each other, produce darkness when they come together. Two similar waves of sound, or atmospheric undulation, produce silence. Two similar but not identical waves of water are both brought to a standstill. The same law may operate in the nervous system of man, in his blood, and in the infinitesimal chemical changes which occur every moment in the microscopic tissues of his body; so that one set of movements or changes started by the morbid cause may be neutralized by the similar set of movements or changes inaugurated by the homœopathic drug.

The truth of the homœopathic law has been partially recognized by the allopathic school from the time of Hippocrates to the present. I will quote three instances of it from distinguished modern sources :

"When Hahnemann promulgated his therapeutic formula, '*similia similibus curantur*,' he supported his assertions by citations from the practice of the most illustrious physicians. There is every proof that local inflammations are frequently cured by the direct application of irritants which cause a similar inflammation, the artificial irritation sub-

stituting itself for the primitive one."—*Trousseau et Pidoux, Traité de Thérapeutique, Tome 1, p. 470.*

"Upon this ground we are disposed to suggest the use of strychnine in tetanus; not that we have become followers of Hahnemann, but that it is a simple and undeniable fact that disorders are occasionally removed by remedies which have the power of producing similar affections."—*Dr. Symonds, Cyclopædia of Practical Medicine, Vol. 4, p. 375.*

"The same medicine may produce opposite effects in health and disease. Thus, cayenne pepper, which produces in the healthy fauces, redness and burning pain, acts as a sedative in the sore-throat of scarlet fever. A concentrated solution of acetate of lead acts as an irritant, while the same solution, very much diluted, will act as a sedative."—*Geo. B. Wood's Therapeutics, Vol. 1, p. 32.*

This teaching admits the homœopathic law, and, pushed to its logical issue, leads to all the truths and blessings of homœopathy. Arsenic, concentrated, will inflame the stomach; diluted, will cure gastritis. Colocynth, concentrated, will gripe and purge; diluted, will relieve the same symptoms. Cantharides, concentrated, will produce strangury; diluted, will cure it. Belladonna, concentrated, will congest the brain; diluted, will relieve a brain already congested; and so on through the whole materia medica. The *principle* being fully admitted, there is nothing to be done but to study the action of drugs on the healthy man, and to apply them to similar cases in very small doses, and homœopathy is the result.

The most obvious illustration of homœopathy is

found in the common treatment of those local diseases which are within reach of our hands and instruments. The use of caustic or irritant eye-washes to inflamed eyes, of nitrate of silver to sore throats or to ulcerated surfaces anywhere, and the application of blisters, caustics, iodine, etc., to ulcers, erysipelas, and other cutaneous affections, are examples in point. Whatever be the explanation, the fact is, that a similar artificial disease has been induced in the diseased tissues, and a cure has resulted.

By an easy and natural step we now pass from this point to another, which is the most important in the whole exposition. *Homœopathic medicine is but an extension to the invisible interior of the body of the therapeutic principle which the Old School finds so efficient in the treatment of local diseases within our reach.* There is no reason why inflammation of the brain, liver, stomach, heart, lungs, spinal cord, bones, or any deep-seated organ or tissue, should not be as readily modified and cured by direct irritants, as similar morbid states in the capillary system of the eye, the throat, or the skin. If the allopathists could have cauterized the brain, lungs, liver, etc., they would have done so long ago, and, reasoning from analogy, with every prospect of success. This artificial irritation the homœopath is able to throw upon every organ, tissue, and nerve of the body, where he pleases, and to the exact degree that he pleases. How can that be done?

Every drug has specific affinities for certain organs and tissues of the human system. This is a most wonderful and inexplicable fact; and by studying these affinities, we can produce artificial

diseases in any given point of the body. What nitrate of silver is to the throat or eye, belladonna is to the brain, cantharides to the kidney, arsenic to the stomach, tartar emetic to the lungs, calomel to the liver, nux vomica to the spinal cord, etc., etc. The only way to get at these invaluable facts is, as before stated, to experiment upon healthy men with medicinal agents, and to collect, compare, and analyze the symptoms so produced. This is the source of the homœopathic materia medica, a vast monument of industry, learning, and self-sacrifice, and of more *practical use* to mankind than all the brilliant discoveries of the age.

Understanding what homœopathy is, we can easily see the necessary and natural limitations it encounters. A homœopath can not always practise homœopathy, and he should therefore be acquainted with every system of medicine. Why can he not always practise homœopathy? Because homœopathy only professes to cure those morbid states which we can imitate on the healthy body. When we have discovered drugs which produce distinctly the symptoms of cancer, tubercle, hydrophobia, Bright's disease, aneurism, epilepsy, ossification of the heart, etc., we can treat them homœopathically with success, but not before. We can greatly alleviate the symptoms of all incurable diseases, the fevers, the spasms, pains, diarrhœas, dropsies, etc.; but we can not treat them homœopathically throughout, because we have not perfected our materia medica so as to operate according to our own law.

From this it appears that homœopathy is not a separate system of medicine, complete in itself,

but a reform in one department only, therapeutics—a reform covering three fourths of the entire field of practice, and effected by the discovery of a fixed law of cure, and the construction of a new materia medica.

Seeing what homœopathy is, we can now frame a clear definition of the homœopathic physician: one who uses the surgical, obstetrical, mechanical, and chemical measures of the Old School; who, in the vital or dynamic sphere, is guided by the homœopathic law; and who, beyond its natural and necessary limitations, is an empiric and eclectic in the most liberal and enlightened sense of those words. He floats the free flag of science, with his beloved homœopathy in the central field, and room for every good thing in the borders. He is a *physician* in the highest and noblest sense of the word.

“Oh! the principle may be all right,” chuckles the unbeliever, “but the dose!—what about the dose?”

The small dose, the apparently inadequate means to effect the end in view, is certainly the greatest obstacle to the spread of homœopathy. The story of Johnny Smith eating up all the sugar pellets in his mother's box, without injury to himself, is the standard argument of the allopaths against the New School; and as it still has some weight with the public who have not *tried* homœopathy, it is worth while to explain it. Homœopathic remedies, acting on the very part diseased, which is rendered far more sensitive by disease, have to be used in exceedingly small doses; doses too small to produce the least effect upon the healthy system. Utterly

powerless on the healthy, they are exceedingly active in neutralizing the morbid elements in the sick. The principle of homœopathy is independent of the dose. He who gives an ounce of epsom salts in a case of diarrhœa, prescribes homœopathically just as truly as if he gave the same substance in the hundred millionth of a grain. The best dose can only be adjusted by observation and experiment. Doses too small to be reached by our ordinary methods of analysis, and entirely harmless to the healthy system, have certainly been found most curative in disease. In this case, as in many others, speaking allegorically, "the still, small voice" is far more potent than the whirlwind or the fire.

Several general truths may be mentioned as tending to make the small dose of homœopathy more credible or plausible to those who demand something more than the simple trial of it in disease.

All the great operations of nature, those of heat, light, chemical action, etc., and those also of the human frame, especially the wonderful modifications of the nerve-fluid and the physio-chemical changes of nutrition, are carried on by microscopic, atomic, and infinitesimal movements entirely transcending our imagination.

Our medicines, vastly attenuated by trituration and succussion, present an immeasurably greater surface for action, becoming thereby more subtle, penetrating, and permeating, so that they effect a more perfect contact with the deepest recesses of the vital tissues, where the atomic, microscopic, and infinitesimal operations of nature are taking place. The crude substances of allopathy never

get into these secret recesses of vitality, any more than a steamship can get from the sea into the little meadow-streams or mountain-rills.

There are many natural agencies, malaria, effluvia, etc., which can not be seen, felt, weighed, or analyzed by man, which yet produce the most powerful morbid impressions on the system; so gradually and insensibly, too, that man at the time is wholly unconscious of their action. It is not unreasonable to suppose that homœopathic drugs may act in a similar manner—nothing being felt by the patient during the gradual removal of the disease.

The modern discoveries in physical science help us not only to realize the existence and power of infinitesimal atoms of medicine, but they give us some intimation of how they act. It is conceded that all the operations of nature, the beginnings of life, take place on an infinitesimal scale. Light causes the chemical changes in the ultimate cells which determine the organization of plants. Now, the wave-length of each ray of light is many millionths of an inch, and thousands of millions of vibrations of that wave of light occur in a single second. Each individual vibration of that infinitesimal wave contributes its share to the grand result, the growth and forms of the vegetable kingdom. Not one vibration could be changed or lost without affecting the first steps of organization, and thereby modifying the whole final issue. From this fact we easily pass to the corresponding idea, that the homœopathic atom may start or excite in the diseased ultimate molecule infinitesimal changes of nutrition, which shall quietly and im-

perceptibly effect organic movements of which we see only the beneficent result.

The greatest enemy to homœopathy is the sensualistic spirit of the age; not only that spirit which believes in nothing but *matter*, but that still grosser spirit which does not believe in matter itself, unless it can be demonstrated to the very feeble senses of man. Whatever transcends the range of the senses is regarded by that class of minds as something unreal, intangible, visionary, or spiritual. The antidote to this narrow state of thought is the spirit of free inquiry without prejudice, the habit and love of experiment, and the study of the natural sciences. These will familiarize the public mind with the wonderful revelations made by the microscope, the spectroscope, and all the beautiful instruments which detect, measure, and analyze the invisible and imponderable forces of nature. In proportion as this is done, will homœopathy become conceivable and credible to the popular thought, and the curative power or force of the homœopathic globule will rank with the most ethereal and potent energies which are secretly at work in all natural phenomena.

Such, my friendly reader, is Homœopathy. Discard your prejudices; think and act for yourself; study it; try it.

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