

MEDICAL SEMINAR DISUSSIONS

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Medical seminar disussions by Edna Locke

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Edna Locke

"In as much as this world is, after all, absolutely governed by ideas, and very often by the wildest and most hypothetical ideas, it is a matter of the very greatest importance that our theories of things, and even of things that seem a long way apart from our daily lives, should be as far as possible true, and as far as possible removed from error."—*Huxley*.

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1912

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HAHNEMANN *

MEDICINE viewed from a scientific standpoint does not permit the consideration of Hahnemann, for of all the exponents of medicine, who have contentedly reposed on conjecture, Hahnemann was pre-eminently the star guesser. When his ideas were discountenanced by the medical profession, he did not hesitate to place his case before the public at large as a court of appeal. This brought about a popular controversy, which not only contributed largely to the success

*Read at the Medical Seminar, University of California, February 28, 1912

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of his system but stimulated in the lay mind the belief in its right of judgment in matters highly technical and scientific. Hahnemann with his clairvoyant mind required no knowledge of the cause and nature of disease. He ignored every suggestion of pathology; he found symptoms much more convenient to contend with, and the task of selecting remedies was greatly simplified by using only symptoms as a working base. Furthermore this process was comparatively easy to explain to the public for its valuable indorsement. And was not popular indorsement the main support of medicine? It was—for his kind of medicine. Though public opinion is always to be reckoned with, its favorable verdict seems to be especially sought after by a certain class of purveyors of things medical.

Did Hahnemann really believe in his ridiculous medication? Was he a religious fanatic gone astray in the field of medicine?

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Or was he so bewildered with disappointment in drugs that he practically abandoned their use, yet gave them the charm of mystery to appease the lay mind? On the other hand, did Hahnemann not accomplish some good? Was he not of service to humanity? When we consider the heroic measures used in medicine in the latter part of the eighteenth century, for instance, the enormous dosage—from two to three ounces of saltpetre in a single day—was not moderation devoutly to be wished? The influence of Samuel Hahnemann helped to moderate this excessive dosage.

Hahnemann was born in Meissen, Germany, 1755, and died in Paris, 1843. In 1796, he brought forth his peculiar system of medicine, which in a way was a natural reaction against the drastic measures then prevalent, but in the rebound he practically reached medical nihilism. He also advanced theories which denied disease, admitting only

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symptoms. The halls of the United States Senate recently echoed a voice that surpassed Hahnemann by denying both disease and symptoms. For this sparkling absurdity we have to thank a senator from California, who is a sponsor for Christian Science. While Hahnemann made no contribution to scientific medicine, his errors were such as to counteract the more dangerous errors of others. This, indeed, was an instance of "likes cured by likes."

Hahnemann not only selected and prepared his drugs by a strange mingling of ingenuity and false reasoning but he also gave them a spritual attribute. The salient requisite in the preparation of a drug was an extraordinary attenuation. He gave minute directions for achieving this extreme attenuation by long continued trituration, succussion, and dilution; after which we are not surprised that the drug required spritual aid. He ordered the original tinctures to be

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reduced in strength to one-fiftieth, and these dilutions again reduced to one-fiftieth, and the next dilutions again reduced to one-fiftieth, and so on to the thirtieth dilution, which he himself used by preference. So carried away was he with this idea that he claimed he could scarcely name one disease that was not most successfully treated by merely smelling the medicine, and the results were equally gratifying even when the patient was destitute of the sense of smell. That medicine gained strength by this extreme attenuation, he declared, "was established beyond the reach of cavil from future experience, either of the allopaths or of practitioners of the new mongrel system made up of a mixture of allopathic and homeopathic processes." This reference to a mongrel system was a wild flower dropped on the brow of the Eclectic.

With Hahnemann pain on the right side of the head indicated a certain drug, while