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


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 homeopathicopathy, 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 powerful, though unconsciously, aided by an article in the British Journal of Homeopathy for January 1850.

The homoeopathic 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 verbal vituperation the short and choppy excerpt 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 a whole bulk of false and malicious words; but because of Hahnemann are not argument; and setting aside both of these, I shall take the liberty of doing what homoeopathic 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 those occasions was accounted to have been subsequent to the announcement of homoeopathy; the other is of unknown date. To the latter I alluded as follows: "It has been stated, on the authority of Dr. Mühr, of Hanover, in a widely circulated medical journal, and as a fact undenied even by his own adherents, that, previous to 1810, Hahnemann had, deceived the world by selling at a high price, under the name of pneum, 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, verbis, from Dr. Henderson, who gives it thus: "I do not think it possible to maintain, (except in one point to be afterwards noticed,) to the reviewer's attempted exculpation, I shall not repeat it here. The defence of the Homoeopathic 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 Leipsis, 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 homoeopathic 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 pneum? and, if so, did he know that borax and pneum were the same thing?<br>

Now Dr. Rummel not only admits that Hahnemann sold borax under the name of pneum, but makes it a great point in his favour that he returned the money. Why did he return the money? It has been only vaguely hinted, 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. This is the common defence of the traders in quack medicines, to encourage themselves to have a claim for restitution—in other words, they had been deceived by the name, and had (as Dr. Mühr states) paid too high a price for an unknown article. The nostrum-vendor, therefore, is clearly appraised 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, at least, an admission of that unhappy tendency to confound right and wrong, which seems almost inseparable from homoeopathic controversy. Great chemists have made mistakes no doubt in all ages. But has it been the practice of really great chemists (or of 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 make rather haste to get to greater worlds? Did Priestley make any attempt to turn "depilatorygised air" to account as an article of commerce by erroneous representations of its nature and properties? Did the discoverers of iodine, chlorine, borine, of the whole host of new metals and of new organic compounds which modern chemistry has revealed, usually act in the spirit of hucksters or of men of science? Or (to put a hypothetical case,) if Dr. Simpson had advertised and sold chloriform 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 "homeopathy truly represented", the same judgment with which he has castigated "our 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 pneum 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 inadvertently 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 homoeopathic 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-solicitous 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 is this: whether Hahnemann sold the purchasers of pneum? 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 homoeopathic reviewer have placed it beyond a doubt:—

1. That Hahnemann did sell borax under the name of pneum.
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 wary of giving information to the public.

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 derived, so far as I have been able to find, from Hahnemann himself, that this alleged prophylactic was announced to the world by advertisement two years before its composition was revealed; and that the revelation took place as a consequence of a general outcry from the mouths of hucksters, who refused to sanction the secrecy of the proceeding. The reviewer, indeed, expressly
sends (what I avoided stating, although strongly suspecting it), that Hahnemann was accused of "trying to make money by false and chicanery;" and Hahnemann, in his own account, says that 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 to do the same book in the future. The reviewer, however, 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 name's answer, when asked if her child is 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 proponent makes strong statements as to its efficacy in the then reining 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 confusing men"—"Alas! he little knew medical human nature"—"child-like simplicity"—"much-abused and per- 
cused"—"a pure charlatanism"—"pure philanthropy and zeal, etc., etc." Such is homoeopathic criticism.

The reviewer's commentary upon this most discreditible passage in Hahnemann's career, extends to no less than seven pages, and is not even attempted to be overthrown or discredited. The reviewer starts by saying that "he has 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 ad- 
vocates of homoeopathy, and themselves beneath it, are at the medical profession for not seeing the matter in this light, is simply to appeal from honest professional opinion to the most weak and prejudiced of the public. The case is, of course, made when the disease is one which, by surrounding Hahnemann with a halo of false glory, this spirit of reckless partisanship does not, however, in the least help the reviewer out of his difficulties. He has, on the con- 
trary, stipulated the proof which he had ended 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 every matter from the point of view, he found 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 lud- 
icrously small, consequence of such a state of mind, that a man of such a character and with the first principles of pro- 
fessional honour, clearly demonstrates the truth of the severe remark made in Paris the other day, that homoeopathy 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 LIGATION.

By Draper Mackinder, M.D., F.R.C.S., Gainsborough.

One of the most disagreeable companions a man can take about with him is a fistula in ano,—a painfully suggestive asso- 
ociate, that is constantly reminding the sufferer of the very possibility of existence of an observable, palpable, and 
visible sign of the decay of his health. Even though this remorseless antagonist to com- 
fortable locomotion and repose, instead of being the mere re- 
presentative of a less conquerable foe, bore with it the tangible 
testimony of independent restraints and prohibitions 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 
nerve.

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 Escolapian 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 avoid-
ance of the series of ill consequences alluded to, instead of 
being allowed to fall into desuetude, should be hailed as a 
blessing to suffering humanity.

Mr. Luko, of the London Hospital, has revived the treat- 
ment of fistula in ano by ligature, an operation that possesses 
attractors not generally recognised, being without danger, and 
compactly painless, creating no alarm, and neither requiring 
alessest not in-door retreat, nor operation.

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 three, inch long. One of the probes is sharpened to a 
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 Operation. Having, by previously administering 
a preparation, prepared my patient for the operation, I intro- 
duce the blunt-pointed probe, armed with silk, into the ex- 
ternal 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 open- 
ning, 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 
arranged, and tell their own tale.

Case 1. Mrs. B., aged 45, mother of a small family, a stout, 
full-habitued woman, of lymphatic temperament, and in com- 
fortable 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 
insensibility to pain. Having ended the usual rules of pro-
titudinal exercises, I have endeavoured to elicit pain at the point 
pressing, at the pit of the stom- 
ach, and both sides. Rest, vesication, mercury with chalk, 
followed by quinine and iron and wine, afforded relief.

On the 10th July she again consulted me, complaining of 
left intercostal pain, numbness of left arm, difficulty of turn-

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