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BEFORE THE NEW YORK HOMŒOPATHIC PHYSICIANS' SOCIETY,

DEC. 3, 1845, BY B. F. JOSLIN, M. D., PRESIDENT.

(From the American Journal of Homœopathy, No. 5.)

GENTLEMEN:—Whilst I highly prize the unexpected honor which your vote has conferred it is with diffidence that I undertake to discharge the duties it has imposed. I rely, however, upon your kind co-operation for the preservation of order, and upon your indulgence in regard to unintentional errors to which I may be liable in matters of form.

Gentlemen, I congratulate you and myself, that the composition and objects of this Society—and I may almost say the essential character of a genuine Homœopathic physician, are such as to promote a spontaneous tendency towards order, harmony and friendship. Even without the evidence of actual observation, I should consider it highly probable, that regularly and thoroughly educated physicians, embracing Homœopathy and associating for its advancement, would in general, in the present early stage of the reformation, resemble each other in many important particulars—would be men possessed of sound minds, and actuated by pure and lofty motives, men who prefer facts to hypotheses, and the interests of truth and humanity to their own temporary advancement. Though the Homœopathic physician, before

he can be admitted into this Society, is required to possess as thorough knowledge of every branch of medical science as the most respectable portion of his Allopathic brethren, and although every member of this Society has actually gone through a regular course of Allopathic study, under Allopathic professors, and has been by Allopathic boards of examiners, declared duly qualified to practice medicine, he is now proscribed for the knowledge which he has superadded. However highly the Homœopathic physician may be respected for his probity, his learning, and the general strength and soundness of his intellect, yet as a Homœopathist he is regarded by the mass of the community as a kind of monomaniac, and is viewed with suspicion and jealousy, if not contempt, by a majority of those to whom the public look up as the leaders of medical fashion, and the expounders of medical doctrine. Under such circumstances, it is not to be expected that the ranks of Homœopathy are to be filled from among the timid, the ambitious, the avaricious, the devotees to medical fashion or the aspirants to medical honor.

The converts to the new doctrine are not to be sought among undergraduates still dependent on the patronage of professors, nor among newly-fledged licentiates still fortified against new truth by undue reverence for the dogmas of the schools, and inexperienced in their practical fallacy at the bed-side of the patient. This must be the general rule. If any have been exceptions, they are worthy of peculiar honor, as men whose intellectual powers and moral qualities have been such as to elevate them above the unfavorable influences by which they were surrounded.

There is another class with whose countenance and presence our fraternity can rarely hope to be honored. They are those who have arrived at that age which thinks and acts from habit, and recoils from a new and laborious investigation, and a total revolution of their theories and practice. Upon the more aged specimens of this class I look with mingled feelings of respect, sympathy and regret. They have sincerely aimed to do their duty and promote the welfare of man under the best lights formerly accessible. That they were born a few years too early for this glorious and beneficent reformation, is their misfortune, not their fault. It is now too late even for their friends and the friends of truth to desire their conversion, which might involve personal sacrifices transcending the amount of public good achieved by their future labors. Such individuals, however, are not numerous in our laborious and self-sacrificing profession, in which an unavoidable neglect of regimen, occasioned by imperative and unreasonable calls, induces disease, and cuts off a great majority of our fellow laborers in the midst of their useful career.

There is another class of unbelievers which, from the nature of the case, must embrace some of the foregoing class. It consists of those who are regarded as eminent in the medical profession. They are rich in honors and emoluments. Their circumstances naturally give them a strong bias against innovation. They apprehend that a medical revolution would check their brilliant career, and from their towering elevation, suddenly degrade them to the level of second-rate practitioners. Some among them may not only have attained wealth and popularity by practice, but honorable and influential posts as teachers of medicine, and, what is still more unfavorable to conversion—should their love of truth be less active than their self-esteem and love of approbation—some of them

may "have written a book," and stereotyped their opinions. To this whole class, their admiring pupils direct our attention, and exultingly enquire, "Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on him?" Have the leading and most learned men of the profession been converted by Hahnemann? Then turning to his followers, they exclaim with contempt, "But this people who knoweth not the law are cursed."

One object in alluding to these circumstances has been to show, that one of their natural tendencies would be to promote homogeneity and fellowship in our association. The tendency, in the present stage of the reformation, is to the union of materials considerably analogous in their nature and habitudes. This is an agreeable feature, and relieves me from much that might, in a corresponding position, be disagreeable and embarrassing in a society composed of materials as heterogeneous and discordant as some which were constituted by the laws of the State of New York, and in which all classes of licensed practitioners—ourselves included—were promiscuously and compulsorily assembled.

I have illustrated somewhat negatively the character of Homœopathic believers, so far as it depends on a few external circumstances unfavorable to the reception of the new truth. Conversion requires either the absence of these circumstances, or else an intellectual and moral character capable of resisting their influence.

There are other influences arising from the inherent nature of the doctrine and of the evidence adduced in its support. These favor or oppose its reception according to the mental character, and the previous training in observation and induction.

I shall allude only to the inductive character of Homœopathy, and its analogy in this respect to the physical sciences as now cultivated, and to Christianity as first promulgated. Since the time of Bacon, the inductive method, which founds science on facts instead of assumptions, has won the respect of the scientific world, and been adopted as the paramount guide in physical investigations. Since philosophers have agreed to exercise first the perceptive and then the reasoning powers,—first to collect fact, then and thence to frame theories—there has been a harmony in their co-operation, and a fruitful harvest resulting from their labors, both comparatively unknown to the persons

and times of the sophists and schoolmen, engaged in rearing specious structures on the basis of imagined data.

In regard to method of cultivation and certainty of conclusions, the new system of medicine approaches the most exact of those sciences which relate to inorganic nature. A class of facts obtained from healthy persons expresses the morbid properties of each article of our *Materia Medica*; another class of facts obtained from the sick expresses the therapeutic properties of the same agents; a comparison of the two classes establishes as a universal law, "Like are cured by like," "*similia similibus curantur*." Again, the facts of each individual case of disease determine the remedy to be selected in accordance with this law.

Let not the student of inorganic nature presume that our alleged facts are shadowy and unreal, because they frequently relate to what is immaterial—to mere sensations. There is nothing of which our knowledge is more direct and certain, than our knowledge of our own sensations. There is no such thing as an imaginary pain, or any imaginary sensation in the strict and elementary sense of the word. If a man believes that he has a certain pain, he has it; if he believes himself bilious, it may be a mistake. The reality of the sensation he knows; the hypothesis respecting his pathological condition he merely believes. The Homœopathic physician generally asks for no clinical facts but those to which the patient could testify in a court of justice. If a man commences the statement of his present condition with "I believe," you are almost sure that he is about to state an hypothesis, not a fact.

Of all the physical sciences, that of therapeutics has been slowest in adopting the inductive method. Hahnemann was the first who made well-ascertained facts the essential basis of the whole therapeutic fabric; the first indeed to discover a law which renders all the phenomena of abnormal action available in practice. His is the only known law which makes every morbid phenomenon observable in the living body subservient to the restoration of health. It is this availableness of the facts which stimulates the true physician to examine so minutely the active and living physiognomy of disease, the symptoms.

The medical profession is divided into two parties which have not joined issue on the main point. One party asserts, as the result of observation and experience, that the Homœopa-

thic agents are efficient. Does the other assert that they are not? No such thing. It merely asserts that they *ought* not to be efficient. The one reasons from observed facts, the other from the supposed nature of things. Here is no issue. What must be the opinion of an impartial jury, when all the witnesses on one side testify that the remedies are efficient, whilst all on the other side testify that they have not tested their efficacy?

The obstacles to belief which I formerly enumerated, operate on certain classes. But it is not selfishness, nor habit, nor blind and obstinate prejudice in its grosser form, which chiefly prevents the general adoption of the new method. In view of the seeming *a priori* improbabilities of Homœopathy, and their own want of the knowledge requisite to make any safe and satisfactory trials of the system on the sick—a circumstance which vitiates the testimony of those few who profess to have tried the system without success—the majority of physicians either resolve to reject it forever, or else procrastinate its trial from year to year, for want of leisure to attain the preliminary knowledge requisite for its practical examination. In the mean time, they have more confidence in their own reason than in other people's observations, on a subject in relation to which there appears to be so many sources of illusion.

Most of these difficulties might be obviated by a method of experimentation, different from that ordinarily pursued. I am confident that, should every physician make suitable trial of the Homœopathic attenuations on himself when in his usual health, the rapid and general conversion of the profession would be inevitable. Let him carefully observe and minutely record the new symptoms experienced after each dose, and then after some days have elapsed, compare this list with the symptoms of the same remedy as recorded in the *Materia Medica*, or in the first volume of *Jahr's Manual*, and he will probably observe such a coincidence as will induce him to pursue the investigation. If he makes a similar examination of the same minute doses of other Homœopathic remedies after suitable intervals, he will, after the trial of a few remedies, find the correspondence between his own and the printed records so striking, as to convince him of the truth of the latter. The effects will be more striking in proportion to the adaptation of the medicine to the particular susceptibilities of

x but this is not true, as they has been tried in Germany  
x France thoroughly and it is condemned

the individual. Hence some previous study or the advice of a scientific Homœopathist, will be useful in making the selection.

Experiments made in the above manner, prove not only the truth of our *Materia Medica*, but the power of the small doses and attenuations, that most obnoxious portion of the Homœopathic creed. This doctrine, like other parts of Homœopathy, is simply a matter of induction. It may, as I have illustrated, be proved by our own sensations. Hahnemann was led to it by pure experience, and not by any speculative views. The disciples of Hahnemann have been anathematized for their confidence in facts.

Similar treatment had been long since experienced by the disciples of One whom we may reverently call a physician, inasmuch as the record of his cures forms no inconsiderable portion of his history. Whilst one of his objects was the restoration of health—man's highest physical interest—another was to generate belief in truth, by means of facts cognizable by the senses.

Christianity was presented to the world in the shape of facts. It was a grand exhibition of the inductive method of philosophy. Now we may also claim for Homœopathy an inductive character, and for its believers a rational regard for the evidence of their senses.

Gentlemen, in making this comparison, I apprehend from you no unfair criticism. The comparison has no reference to the relative importance of the two subjects, and makes no irreverent use of sacred things. When Archbishop Whateley, in order to confound the sceptics of his day, institutes a tacit but elaborate comparison between the life of Napoleon and that of Christ, and between the disbelievers of the two biographies, or when the great Teacher himself compares the kingdom of heaven to "leaven which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal," no intelligent and candid reader considers the more sacred subject degraded, or suspects any design to compare the two in regard to their importance, dignity or sanctity. A miraculous cure requires supernatural agency, and in this respect is unlike all others. But the spectator of this phenomenon, in order that he may be convinced of its reality, requires only the honest exercise of his perceptive and reflective powers. In this respect, a miracle agrees with every other phenomenon; it is addressed to man's natural powers. The case of second-hand evidence is similar. If any phenomenon is recorded by

persons who observed, or any sensation by persons who experienced it, I may endeavor to weigh the characters and circumstances of the witnesses, and may admit or reject their testimony according to the evidence thus obtained. If the phenomenon is strange and wonderful, if it is even miraculous, I still use my natural powers in examining the testimony.

In pursuing the inductive method, by which the physical sciences are built up, the philosopher no longer inquires what the facts should be, but what they are. He collects them by his own observations and experiments, or obtains them from competent and credible observers, and employs facts as the only proper basis of his generalizations. If any facts, however new and strange, be reported by credible witnesses, he endeavors to place himself in a situation to observe them. If this be impracticable, he will not array his preconceived opinions against unexceptionable testimony.

Such has been the course pursued by the disciples of Bacon, and also by the disciples of a still greater Master. These appealed to facts as the basis of belief, and warned their brethren against the prevalent "philosophy," which was far from being inductive. The Greeks sought "after wisdom," after plausible hypotheses, and therefore rejected the facts, and the true wisdom. The sophists, the self-styled philosophers, held the same position as those medical sceptics of our day who array a priori argument, barely plausible, against facts well attested. A flippant speaker or writer may make the Homœopathic doctrine appear ridiculous to minds as superficial as his own; a thorough examination, by men really scientific and profound, will demonstrate its consistency with true reason. This greatest of all medical truths shrinks not from the ordeal of speculative investigation; yet this was not its origin in the mind of its immortal discoverer, nor has this been the principal instrument in its propagation. It appeals to the test of experiment—to results susceptible of verification by every physician and philosopher, who is anxious to arrive at a correct estimate of a discovery, the most important ever made in the whole range of the medical and physical sciences.