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THE CERTAINTY OF MEDICINE.

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IN an essay on the "Certainty of Medicine," presented to the public by Dr. Peter John George Cabanis, in 1791, we find in the concluding 10th section, the following: "*I dare make bold to predict that together with the true method of observation, the spirit of philosophy which should always predominate in it, will soon revive in medicine, and that the science will assume a different aspect. The various fragments of which it is now constituted will be assembled, in order to frame with them a system, simple and fruitful as are all the laws of nature. After a faithful examination of all the facts, and after they have been verified and compared, they will be linked together, and referred to a small number of principles, fixed or susceptible of little variation. The method of this investigation, of uniting them by their analogies or differences, of deducing from them general rules, which will, in fact, be but a more precise detail of them; this method, I repeat, will be carried to a higher degree of perfection. The more impor-*

tant and difficult art, that of applying these general rules to practice, will be simplified. From all this it will naturally follow, that the physician will not be under the necessity of creating for himself his method and means of cure, of forgetting what he has learned in the schools in order to seek in his own sensations a knowledge of that which he would fail of acquiring from the sensations of others. I allude to descriptions not merely correct and minute, but constituting by union a whole, of which the different parts are well linked together. When this is attained it will not be necessary that talent should be incessantly substituted for the art—this latter, on the contrary, will sometimes create, and even appear in some instances to be substituted for, the former. I am far from believing it possible, however, that by the precision of the art, we shall ever be enabled to supply the advantages of a sound judgment, or the combination of happy genius, but they will prevent the judgment from continuing to be misled by vague and incoherent images, and genius from being bound down to the most fallacious rules; they will consequently in future encounter no obstacles to their entire development. Slender minds will thus perform with facility, what at the present period is attained with difficulty by the most intelligent—and the practice of medicine, divested of that trash by which it is now obscured, and reduced to indications, simple, distinct and methodical, will thus acquire the degree of certainty at which, owing to the changeable nature of the objects on which it is exercised, it can reasonably be expected to arrive."

Can there be a single homœopathist who does not read with pleasure this prophecy of Cabanis, and is there one who does not regret that this great philosopher was not permitted to see his sagacious predictions verified, and in a very short period thereafter? Certainty in medicine was established. Hahnemann had even then commenced his faithful examination of facts, was collecting what was known of drug-action, and instituting his "provings" of drugs, and these facts, being verified by repeated clinical experiments and compared amongst themselves and with other known

natural phenomena, were linked together and referred to a very small number of fundamental principles. From these principles were deduced general rules, and the whole given to the world by Hahnemann, and accepted by his true followers. And we now see, at this day, the allopathic school, while ignoring and rejecting Homœopathy as a system of medicine, acknowledging the necessity of principles and fixed rules, and reaching about, examining facts, and endeavoring to arrive at a conclusion.

They are actually looking forward to *Progress*, and slowly as they march along they are really marching onward. History, however, repeats itself continually, and thus we find in the medical profession a party or sect claiming "*Progress*" as their motto, detaching themselves from the allopathists, under the pretext of "Liberalism" and "Progress," and calling themselves "*Eclectics*." Their progress is in a backward direction, and they openly declare their most earnest opposition to anything like fixed principles based on natural laws, and are still more opposed to the practical rules derived from, and in harmony with, these fundamental principles. In their schools they teach a "*multiplicity of opinions*," and denounce as "*Dogmatists*," all those who differ from them. It is a characteristic point of difference between the old and the new school—the allopathic and the homœopathic—on the one side, endeavoring to fulfill what Cabanis dared to predict, and the eclectics on the other, appealing to public prejudices and to an unfortunate misconception of liberty and liberality; daring to advance the fallacious assertion that a liberal science cannot and must not be bound by any principles, even when these are based on natural laws and verified by experiment. And if the predictions of Cabanis have been truly fulfilled by the establishment of Homœopathy, and if we see clearly and unmistakably a growing desire in the ranks of thinking allopathists to obtain certainty in medicine, it becomes the duty of those members of the profession who have been charged to teach Homœopathy in a Homœopathic College, to see to it that

there shall be taught none other than these very fundamental principles, which are essentially the result of a true mode of observation made in a truly philosophical spirit.

The small number of these principles, (three) advanced, promulgated and explained in this Journal and taught in the Homœopathic Medical College of Pennsylvania, are found susceptible of little variation. The law of cure has been universally accepted; the single remedy finds its opponents, who are the defenders of alternation, only amongst unphilosophical minds, or amongst those who decline to read the *Organon* in the original, and persistently quote from the falsified translations, in defence of an absurd proposition; the minimum dose is accepted by all men of understanding, —and only misinterpreted by unthinking persons as meaning the highest potency—as the dose just sufficient to cure the individual case. (The question of dose not having been as yet settled is to be left to the individual judgment of each physician.)

If these three fundamental principles are susceptible of any variation, we have not learned of any proposition to change, alter or vary them, since they were inscribed on the banner under which we serve our cause.

We leave the third party, "the Eclectics," to enjoy the glory of an appeal to ignorance and prejudice, unfurling their standard on which is emblazoned "*Liberality in a multiplicity of opinions*," and when they appeal to St. Paul, who said in his first epistle to the Thessalonians, chapter v., verse 21, "*omnia autem probate*: *quod bonum est tenete*," we here remind them of the previous verse "*prophetias nolite spernere*," which would read, in connection, "despise not prophecies," but "prove all things: hold that which is good." We would also remark that St. Paul did not mean to instruct the Ephesians to use their own individual judgment, and to hold on to what *they* thought best to retain from the old dispensation, and accept what they might think good under the new.

If it is possible to believe in truth and consent to iniquity,

then the position we have taken is wrong, and the Eclectics are right. We take the liberty, however, of admonishing them to accept St. Paul's admonition in the sense in which he gave it, and to despise not even the prophecy of Cabanis; let them prove even his philosophical arguments, and the subsequent history of developed medical progress, and learn to hold fast to *principles* and not idle away time by embracing a variety of incongruous *opinions*, however distinguished the persons may be who offer them.

Leaving, therefore, the Eclectics where they are; despising principles, and resembling the mariner who trusts to good fortune to reach port without chart or compass, we turn back to the consideration of certainty in medicine, and address ourselves to both the homœopathic and allopathic school.

The history of medicine shows very plainly that the same differences which divide the schools of our day have existed at all times. The empire of medicine was already divided among the Greeks by two principal sects: the Dogmatists and the Empirics.

The *Dogmatists* maintained that the ignorance of causes forced the science to wander in its march, and introduced into the methods of cure a great degree of uncertainty. As all diseases, they said, differ with respect to their causes, it becomes absolutely necessary to understand these thoroughly, in order to make a judicious application of remedies.

The Empirics, on the other hand, maintained, that a knowledge of *causes* is not within reach of our senses, whilst *facts* offer themselves ready to our investigation. According to this school, it is sufficient for us to know all the circumstances constituting a disease, which are learned from observation or a faithful description.

This dispute was merely one of words, and both parties were in the right according to the sense in which they understood them.

The Dogmatists said: when you are called to a man who

has been bitten by a dog, you inquire whether or no the animal was mad, because in the two different events the treatment is not the same; consequently, the knowledge of the cause is indispensable. To this, the Empirics reply that it is far from being indifferent whether the bite be made by a healthy or mad dog, but that in this case, there is no question about cause, that circumstance being a simple fact appertaining essentially to the history of the disease or the patient, and without which the history of the case would not be complete. The only proper question is—*to what extent should we carry the investigation of causes?* There were and still are *evident and hidden causes.* This is about all "*the ado about nothing*" which has disturbed the equanimity of many a member of the profession, and is acting as a disturbing element in our own school. Viewing this question philosophically, we discover the hidden cause of all the various difficulties which the progressive, thinking men encountered, when they endeavored to establish certainty in medicine. If the cause of the disease of the patient to be treated is known, no doubt that cause, belonging to the history of the case in question, is a very important part of the case itself, and the intelligent physician may be led by that knowledge to find the proper curative agent.

The cause of the disease, or a knowledge of it, is no doubt required for the purpose of completing the history of the disease, and of the just conception of the disorder of the patient, in order to find for that individual case the proper remedy, under the known law of cure. The mere knowledge that a person has congestive fever, hooping cough, yellow fever, or suppressed menstruation, does not indicate the curative agent. In the first three cases, the concomitant symptoms, such as belong to the patient individually, may well be considered as very characteristic symptoms, and in no sense will we be guided by any supposed cause of the disease, in endeavoring to cure the patient; and the various opinions of all men of distinction, setting forth the supposed cause of said disease, will bring us no nearer the

selection of the proper means of restoring this individual case to health. In the last case, "the suppressed menstruation," we may, with propriety, inquire for the *cause*. And even here, the phenomena, as they present themselves, without the knowledge of the cause, will enable us to relieve present sufferings, and restore the patient to a healthy condition. If the cause has been *fright*, this condition belongs to the history of the case in question, and *Lycopodium* will be the curative agent, provided the symptoms present from this cause correspond with the known action of that valuable remedy, and this will generally be the case. If the symptoms do not correspond with Lycopodium, then compare them with those of *Gelseminum*. If menstruation is suppressed, and we know no cause, but find that instead of the catamenia, the nose bleeds profusely, and that this latter is an unusual occurrence, the menstrual function will be restored by a single dose of *Bryonia*. If the suppression was *caused* by a wetting of the feet during the period, *Pulsatilla* will, in all probability, effect a cure. If the patient is a married woman, and now suffers from morning sickness, general chilliness, and an aversion to a warm room, *Pulsatilla* will relieve her sufferings without restoring the menstrual discharge; or if she has missed the menstrual term, complains of *continuous nausea*, and at the same time of *constant flow of saliva*, *Lobelia inflata* will cause a cessation of all these sufferings, etc. What, then, has the known cause to do with the cure of these patients, except as a part of the history of the case. The cause by itself is surely no indication for the remedy. The further the cause is placed beyond the reach of our research, the less necessary it is to understand it. Homœopathy, in fact, does not admit the propriety of the position assumed by the old Dogmatists, and makes the cause, *when known*, part of the history of the case; while if the cause be *hidden* and *unknown*, and beyond the reach of our research, it indulges in no useless speculations.

It is certain that the principle by which all animated

bodies are moved, and the circumstances which more immediately serve to modify the influence it exercises over the different organs of the body, are equally placed beyond our reach, and totally unknown to us. It is evident, that if the basis of the healing art consists in a knowledge of these phenomena, the art itself must be viewed as deficient in its fundamental principles. Man knows the essence of nothing; neither of matter which is constantly before his eyes, nor of the secret principle by which it is modified, and which determines all the phenomena of the universe. Man speaks of causes which he flatters himself he has discovered, and of those of which he laments his inability to discover. Of the first true causes of disease, we remain as ignorant as we are of the essence of matter. Now if these propositions are admitted to be correct, then Homœopathy very properly and correctly understands "the totality of symptoms,"—comprising the cause, and all the phenomena dependent on a disturbed state of the system and of the various functions of the various organs—as the only true picture of the diseased condition of the sick; and in this understanding finds a certainty, and ignores former differences of opinion about the causes of disease.

The great uncertainty of all previous schools of medicine consisted in the fact, that the nature and effects of substances employed as remedies was to them a mystery, and their mode of operation in the system was not understood. Homœopathy has overcome all this uncertainty, and the proving of drugs on the healthy has enabled us to collect such a vast array of facts, that there is now presented to the physician a reliable Materia Medica, and certainty in the knowledge of drug-action, the want of which has been felt so keenly in all previous centuries.

Had the science of medicine rested on a solid foundation, its theory would at all times have been the same, and its practice, more particularly, would not have undergone so many extraordinary changes; but as this was not the case, the great desideratum consisted in the discovery of a method

of cure, or system, which should rest on fixed and immutable principles and certainties, and not dependent on ever-varying human opinions.

If the fundamental principles now held and promulgated by our college, and in its organ, this Journal, remain fully established, and if the speculative investigator of new facts, in his progressive march towards a further, never-ending improvement and development of medical science, allows himself to be guided by these principles, which, in fact, are to him what to the mariner is his chart and compass, the "certainty in medicine" will become greater in degree as progress is made in this manner of investigation; and every deviation from such a course can only lead back to *uncertainty* and a diversity of opinions. The unfortunate belief that fundamental principles must not stand in the way when we are indulging in researches, that may prove fallacious, is apt to lead us into such absurdities as Organopathy. Were we in possession of a perfect knowledge of all the causes of diseases, or of their origin, or seat in just this part or that portion, or in this organ or that tissue of the body, if we knew all this, and, as well, the corresponding effects of drugs, in all cases, we might then be justified in pursuing the plan of investigation and treatment suggested in Organopathy, as one of the many *individual opinions.* But these vagaries are the result of a neglect to hold fast by the landmarks, —our principles—for in these rests all future hope for progress towards *certainty in medicine.*

In the Hahnemannian Monthly, Vol. IV., No. 1, *page* 40, *paragraph* "I" *should read as follows:—*

I. The *Vital Forces*, which consist, in part, of what are termed the "forces of nature," which flow into man from the inferior world and its lower organizations; and, in part, of those spiritual influences (*influx*) which flow into and sustain man's higher nature, from the spiritual world and its superior orders of being.