

Alchemical Techniques In Homoeopathy

Hahnemann's interest in chemistry is legendary, but few know where he studied it on a basis when in his twenties. Gumpert tells us:

'But the sole consolation of Hahnemann's existence in Dessau [1779-83] was his daily visit to the apothecary, Haeseler, in whose laboratory he could continue his study of chemistry.' [Gumpert, p.26]

'The more definitely Hahnemann passed into oblivion as a doctor the greater grew his reputation as a writer on medical subjects. Orders for translations poured in on him from Leipzig.' [ibid., p. 58]

'Day after day, he tested medicines on himself and others. He collected histories of cases of poisoning. His purpose was to establish a physiological doctrine of medical remedies, free from all suppositions, and based solely on experiments.' [ibid., p.92]

'Medicine tests [provings] constitute one of the most critical points of Hahnemann's teachings. This grandiose attempt to acquire unhypothetical medical experience was outwardly justified by the complete lack of objective methods of investigation and experimental systems in those days.. [Hahnemann had] the courage to break away from hypotheses and systems..' [ibid., p.122]

'When he left Hermannstadt [now Sibiu in Romania], at the age of 22 years, he was master of Greek, Latin, English, Italian, Hebrew, Syriac, Arabic, Spanish, German, and some smattering of Chaldaic..here he was unwittingly preparing himself for his great future.' [Bradford, p.28]

Nor is it true that Hahnemann gave up medicine because he was unable to earn a living' from it [Bradford, p.36]

'Had he wished he could have remained in Gommern [1781-84], for means for his ample living were assured. According to the statements made by his contemporaries and by himself, he had become disgusted with the errors and uncertainties of the prevalent methods of medical practice, and wished earnestly, to seek for some better method. He reduced himself and his family to want for conscience sake.' [Bradford, p.36]

He moved to Dresden in the autumn of 1784;

'He did not practice medicine, but devoted himself to his translations from the French, English and Italian. He also pursued with renewed zeal his favourite, chemistry.'
[Bradford, p.37]

By around 1784, Hahnemann very reluctantly and very sorrowfully gave up the practice of medicine. At least this allowed him to channel his energy and time into translating chemical and medical treatises from English, French and Italian into German. This gave him a bit of an income, and also stimulated his further investigations of drugs, poisonings and diseases, and gave him more time for historical research into actual medical cases in various languages.

'thus he arrived at the decision to give up his practice "and to treat scarcely anyone else medically, so as not to injure him" and to occupy himself "merely with chemistry and writing"..' [Haehl, Vol.1, p.267]

taken together, these changes which Hahnemann made in his life, provided him with the opportunity he needed to devote a lot of his time, to reading, writing and thinking. We also know that he conducted chemical experiments in the laboratory of his father-in-law, her Haesler, the apothecary in Dessau, and step-father of his first wife.

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The time he spent in Dessau afforded him a welcome opportunity of pursuing his chemical research in the laboratory of the 'Moor Apothecary Shop'-work which was so significant for his pioneer activities in medicine. [Haehl, Vol. 1, p.265]

'Hahnemann devoted himself entirely to chemistry and writing, according to his own admission. He puts chemistry first. In this science he was self-taught. He had never received any definite course of instruction in the subject or possessed a laboratory except during his stay in Dessau (1781), where he had found a suitable place in the Moor Apothecary Shop for his experiments and probably also an occasional tutor in the person of the Apothecary Herr haesler.' [Haehl, Vol.1, p.268]

Apart from the loss of his medical practice, which seems to have become an agony his conscience would not allow him to prolong, he now placed himself in a more favourable position for making some fundamental medical discoveries.

It is clear from the sheer mass and volume of these translations, that hahnemann must have been one of the best read physicians of his day and certainly therefore, a person well-placed to observe and criticise some of the wilder absurdities of the medicine of his day, which had indisputably become a veritable mass of conflicting theories, not one of which had been tested by experiment, but merely composed as an exercise in rhetoric and then used to further the career of its inventor;

'at this period there was a complete anarchy in the domain of therapeutics. Theories hippocratico-vitalistic, Galenic, Mathematical, Chemical, Humoral, Electro-Galvanic, formed an inextricable tissue of variable opinions. Hahnemann had abstained from a search for

therapeutical indications in this mass of hazardous theories. He had adopted a simple medication partly expectant, that corresponded more fully with his ideal of the art of healing.' [Rapou 'histoire de la doctrine medicale Homeopathique, Paris, 1847, quoted in Bradford, p. 34]

Hahnemann utterly despaired at the irrational nature of the medicine of his day, and its learned professors in the university medical schools, who he felt did more harm than good through their quarrelling:

'No learned brains could unravel the skein of hypotheses and theories which entangled the professors and set them all at odds..the words of an arrogant and incomprehensible professorial language were in themselves without results, but the application of those same professors' erroneous deductions killed thousands of men and women. There were no experiments, there was no painstaking research; there were only odd and eccentric systems which were exalted into dogmas, without any possibility of testing senseless methods of treatment.' [Gumpert, p.15]

Hahnemann abandoned medical practice for fear of its harmful effects and through a profound dissatisfaction with its dismal clinical results. He thus became paralysed into medical inactivity through a profound uncertainty about the usefulness of its main techniques and with what he was going to do with the rest of his life. His apparently stop-gap solution to this problem was both intelligent and deeply pragmatic; keep translating to earn a living and given time some truth might just emerge out of a terrible darkness.

The future looked very dark to the honest seeker after truth. He had lost his faith in medicine. Of this time he writes; 'Where shall I look for aid, sure aid? Sighed the disconsolate father on hearing the moaning of his dear, inexpressibly dear sick children. The darkness of night and the darkness of a desert all around me; no prospect of relief for my oppressed paternal heart,'. '[Hahnemann in Hufeland, Lesser Writings, p.513, quoted in Bradford, p.51]

In effect, therefore, he used his translation as a platform from which first to probe the depth of allopathy, and then later, to launch into massive and sustained attacks against it. That was by no means his starting position, but it was certainly how things ended up. No wonder, then that he never flinched in his furious arguments with allopaths after 1806; he had probably seen and rehearsed all their arguments during his translations and had already demolished their positions point by point. He had in fact attained a state of renewed medical certainty, which others interpreted as stubborn arrogance. He can only have attained this through his translations, backed up by his experiments.

'He now saw full well that he must not look to his medical brethren for assistance in his great aim, but he did not despair; on the contrary, this very opposition of his colleagues made him more resolute in his determination to carry out his plans alone, or with what casual assistance he could procure from non-professional friends.' [Dudgeon, 1853, p. 181]

Though Hahnemann may not have intended to carry into his new system any of the ideas of alchemy, there seems little doubt that several of its techniques did get carried in, intentionally or otherwise. Indeed, he seems to have taken many of the techniques of alchemy, dumped the theories and used the techniques to prepare his new remedies, chosen on the basis of the law of similars.

We are now in a position to examine briefly what these techniques were and how they are similar to homoeopathic techniques.

On top of the previous material it is also true that certain links with alchemy can also be delineated in relation to the following techniques which are central and unique to the homoeopathic system:

- Law of similars
- Minute doses
- Succession
- Trituration

Potentiation

The following quotation material supplements the material above drawn from homoeopathy and supports the notion that Hahnemann used some alchemical techniques in his preparation of homoeopathic remedies. He must therefore have been knowledgeable about alchemy and his denials were probably designed to conceal his knowledge. There are seven central processes in alchemy. These are 1. calcinations or roasting; 2. dissolution; 3. separation; 4. conjunction; 5. fermentation; 6. distillation; and 7. coagulation.

Clear evidence of Hahnemann's detailed knowledge of alchemical techniques lies scattered here and there throughout his writings, especially in his mode of preparation of certain remedies. Extracts now follow. Let us begin by considering some of Hahnemann's own instructions for the mode of preparation of some of the elite members of his material medica.

Ammonium Carbonicum:

'The salt obtained from equal parts of sal-ammoniac and crystalline carbonate of soda, triturated together and sublimated at a moderate heat..' [Chronic Disease, Vol. 1, p.231]

Causticum;

'Take a piece of freshly burned lime of about two pounds, dip this piece into a vessel of distilled water for about one minute, then lay it in a dish, in which it will soon turn into powder with the development of much heat and its peculiar odour, called lime-vapor. Of this fine powder take two ounces and mix with it in a (warmed) porcelain triturating bowl a solution of two ounces of bisulphate of potash, which has been heated to red heat and melted, cooled again and then pulverized and dissolved in two ounces of boiling hot water. This thickish mixture is put into a small glass retort, to which the helm is attached with wet bladder; into the tube of the helm is inserted the receiver half submerged in water; the retort is warmed by the gradual approach of a charcoal fire below and all the fluid is distilled

over by applying the suitable heat. The distilled fluid will be about an ounce and a half of watery clearness, containing in concentrated form the substance mentioned above, i.e., Causticum; its smells like the ley of caustic Potash..' [Chronic Diseases, Vol. 1, p. 559]

Hepar sulphuris calcareum:

'A mixture of equal parts of finely powered, clean oyster shells and quite pure flowers of sulphur is kept for ten minutes at a white heat in a hermetically closed cruible and afterwards stored up in a well-corked bottle. To develop its powers, it is treated like other dry drugs in order to potentize it to the higher degrees, according to the directions at the end of the first of the volume.' [Chronic Diseases, Vol,1, p.762]

Kali carb:

'Half an ounce of purified tartar, moistened with a few drops of water, is pressed together into a ball, which is rolled up into a piece of paper and allowed to dry; then it is brought to a red heat between the glowing charcoal of a great [or of a draught furnace]. It is then taken out, laid in a porcelain saucer and covered with a linen cloth it is allowed to attract moisture from the air in a cellar, which causes the alkaline salt partially to deliquesce, and , if allowed to stay there a few weeks, it will deposit even the last trace of lime. A clear drop of this preparation is then triturated three times with 100 grains of sugar of milk..' [Chronic Diseases, Vol. 1, p.805]

Such examples can be multiplied many times and it would be pointless to do so. The gist is that he was aware of and used alchemical techniques. The above highlighted terms are certainly central to alchemical techniques and it therefore seems ridiculous to continue to deny any link between homoeopathy and alchemy when such obvious links exist between these techniques as used by Hahnemann in homoeopathy and their obviously central position within alchemy.

Here are some extracts of alchemical texts for comparison:

'Preparation of corals to restrain menstruum and profluvium.. make a mixture, reduce by calcinations through the fourth grade of reverberation for 12 hours or more; afterwards reduce by ablution with water and plantain.' [Paracelsus, Alchemical Medicine, 1987, p.20]

'Concerning magnet.. it has virtue for wounds and ulcers.. of magnet.. of calyx of eggs..set in layers in a crucible. Place in a fire of reverberation a day and a night. Extract and it will be prepared... [ibid., p.22]

'Concerning silver, the virtue of silver obtains in complaints of the cerebrum, the spleen, the liver, and in the retention of profluvium.. arrange in layers and reduce to the fourth grade of reverberation for 24 hours..' [ibid, p. 32]