THE

CALCUTTA JOURNAL

OF

MEDICINE.

VOL. xxi.] July 1902. [No. 7.

STORY OF MY CONVERSION TO HOMŒOPATHY

By the Editor.

It would not, I think, be uninteresting as an episode in the history of homœopathy in India to relate how my conversion was brought about.

At the preliminary meeting for the establishment of a medical society as a branch of the British Medical Association, held at the house of the late lamented Dr. Chuckerbutty, on the 27th May, 1863, in moving a resolution I made a speech in which I contemptuously alluded to homœopathy as one of the various systems of quackery which, I said, owed their rise and *temporary* triumph to the regular profession being unmindful of the following facts, namely, that all diseases are not curable, that many diseases, which our interference can do nothing for, are sometimes better left alone and to nature, and that quacks and charlatans stepping in when we desert our patients, often effect cures which perhaps we had been retarding.

I was thus, equally with my professional brethren, a hater and denouncer of homœopathy, and perhaps the most furious of them all. Like them I had no knowledge of it except from its caricatures by orthodox opponents. This distorted knowledge derived from misrepresentation of the system aided by the apparent

absurdity of the law of similars and the infinitesimal dose, was enough to justify my refusing to read works on homœopathy by homœopaths, that is by those who had practically investigated its claims and found them based upon fact.

The contemptuous allusion to homœopathy in the speech referred to met the eye of the late Babu Rajinder Dutt, the most distinguished among the few laymen who had taken up the cause of the despised and the persecuted system. He, a millionaire, out of pure disinterestedness, had in his earlier career, been one of the chief instruments in bringing into favor the European allopathic system. And with that disinterestedness associated with an acute discernment, he saw the superiority of homœopathy over the prevalent system of medicine. He took up its cause with his usual earnestness and did his best to diffuse its blessings among his fellow-citizens of Calcutta. By effecting cures some of which were the most brilliant in the annals of homœopathy in India, he had succeeded in making converts of some highly intelligent and educated laymen, among whom was the late Pandit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar. But not only did he fail to influence professional men, most of whom were his friends and some of whom had owed their advancement to his exertions, he began to be looked upon by them as one who had lost his head and was spoiled by one of the most audacious and mischievous of quackeries.

But such treatment by his medical friends did not deter him from pursuing the course he had taken. His conviction of the truth of homœopathy from personal experience was so strong that he was sure he would be able to impart those convictions to any medical man if he would but listen to him and watch his cases. When he read my speech he found something in it, as he told me afterwards, which inspired him with the hope that he had at last found a professional whom he would be able to bring over to his side, that is, to the side of truth, if only he could be induced to hold in abeyance his professional pride for a time.

That hope would in all probability have remained unfulfilled, had it not been for a pure accident. Babu Rajinder Dutt was untiring in his endeavours to make a convert of me, but with an obstinacy which was characteristic of deep-rooted prejudice I was repelling all his arguments and refusing even to watch his

cases on the plea that I could not afford to lose time and professional dignity to watch cases under a layman.

While such struggle was going on between us, a lay friend ill-disposed to homœopathy handed me a homœopathic pamphlet for review for a periodical of which he was one of the editors. The pamphlet was Morgan's Philosophy of Homœopathy. This I thought was a very good opportunity for me to smash homœopathy and silence Babu Rajinder. The book was the first on homœopathy I condescended to read, and I thought I would write off a review of it in no time. But what was the impression after a cursory glance at the pamphlet? I was convinced that I could not review it properly before reading it a second time. On a second careful perusal the conviction was forced upon me that no opinion could and should be passed on *à priori* grounds alone on a system which was alleged to be based upon facts, and which boldly challenged an appeal to facts. But how to get at the facts? I had no other alternative than to turn to Babu Rajinder. He was the only practitioner whose cases I could watch, and though a layman, I now did not hesitate to sacrifice professional dignity, and made up my mind to be as it were his clinical clerk in order to arrive at the truth which appeared to me to vitally concern the profession and humanity at large.

Before taking this step I made a stipulation with Babu Rajinder. I told him that, as I believed his cures were effected by the strict regimen that he enjoined and not by his infinitesimal nothings globules or drops, I would agree to observe cases with him, provided he would agree to keep the patients for a time at least under strict regimen alone, and give them no medicine till it should appear that further expectancy would be injurious. He readily agreed. Strange to say, and to his dismay, a few cases did recover under regimen alone, and without any medicine. But my triumph was not to continue long, for others proved refractory, and I had to give my consent to administer his medicines to them. A great many recovered, and the incurables were benefited. This fact staggered me; the efficacy was too evident to be gainsaid; and I was compelled much against my will of course, to make trials of the medicines myself in the cases which resisted my own treatment. The result, to my mortification, was something bordering on the marvellous if not miraculous.

These trials were begun in 1865, and in the course of a year the conviction became strong that Homœopathy was not the humbug and the quackery I had thought it was. In order to be sure of the degrees of their actual attenuation I prepared with my own hands some of the medicines, and I was surprised, as I have said, at their efficacy when administered according to the principles of the system. There was truth in the system, and to further resist and oppose it, would, it appeared to me, to be to resist and oppose the truth. And as the truth was concerned with my professional life, and as I was member of a profession whose sacred duty it was to avail themselves of every means for the cure of disease, the amelioration of suffering, and the prolongation of life, I thought it my duty to lay my experiences before the profession.

As a first step, to one professor of my college who had a great liking for me when a student and afterwards, and at whose fatherly insistence I had dared to appear at the M.D. examination, I timidly communicated my altered convictions. He was horrified to learn I had somehow come to have a leaning towards the hated system. He was sure, however, that with increased and matured experience I would see through its absurdity. From the manner in which he spoke I almost thought so myself. But increased experience only brought stronger conviction and I dared not meet him again. Some time, perhaps not less than six months after, we accidentally met as we were passing in the same street. He stopped his conveyance and beckoned me. The first question he asked was, "how is it you have not seen me so long?" "Simply because," I said, "my convictions about homœopathy having gained in strength from extended experience, I did not expect any sympathy from him." "You have my sympathy always. You have made a mistake. You are a rising man and have a bright prospect before you. A time will come when we shall have to consult you. I have every hope of your mistake being rectified in due course. I will advise you not to give out your conviction yet too soon. If you do you will have to repent for it." This was what in substance he said. In those days the professors took a great interest in their pupils and actually loved them, and the veneration of their pupils for them was unbounded.

I followed the advice given with such kindness and warmth of affection. But I went on with my trials which had become a necessity. With each trial the truth of homœopathy was revealed in greater splendor. To keep the truth any longer to myself would be, I considered, cowardice which was worse than crime. I thought, in my simplicity, that the members of our medical association who had cheered me when I had denounced homœopathy in my ignorance, would at least listen to me with attention when I would speak in its favor from personal experience. And truly I *was* listened to with attention when I delivered my address "On the Supposed Uncertainty in Medical Science and on the Relationship between Diseases and their Remedial Agents," at the 4th Annual Meeting of the Association in Feb. 1867. Discussion was begun and was being carried on on the subject of the address in the most sober and temperate manner imaginable, as on other subjects and at other meetings. In fact the members were behaving as befitting members of a scientific profession when suddenly one of them, a marine surgeon, probably weary of the calm that was reigning, raised quite a storm by simply expressing his surprise that the meeting should be discussing homœopathy instead of dismissing it with contempt, and treating a homœopath as a professional brother instead of expelling him from the association and from the room.

These words had a magical effect. Every one present shared in the surprise of the worthy champion of orthodoxy. The temper of the meeting underwent a sudden change. The coolness and sobriety of scientific discussion became at once transformed from the blow that had come down upon it into superheated zeal in defence of what was called rational medicine and the legitimate profession. Even some of the laymen who had been invited to the meeting caught the contagious fire. Had it not been for the interposition of one of the secretaries, who was an Irishman, the meeting would have succeeded in achieving the triumph of expelling the offending member who a moment before was a vice-president. The Bengal branch emulated the parent Association in bigotry if in nothing else. The scene was dramatic in the extreme, and is still vivid in my mind. Some idea of it was given by an eye-witness in one of the papers, and I must content myself with referring to it instead

of attempting a description myself, especially as I have in contemplation the reprinting of my address with the opinions of the press thereon and on the proceedings of the meeting. The press as will be seen, was unanimous in condemnation of bigotry and in favor of toleration in matters scientific.

After the meeting there was considerable and unseemly wrangling about the possession of my paper. I was peremptorily asked to leave it with the Secretaries, as it was a property of the association. I protested and pointed out that, having been the first secretary of the association for three years, since its establishment, I knew positively there was no rule to that effect; and that never before we had demanded from their authors the papers that were read at our meetings. When it was found that I was not so docile and submissive as they had thought, or at least thought they could coerce me to be, one of the members who had played the second best at the meeting requested me to make over the paper to him which after considerable hesitation I did, but not before telling him that I had no objection to giving the paper to him as a friend but not as an office-bearer of the association. As events showed I was justified in my hesitation. It was with difficulty I got back the paper and that not before the administration of a legal threat. Had I not thus insisted upon getting the paper back, it would never have seen the light. It was written off-hand and I had not even a rough copy of it. Besides, I was anxious that it should appear exactly as it was, without the slightest alteration, in order that the public may see for themselves what my actual position was, and on what slender grounds I was condemned and made an outcast.

An outcast I actually became from the next day of the meeting. The rumor spread like wildfire that I had lost my reason, that I had yielded to the seductions of Babu Rajinder Dutt and given my adhesion to one of the worst and the most absurd of quackeries that had ever come into existence, that I had forgotten my mathematics and now believed that the part was greater than the whole. My patients, and their number was not inconsiderable, who had perfect faith in me, regretted that I should have given up my old convictions, and one by one forsook me. The loss of my practice was sudden and complete. For six

months I had scarcely a case to treat. Even those who used to receive advice gratis every morning at my house ceased to come, and if any body, not finding benefit any where else, did come it was only to beg me to give him my old and not my new medicines. My old master, the late Babu Thakur Dass Dey, from whom I had received the rudiments of education and who loved me as his own son, used vehemently to remonstrate with me for having brought on my ruin. There were sincere friends who offered the kindly advice of retracting! Such remonstrance, such advice was to me worse than loss of practice. My reply to my beloved tutor and to my kind friends was that I would rather give up my profession and take to any other calling, or even starve, than disavow the truth. I was prepared to brave any contingency that might happen to me for my honest convictions, and to proclaim to the world to the utmost of my power what I believed to be the truth.

I was sustained by my faith in the ultimate triumph of truth, but that triumph, I was also sure, could only be brought about by persistent presentation and advocacy of the truth. And I felt that that presentation and that advocacy should come from one who had a regular training in the medical sciences, and therefore could speak with authority, and who would not be suspected of mistaking a mild for a grave disease. Babu Rajinder had succeeded in making converts of a few highly intelligent laymen, and he had succeeded in converting at least one professional man, and that conversion was due to observing actual success of homœopathic treatment. Babu Rajinder was a layman and therefore notwithstanding the marvellousness of some of his cures he could not command that confidence from the community which he could if he had been a regular professional. He could only be sent for in extreme cases given up by the doctors, and it is not every extreme case that could be brought back to life from the jaws of death. Failures must necessarily arise, and failures in his hands were bound to be fatal to the advancement of the cause for which he was laboring with such earnestness and zeal. He was at first associated with one who, though he called himself an M.D., was in reality a layman who had necessarily no proper acquaintance with the medical sciences; and latterly he was associated with a professional who was more

a religious enthusiast than a zealous physician. He more often practised hydropathy than homœopathy, and thus courted failure in many an instance. One of his unlucky failures was related with dramatic effect at the meeting. The association of such a practitioner with Babu Rajinder, far from bringing credit, brought in many cases serious discredit upon the system. Babu Rajinder felt it, but he could not help it; and therefore he was on the look-out for one who could co-operate with him and then take his place.

I thus found myself forced to a position for which I could scarcely think that I was competent. It became but too evident that I must not content myself with merely practising the system in which I had recognized the germ of a beneficent truth capable of indefinite development, but that I must help in that development, and do all in my power to diffuse a knowledge of it among the profession and the public. I had no hopes of doing this through the medium of orthodox journals of which there was only one in India at the time, the *Indian Medical Gazette*, the columns of which were shut against me even for reply to unfounded charges and slanderous accusations. I thought it not only inadequate but undignified to do so through lay journals. I saw that I must have a journal of my own if I was to fulfil my mission at all. The attitude of the press of India encouraged me to take the risk, and a journal with an unsectarian name was started from January 1868.

The appearance of the journal had at once the remarkable effect of silencing the opposition from my lay countrymen, perhaps because they saw that I was not quite the fool they had believed I had become. The opening article giving expression to "Our Creed" of catholicism in medicine succeeded in disarming criticism even of my most hostile opponents. Even the *Indian Medical Gazette*, "though declining to agree with him in the principles of his creed," could not "but commend the spirit and perseverance which have induced Dr. Mohendro Loll Sircar, single-handed to start a 'Journal of Medicine' in Calcutta." How far the Journal has been instrumental in furthering the cause of Homœopathy in India I must leave it to the future historian of medicine to determine. This much is certain that since its appearance, the spirit of intolerance and bitter

opposition has nearly vanished, at least so far as external manifestation goes, and that orthodox physicians have begun to feel the power of homœopathy so far that they very seldom give up cases lest they should go to the homœopath and be cured.

The Journal has been in existence ever since, but had to remain in suspended animation from time to time owing chiefly to illness which was often serious enough to disable me from all work, but partly also to public duties which were imposed upon me by Government or my countrymen, and left me no time for my self-imposed task.

The very few distinguished laymen whom Babu Rajinder had converted were, needless to say, my first supporters. They trusted me with cases which in the beginning I invariably treated in conjunction with Babu Rajinder, as my own knowledge of homœopathy then was not adequate enough to inspire me with confidence to undertake unaided the treatment of any serious and complicated case. I found homœopathic treatment to be greatly more difficult than old school treatment. Whereas I could prescribe off-hand if I had to treat a case after orthodox methods, I could not do so if I had to treat after the method of the new school, without a great expenditure of thought in interpreting the symptoms and signs presented by the patient, and of time in consulting books to find a remedy to correspond with those symptoms and signs. Though I had improved my knowledge of the Materia Medica during the "starvation" period of six months when I had no practice and therefore nothing else to do, I found the injunction of Hahnemann but too true that no conscientious physician ought to consider his knowledge of the materia medica minute enough to enable him to dispense with the necessity of consulting it in every case. After an experience and study of nearly forty years I find the same necessity still existing, and I would advise every practitioner of the new system not to lose sight of the Founder's injunction.

I need hardly say that in the course of a short time my practice began to look up. Disease is no respecter of person, of school, of creed. People cannot afford to endure suffering or lose life for the sake of a favorite physician or of a favored system. They do not care after the methods of which school they are treated so long as their ailments are cured. If the old school

could effect cures in all cases or even in the majority of cases the new school would have had no footing; indeed, there would have been scarcely any necessity for it. But it was notorious that except in surgical diseases the old school had but few genuine cures to boast of. It was a signal failure in cholera, scarcely less so in chronic diarrhœa and dysentery, in fevers which were not amenable to quinine, and in the vast majority of diseases for which no specific had yet been discovered. It was because of my having observantly watched these failures that I was induced to look beyond the bounds of my orthodoxy, and it was because I found the homœopathic method superior to the old methods that I had given in my adhesion to the system in the face, as has been seen above, of virulent opposition and persecution. And, therefore, notwithstanding the collapse of my practice, I had not given up all hope. I had not to wait long. My persistency in the path I had chosen brought in its reward. Uncured cases began to come to my out-door, and their cures began to spread the cause.

Thus the 16th February 1867 has been memorable in the history of the medical profession in this country. On that day a native member of the profession was the first in India to stand up for a reform in medicine and for this he met with opposition and even persecution similar to that which had attended the reform in the land of its birth and in other parts of the world. Upwards of thirty-five years have elapsed since that date, and considering the circumstances of the country the progress of the reform has not been unsatisfactory. There has been growing appreciation of homœopathy throughout India. Numbers of the native members of the regular profession have openly adopted the system and are practising it with success. Though income is no criterion of true success, yet the fact that several homœopathic practitioners are enjoying respectable incomes shows that the system must be in favor with the community. This is evidenced by another fact which is no less significant. We have no regular and adequate organization for teaching the principles and the practice of the system, notwithstanding the existence of four (!) homœopathic schools in Calcutta, and the necessity has been felt of resorting to America for due qualification. Some had actually gone to that distant land

of freedom and come back equipped with degrees from her recognized Homœopathic Colleges, and others are following their good example. Who would have thought of undergoing heavy expenses and of undertaking long and perilous journeys for homœopathy if there had been no demand for its practitioners?

The evidence of the law of demand and supply in favor of homœopathy is supplied by another fact, namely, the growth and multiplication of lay practitioners. Had it not been for the evident superiority of the new system over the old, people would not have trusted their health and their lives to laymen. We must thankfully acknowledge the debt we owe these men for their help in the spread of the cause. For India as a whole, as will have been seen from the above, the pioneer of homœopathy was a layman from the fact of his having succeeded in converting a professional; and laymen practitioners are the pioneers of the system in the villages and towns of the mofussil. This seems to be a necessity all over the world; in our country it has been particularly so, no doubt because of the conversion of so few regular practitioners. This necessity has not been an unmixed good. And no wonder. We cannot expect laymen to maintain the dignity of a system which requires for its successful practice the highest knowledge of the collateral sciences against an opposition intimately acquainted with these sciences. We are free to acknowledge, and we do so with the greatest pleasure, that some laymen practitioners are wonderfully successful by dint of their honest and laborious search for symptoms, which it is to be regretted the regular practitioner in his pride so much neglects. One of these practises homœopathy purely out of philanthropic motives. Every morning he gives advice and medicine gratuitously to over one hundred poor patients. When pressed he visits patients at their houses, but he never takes any fee. He is imbued with the true spirit of Homœopathy, but unlike others he has no ambition to pass off as a doctor. He keenly feels his want of knowledge of anatomy, physiology, and other auxiliary sciences. He would give up his self-imposed task if the poor whom he treats would get the regulars to pity them. To such a man we should feel grateful for his services in our cause, and gratitude demands that I should give out his name. He is Babu Dina Bandhu Mukerjee, of Shibpur, a clerk in a Government office.