

## WAS HAHNEMANN A NOSTRUM-VENDOR? A QUESTION OF FACT.

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IN a little book recently published by me on *Medicine and Medical Education*, I had occasion to treat of the career of the founder of homœopathy, and incidentally to open up one or two suspicious passages in it with regard to the sale of secret remedies. Those who have read my observations impartially, will, I believe, do me the justice to admit that I have neither exaggerated the charges, nor withheld the defence, so far as known to me. My object, indeed, was simply to get at the facts; and in performing this service to the cause of truth, I find myself powerfully, though unconsciously, aided by an article in the *British Journal of Homœopathy* for January 1859.

The homœopathic reviewer is, as usual, very bitter, very personal, and very unfair. He is, however, so far well-informed, as to make it certain that the best and the worst that can be said in Hahnemann's favour has now been spoken. Having long ceased to expect anything better at his hands than misrepresentation and detraction, I shall give his twenty-eight pages of controversial rhetoric the go-by, except in so far as they illustrate the question which I have asked at the head of this communication. It is very easy for the pen of a ready and unscrupulous writer to cover over a little morsel of unpleasant truth with multitudes of words; but abuse of me and praise of Hahnemann are not argument; and setting aside both of these, I shall take the liberty of doing what homœopathic reviewers so seldom do; viz., of coming to the point at once.

In my sketch of Hahnemann, I adverted to two alleged occurrences which justified the strong suspicion (if not the absolute certainty,) that he had more than once compromised his character as a physician by the sale, or attempted sale, of secret remedies. One of these occasions is ascertained to have been subsequent to the announcement of homœopathy; the other is of unknown date. To the latter I alluded as follows: "It has been stated, on the authority of Dr. Mühry, of Hanover, in a widely circulated medical journal, and as 'a fact uncontroverted even by his own adherents,' that, previous to 1810, Hahnemann had, 'deceived the world by selling at a high price, under the name of pncœum, a nostrum which consisted of nothing but borax.' This is a stigma under which no innocent man should have been allowed to remain for a moment; for it involves the double charge of making gain by a secret remedy, and of concealing a known substance under a false name."

I did not give this charge against Hahnemann without giving, by the side of it, the only defence I had seen. The defence was quoted by me, *verbatim*, from Dr. Henderson, who gives it without authorities; and as it is substantially similar (except in one point to be afterwards noticed,) to the reviewer's attempted exculpation, I shall not repeat it here. The defence of the *Homœopathic Journal*, though extending over three pages, amounts simply to this: that a certain Dr. Rummel, "one of Hahnemann's oldest and most esteemed adherents," declared before a meeting of persons assembled to do honour to Hahnemann's statue at Leipsic, that he had "made a mistake" in this matter. Therefore, pleads the reviewer, as Dr. Rummel must have known "the exact facts," it is clear that the whole affair was "simply a chemical blunder," for which he made ample reparation by paying back the money he had received.

The reviewer must excuse me if I do not at once give in to this tremendous battery of homœopathic logic. Whether Dr. Rummel knew the exact facts or not, it is clear that he knew the charge of bad faith that had been laid at Hahnemann's door. How does he meet that charge? The question was twofold: Did Hahnemann actually sell borax under the name of pncœum? and, if so, did he know that borax and pncœum were the same?

Now Dr. Rummel not only admits that Hahnemann sold borax under the name of pncœum, but makes it a great point in his favour that he returned the money. Why did he return the money? If he had only made a mistake in names, and had, nevertheless, sold a useful article at a fair profit, without any concealment or false pretences, the money need not have burned his fingers, and could not have been demanded of him. The return of the money is conclusive proof that the purchasers of pncœum considered themselves to have a claim for

restitution—in other words, they had been deceived by the name, and had (as Dr. Mühry states) paid too high a price for an unknown article. The nostrum-vending, therefore, is clearly apparent from Dr. Rummel's own admissions.

"Many a great chemist," writes Dr. Henderson, in allusion to this charge, "has made as great a blunder, and in more recent times, too." We have here an admirable specimen of that unhappy tendency to confound right and wrong, which seems almost inseparable from homœopathic controversy. Great chemists have made mistakes no doubt in all ages. But has it been the practice of really great chemists (and if so, is it a practice to be justified by great physicians,) to attempt to make a profit out of their own ignorance and the ignorance of others? Did Davy sell potassium at a high price, or did he not rather hasten to tell all the world how to make potassium? Did Priestley make any attempt to turn "dephlogisticated air" to account as an article of commerce by erroneous representations of its nature and properties? Did the discoverers of iodine, chlorine, bromine, of the whole host of new metals and of new organic compounds which modern chemistry has revealed, usually act in the spirit of lucksters or of men of science? Or (to put a hypothetical case,) if Dr. Simpson had advertised and sold chloroform as a new and unknown substance, and had afterwards "discovered his error," and returned the money, would Dr. Henderson have meted out to him, in "Homœopathy truly represented", the same judgment with which he has so charitably exonerated Hahnemann? Dr. Henderson knows very well, that even a manufacturing chemist or druggist would now-a-days think himself deeply disgraced if he had committed such an "error;" yet he excuses it in the case of one who is put forward as a leader among physicians!

As regards the charge of intentional deception, implied in the knowledge that pncœum was borax, and nothing more, I have said no more than that a fraud was charged against Hahnemann, and that the charge has not been rebutted. Neither Dr. Rummel, Dr. Henderson, nor the reviewer go beyond the simple assertion that the whole affair was "a mistake." None of them make any attempt to explain how the mistake occurred, or how it came about that Hahnemann so innocently discovered a new alkali, without being aware of what he was doing. Neither do they inform us distinctly how the error was discovered, whether by Hahnemann himself, or by those who were made to pay for his nostrum. Dr. Henderson, indeed, quietly assumes (without proof) that Hahnemann corrected his own blunder; but Dr. Rummel's words ("it was afterwards found that he had made a mistake,") point to the opposite conclusion as plainly as homœopathic words can be expected to do. And on this evidence we are to pronounce an acquittal of Hahnemann on the charge of fraud, and to believe that his over-sensitive conscience spontaneously prompted the restitution of the perfectly honourable gains which he had made out of the "new alkali"!

It is evident that unless Hahnemann himself, or some of his friends at the time, had made a clean breast of the whole matter, no more favourable judgment can be passed upon it than what is called in Scotland "not proven;" and that only as regards the question of deliberate fraud. The question will always recur—what inducements were held out by Hahnemann to the purchasers of pncœum? and were those inducements justified by the state of his own knowledge respecting it? Of all this we unfortunately know nothing; but Dr. Rummel and the homœopathic reviewer have placed it beyond a doubt:—

1. That Hahnemann did sell borax under the name of pncœum.
2. That the "mistake" was found out, and that not by Hahnemann (as Dr. Henderson would leave to be inferred), but by others.
3. That to save his credit he paid back the money.

And this is simply the best face that can be put upon an ugly transaction; of which all that can be said further is that Hahnemann and his friends have found it convenient to be very chary of giving information to the world.

The other occasion on which Hahnemann has been accused of putting forth a secret remedy, is that of the notorious *Hahnemannian preservative against scarlet-fever*. It is not denied by the reviewer (nor, so far as I know, by any one else), that this alleged prophylactic was announced to the world by advertisement *two years before its composition was revealed*; and that the revelation took place in consequence of a general outcry from the medical profession, which refused to sanction the secrecy of the proceeding. The reviewer, indeed, expressly

says (what I avoided stating, although strongly suspecting it), that Hahnemann was accused "of trying to make money by false representations;" and Hahnemann's own account of the transaction is to the effect that he might have got "at least as much in the way of honorarium" by publishing a big book on scarlet fever, as by "subscribing" a secret remedy, with the promise of a little book in the future! The reviewer further discovers that the price "could not have been more than a shilling;" a statement for which he gives no authority, but which reminds me of the wet nurse's answer, when asked if her child was not illegitimate, "Yes, ma'am, but it's a very little one!"

Surely this is very lamentable, if it were not somewhat too ludicrous. A remedy is advertised, in regard to which the professed discoverer makes strong statements as to its efficacy in the then reigning epidemic. It is said to be a preventive remedy, as powerful against scarlet fever as vaccination is against small-pox (vaccination having just then come into fashion); trial is demanded on the double ground of humanity and science; professional opinion is formally invited; only, the disinterested discoverer must have your opinion (and your money) before he publishes the name of the remedy! Yes, says the reviewer, that is all true; but observe *how very small the sum*—"only a shilling"—"actually nothing"—"simple-minded confiding man"—"Alas! he little knew medical human nature!"—"child-like simplicity"—"much-abused and persecuted sage"—"open candid character"—"pure philanthropy and zeal, etc., etc.!" Such is homœopathic criticism.

The reviewer's commentary upon this most discreditable passage in Hahnemann's career, extends to no less than seven pages; but he does not even attempt to overthrow one of my statements as to matters of fact, while he embodies his own opinion in such vague euphuisms as I have quoted above. The very application of these terms to such a transaction, is a thing so shameful, that I will not venture to characterise it. The reviewer knows perfectly well what he is about, and betrays no small amount of controversial skill in mystifying and confusing the reader as to the merits of the case. But there is one answer to all his studiously distorted representations. *To have no secrets about remedies is a rule among physicians without any exception*; and in Hahnemann's case there was not even the shadow of an honourable reason for the breach of the rule. The reviewer's defence of Hahnemann, such as it is, resolves itself simply into a defence of nostrum-vending. "I do not give you the name of the substance," he makes Hahnemann say, "as that might prejudice your judgment, or you might prepare it improperly, so I prefer sending it to you in the form in which I have found it successful. The name will be, by and bye, published, etc., etc." No one can fail to see in what direction this defence tends. The whole army of advertising quacks may shelter themselves beneath it. To rail at the medical profession for not seeing the matter in this light, is simply to appeal from honest professional opinion to the most ignorant prejudices on the part of the public.

When I proposed to myself to write a notice of Hahnemann's career, in conjunction with that of Paracelsus and Brown, it was not for the purpose of accusing or reviling these men, but with the view of investigating their mental history in connection with the systems they professed, and the avowed attitude of opposition and contempt which they assumed towards professors of the medical art in general. While I did not shrink from exposing the lamentable errors of doctrine and of conduct into which "system-builders" (as I have called them) naturally fall, I refrained from attempting to deepen the impression by disingenuous sophistry and hysterical ecstasies of praise or blame. The reviewer is much too "smart" a person to take good advice, or I would give him the gentlest possible hint, that there are restraints in controversy which gentlemen and men of a liberal profession feel bound to impose on themselves, and which will prevent me from answering him after his own fashion. He will not, of course, accept my view of Hahnemann's character, and he pursues me with all manner of controversial Billingsgate for assailing it. Be it so. It is the way of his sect to please themselves, and depreciate better men, by surrounding Hahnemann with a halo of false glory. This spirit of reckless partizanship does not, however, in the least help the reviewer out of his difficulties. He has, on the contrary, only consummated the proof which I have endeavoured to adduce in the lives of Paracelsus, Brown, and Hahnemann, that from the confirmed system-builder or sectary in physic, nothing is to be expected in the interest of truth. Looking at everything from one point of view, he soon allows the sect to become all in all, and the eternal distinctions of right and

wrong go for nothing. It is quite a natural, though a ludicrously small, consequence of such a state of mind, that a casual slip of the pen, made by me on a former occasion (but completely explained and carefully rectified so soon as it was pointed out), takes rank, with this reviewer as a graver offence than selling borax under the name of pncem!

Take it all in all, no more striking evidence could possibly be given of the utter demoralisation of the Homœopathic ranks, than is contained in this review. That it should be possible to offer to men calling themselves physicians a defence of Hahnemann so completely at variance with the first principles of professional honour, clearly demonstrates the truth of the severe remark made in Paris the other day, that homœopathy is not a science nor an art (not even a creed nor a doctrine), but simply a trade.

#### CASES OF FISTULA IN ANO TREATED BY LIGATURE.

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ONE of the most disagreeable companions a man can take about with him is a *fistula in ano*,—a painfully suggestive associate, that is constantly reminding the sufferer of the very probable existence of an occult and formidable underminer of his health. Even though this remorseless antagonist to comfortable locomotion and repose, instead of being the mere representative of a less conquerable foe, bore with it the tangible evidence of independent responsibility, the consciousness of having to undergo a painful and somewhat dangerous operation, which, in many cases, necessitates the recumbent position for weeks, is of itself sufficient to create anxiety in the strongest mind.

A few weeks incapacity for the performance of the ordinary duties of business-life would, to some people, be a matter of the most serious importance, involving a pecuniary sacrifice amounting almost to ruin. To a needy professional man a prolonged bedroom residence would be peculiarly unfortunate; to the Esculapian most depressing, seeing that it affected materially the welfare of more than the individual sufferer. Any effectual means, therefore, that can be adopted for the avoidance of the series of ill consequences alluded to, instead of being allowed to fall into desuetude, should be hailed as a boon to suffering humanity.

Mr. Luke, of the London Hospital, has revived the treatment of *fistula in ano* by ligature, an operation that possesses attractions not generally recognised, being without danger, and comparatively painless, creating no alarm, and neither requiring absolute rest nor in-door residence.

To make this proceeding as simple and painless as possible, I requested Mr. Ferguson to make me two very fine silver probes and a grooved director, the probes being seven, and the director five, inches long. One of the probes is blunt, and the other sharp pointed at one end, and both are perforated at the other. These may be easily carried in an ordinary pocket-case, and will be found useful on many occasions.

*Method of Operating.* Having, by previously administering an aperient, prepared my patient for the exploration, I introduce the blunt-pointed probe, armed with silk, into the external opening of the fistula, pass the index-finger into the rectum, search for the opening, seize the extremity of the probe (which is easily bent), draw it through the anus, and complete the operation before the sufferer is made aware of the nature of his ailment. In the event of there being no internal opening, or that aperture not being easily found, I pass the sharp-pointed probe, alone or aided by the director, along the sinus, and transfix the wall of the gut. The ordinary probes are too short and thick, and inflict much unnecessary pain.

The following three cases are from my note-book, briefly narrated, and tell their own tale.

CASE I. Mrs. B., aged 45, mother of a small family, a stout, full-habited woman, of lymphatic temperament, and in comfortable circumstances, consulted me on the 6th of May, 1857, for pain at the pit of the stomach, intercostal spaces, and over the dorsal vertebrae, coming on at 3 A.M., and continuing until the erect position was assumed, there being almost complete inability to move. Pressure over one of the upper dorsal vertebrae elicited pain at the point pressed, at the pit of the stomach, and both sides. Lest, vesication, mercury with chalk, followed by quinine and iron and wine, afforded relief.

On the 20th July she again consulted me, complaining of left intercostal pain, numbness of left arm, difficulty of turn-