

Rudolf Tischner

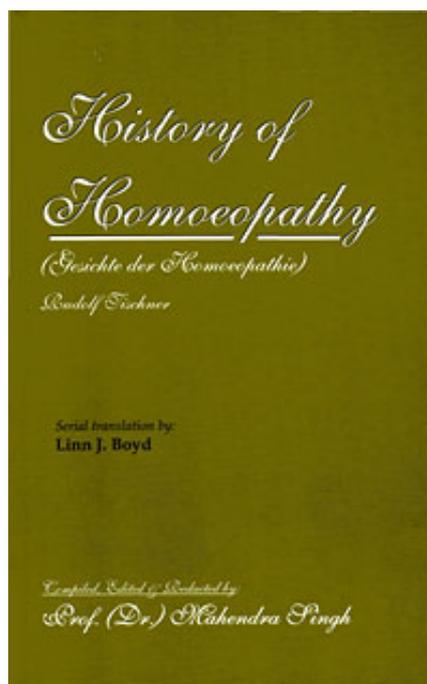
History of Homoeopathy (Geschichte der Homoeopathie)

Reading excerpt

[History of Homoeopathy \(Geschichte der Homoeopathie\)](#)

of [Rudolf Tischner](#)

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Chapter - Four

Drug Proving on Healthy Human Beings

The *last* who deserves to be mentioned as a forefather of the simile principle, Anton Stoeck, is also the *first* in whom there is found a union with the second principle of homeopathy: proving on the healthy. Before we further elaborate our presentation of the period, the earlier history of these provings should be given.

One might feel that it would be the first task of scientific medicine to secure, as soon and as extensively as possible, clarity on the action of materials which they possess in the battle with disease —indeed, often in a fight against the death of their patients. But with greatest surprise one sees that for centuries and thousands of years they fumbled completely in the dark and physicians knew the effect of drugs almost exclusively from impure experience at the bedside, apart from occasional instances of poisoning. Furthermore, tradition, the belief that a drug acted so and so, played a great rôle. So far as one was led by experience he tested the drug by odor and taste, if not by the magic art as by the above-mentioned signatures and others. That this picture is not exaggerated is shown by the incidental statements of irreproachable physicians. Pure experience consciously gained by studies designed at the goal of healing was thinly diluted for a long time and even modern medicine was not yielded a legitimate place to proving on the healthy. As the insufficiency of pharmacology was perceived, the borrowing school medicine turned to natural science and almost exclusively

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to animal research which had been employed earlier, even if in a cruder form.

Also, the historians of medicine have not treated the theme extensively in a work going back to original sources as far as is known to me. Only here and there it is mentioned briefly that this or that drug has been proven on the healthy and for decades the reports have been copied one from another. So the history of this certainly not unimportant theme will be given here for the first time — although naturally with some omissions.

When I previously stated that practically drugs were not proven on the healthy before Hahnemann, so this opinion holds perhaps at least to the earliest-times of which we have written records. The odor and taste of drugs were certainly before — as well as later — a most-important means for the selection of medicinal plants, and indeed it is conceivable that many stone-age therapies and "old woman's" herbs had been occasionally tested, even if nothing exact has been recorded of it. The drug knowledge of folk medicine is, in any case, worth admiring, and indeed, so to speak, all healing agents, employed by physicians arise from herb women and folk therapeutics; this holds, to mention only a few examples, of mercury and arsenic, of ergot and digitalis, as well as quinine bark, not to mention many from ancient times.

The first definite knowledge on drug proving comes from Greece. The empiricist Heraclitus of Tares was especially renowned in this field for having proven a number of remedies. Unfortunately, none of his writings have survived but obviously he influenced medicine by his work and moreover he was extolled by later Greek-Roman writers.

Although it does not belong to our discussion in the strict sense, a few words on the testing of poison may be

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introduced and mention made of the fact that a few eastern kings conducted poisonings on criminals and their own persons to acquire knowledge of the action of poisons and antidotes, in order to be better able to protect themselves against the practice of poisoning then common. Especially known as such are Attalus III of Pergamos (reigned from 138-133 B.C.) and Mithridates of Pontus (lived from 124-64 B.C.). Mithridates took poison and antidote daily and habituated himself so that, as it is related, if he should be poisoned after a defeat by the Romans, it would not succeed and he could again draw his sword against them. By these studies pharmacologic knowledge was essentially widened, even if unfortunately these writings have not survived.

It is not surprising that in the fixation and non-progression of therapy occurring in Roman times, especially in the period of prevalence of Galenism, that nothing is known of drug proving. It was known again only at the beginning of the Renaissance. The question was raised above as to whether or not Paracelsus made drug provings. So far as I know, he did not mention the point, and moreover it is most plausible that his knowledge of drugs was gleamed from his observations on chronic and acute poisonings or on patients, except in so far as he depended upon tradition. It is a peculiar fact that even in the Renaissance the first studies of this type were not made in order to study the effect of poisons for the welfare of the sick, but were only concerned again in the testing of antidotes as in the time of Mithridates. The studies initiated by command of Pope Clement VII in 1524 in Rome received brief mention by the famous botanist, P. A. Mattioli. Mattioli's teacher, G. Caravita, surgeon of Bologna, having prepared an antidote against internal poisons and bites of venomous animals, desired to test it on two criminals condemned to death. However, these two studies are short

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and superficial, possibly first recorded from memory a long time afterward (*Opera omnia*, Basel, 1574, p. 707). Details are not given and he states only that all the manifestations were observed which according to Avicenna are characteristic of aconite poisoning. Of this study it may be said that the one to whom the antidote was not given died after a few hours, and the other survived even though he had taken more aconite. Whether one can actually attribute this to the antidote or whether it is to be ascribed to other conditions, as for example, premature vomiting, is not apparent from the report.

Two other such studies were reported by Mattioli, these having been undertaken at the command of Kaiser Ferdinand I in 1561 in Prague. A drachm (3.65 g.) of the root of aconite was given to a criminal in order to see whether an antidote which had previously proven useful against arsenic was as good here. Since after 5 1/2 hours no symptoms appeared, one was "afraid," as Mattioli states, that the aconite for some reason might not be toxic, so a strong dose was prepared from the stems, leaves, blossoms, and seeds. After one hour, symptoms finally appeared: great weakness of the entire body and heavy sensation in the heart. The criminal made a bold speech, consciousness was unclouded and the eyes animated, cold sweat appeared on the forehead and the pulse was almost imperceptible. At that time Mattioli held it suitable for the administration of the antidote, whereupon the eyes became distorted and the mouth was drawn wide. The head was drawn rigidly between the shoulders, and the criminal sank into deep unconsciousness and he would have fallen to the ground if he had not been held up by a guard. By moistening the face with wine and shaking the head, he again became conscious, after which he had an evacuation of stool. Mattioli now permitted him to fling himself upon a litter in order that he could be further observed. The

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criminal complained of cold and vomited some foul, bilious, pale material from which he had some relief. He now desired to lie upon his side so that he could sleep but Mattioli prevented this in order to make further observations; at the same time he became numb and without further symptoms died suddenly, after which he became as pale as if he had been suspended from a rope.

Entirely different were the symptoms of the other criminal. In him one wished to see the effect of the bezoar stone, one of the famous antidotes of the Arabians, which consisted of clumps of hair, *etc.*, from the intestines of goats.

The criminal was about twenty-seven years old; after taking the drink he stated that it tasted much like pepper. After about one hour he vomited and was given seven granules of the antidote, after which marked symptoms appeared, vomiting of leek-green colored bile, a sensation of a ball in the umbilical region on account of which he attempted to vomit and a cold breath seemed to blow upon the upper and posterior part of the head. Then there were paralytic symptoms in the left arm and leg so that he could only move the fingers. Soon these symptoms abated and passed slowly to the right side; then they appeared alternately so that when he could not move the right arm, he could the left, and vice versa until the symptoms completely vanished. He stated he had a sensation as if all the blood was cold. Then attacks of vertigo were mentioned and marked irritation of the brain, which, as he said, felt similar to water bubbling in a pot. Then twitching of the mouth and eyes as well as a very sharp pain in the jaw so that the man often grasped the involved area with his hand, though this did not relieve it; to this was added prominence of the eyes, pale (livid) face and black lips, and indeed a swelling of the body was observed as though he had dropsy. The pulse like the state of consciousness

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varied, according to the severity of symptoms. At one moment he despaired of life, in the next expressed his hope, at one time he was in possession of reason but soon was delirious, now crying and now singing. He expressed a marked desire for cold water because he believed that by it he would soon be saved. Three times during the observation he became blind and three times he seemed as dead. Speech remained undisturbed. After seven hours the manifestations again vanished.

The report brings in my opinion the first description of an intentional aconite poisoning induced for scientific purposes. On this account I have deviated from the original but slightly. We may consider the manifestations as solely due to aconite. The bezoar, in case it could provoke any symptoms, would certainly not create any such acute manifestations, so in fact we have before us a pure aconite poisoning which one could recognize without difficulty. Hahnemann included Mattioli's description in the *Materia Medica Pura*.

The first who had made studies with a number of drugs on the healthy in the Renaissance, in fact, upon his own body, was the famous Zurich historian, Conrad Gesner. He performed such studies with a large number of plants, some having so marked an effect that his friends urged him to stop since they were fearful of his health. But as he wrote to his friend Gasser one time, he took their interest as a token of their friendship (see *Epistolarum medicinalium Conradi Gesneri, libri tres*, Zurich, 1577, fol. 44).

Unfortunately, he never reported the experiments in a connected way and they are found scattered in the above-mentioned volume of letters, especially in letters to his friend Occo. He made a vinous decoction of "eupatorium aquaticum," from whose action he reported marked

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evacuations of stool and urine, as well as repeated vomiting, and he believed the vomiting to be surer and easier than with helleborus (among other places, fol. 63). There is also a report of an experiment on the above-mentioned "helleborus albus" (fol. 69). Two hours before eating he took some of the infusion, but he noticed the effect first at the time of eating and then in the form of heat in the tongue and throat, burning in the scapula, face and head, then he noticed prolonged swallowing; since these continued, he induced vomiting by means of a feather and finger.

The most detailed and for other cultural reasons the most interesting report is a letter to Occo on November 5, 1565, referring to a study with tabaccum, which I reproduce (fol. 79):

"The leaves which you obtained from D. Funck and sent to me recently were apparently obtained from France. Since neither the name nor the properties were mentioned, I attempted to chew a small piece without swallowing any, and it soon acted remarkably on me, so that I seemed intoxicated, and vertigo attacked me like that due to a ship in motion. After repeating it three or four times, the action was similar so that I wrote to D. Funck and asked him to send the letter to you. After I had written him, I gave some of the triturated leaf in meat to a dog; after a few hours he vomited fairly copiously but nothing else happened so far as I know and for this reason I released him. Since I had read in a book written by Thevetus, a French monk, that in Antartic France [Canada] there is a plant called petum, used by the Americans and it is similar to neat's tongue and provokes such effects so that it is commonly used by these people for smoking, I rubbed some of the leaf, brought a coal to it, and took the smoke through a cone into the nose and mouth and noticed that, apart from the acidity, there was nothing unpleasant. On the next day I

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took more and felt dizziness but less than with the masticated leaf. Truly wonderful is its power and rapidity in provoking vertigo and a type of intoxication. On this account these people smoke if they are going into battle or other danger. I have no doubt that this is the same plant. I hear that it is called 'nicotiana' by the French after the name of the ambassador [Nicot] who first brought it to France. If you have still a supply, send me some more, so that I can also test other properties which a friend has described to me."

In all likelihood others became stimulated through his scientific zeal, so for example in his writing "De Aconito primo" (without place, 1577, fol. 18) he mentions that a friend has tested aconite, which he had received from Gesner, upon himself and apparently obtained marked effects, but none of these was reported exactly.

He also wrote not infrequently of other studies, as for example on leaf 22, he had taken gratiola. Vomiting and diarrhea resulted and for a day he had expectorated much very viscid as well as watery mucus.

Such types of study, which provoke an acute poisoning of marked severity by means of single or a few doses only too frequently have vomiting or diarrhea as a result and thereby the effect of the substance comes to a premature end, so that the results are too crude, uniform, and too unproductive to furnish exact knowledge of the individual properties of the drug. Only those who fully dedicate themselves to this task and through multiple tests find the correct type of experimental method will be able to wrest secrets in this field from nature. For this reason it is not amazing that for a long time one hears nothing of drug studies upon the healthy, although occasionally famous men, such as Baglivi, Sydenham, Fr. Hoffmann, had spoken in favor of such studies. Most considered the matter as did

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Daniel Sennert, who, **in**, discussing the question, favored the views in accordance with the advice of Avicenna, that one should pursue drug studies on patients with simple diseases (Sennert, Opera omnia, Ludg., 1674, Tom. II, p. 669).

The time was not yet ripe for that type of study. The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were the period of blooming of the inorganic natural sciences, physics and chemistry. With the usual overemphasis of newer results of investigation they considered themselves able to explain the processes in the human body physico-chemically and this was done prematurely, and by completely primitive analogies. The modern era, even when removing medicine from Galenism, with youthful zeal cast itself into the arms of the inorganic natural sciences. Then the great systems of "iatrophysics" and "iatrochemistry" developed.

Also the views on drugs became more or less forcefully adapted to the existing systems and their action "explained." Only slowly one became clear on the questionable nature of this procedure and only in the eighteenth century the correct psychologic moment arrived for proceeding systemically in proving the effect of drugs on the healthy, for which purpose the body of the investigator was primarily available.

As the first to strike out in the new way was the previously mentioned Anton Stoerck, who, as anyone who had read Hahnemann's *Organon of Medicine* knows, was one of those "who surmised that drugs through their power to provoke symptoms analogous to disease healed analogous disease states." Yet, though Stoerck should excite double interest, he has never been considered in

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detail in this respect. It is for this reason that his contributions will be examined somewhat more carefully.

Anton Stoerck (1731-1803) was born in the village of Sulgau in the Schwabian Black Forest, not far from Rottweil, of poor parents. As a boy he went to Vienna, as had his older brother Melchior, who was one of the first pupils of the famous and powerful physician to the Queen Marie Theresa and the leader of the Austrian medical department, G. van Swieten, and through this became professor of theoretical medicine in 1751. As this brother won van Swieten's good will, so did Anton Stoerck, and even at the age of twenty-nine he became physician to the Court.

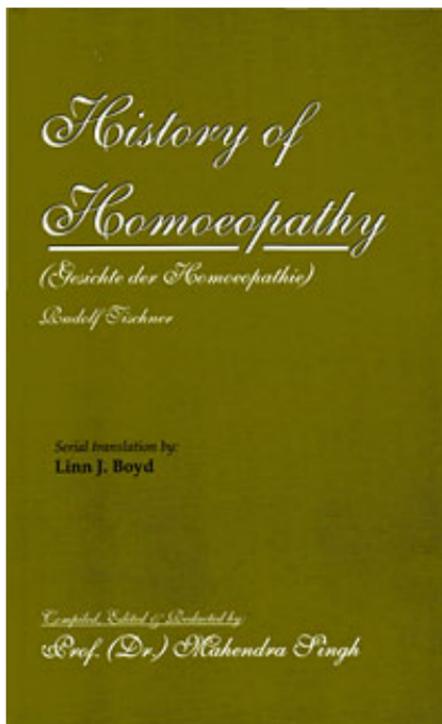
Even in these years Stoerck had begun to introduce new drug plants into the drug treasure. The first of these labors was a small writing, "Libellus de cicuta, quo demonstratur, cicutam non solum usu interno tutissime exhiberi, sed simul remedium valde utile in multis morbis, qui hucusque curatu impossibiles dicebantur" (Vindobonae, (13.) 1761).

When Stoerck and others speak of "new" remedies so is this only conditionally correct. Just as cicuta, as Stoerck calls the plant, which today as well as by Hahnemann, is called "conium maculatum," so also other plants investigated by Stoerck were already employed more or less by the laity in diseases, and many by physicians here and there, but they had never been introduced mainly because of their toxicity and in this respect they were actually "new."

Although the connection of this writing to our theme is

13. Such are all of his writings.

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