Francis Treuherz
Homeopathy in the Irish potato famine

Reading excerpt
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of Francis Treuherz
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HOMEOPATHY IN ACUTE DISEASES

NARRATIVE OF A MISSION TO IRELAND DURING THE FAMINE AND PESTILENCE OF 1847

By JOSEPH KIDD, Surgeon

There are few patients commencing homeopathic treatment, who do not feel and express their dread of the insufficiency of that treatment in acute disorders or where life is endangered, in their ignorance of the fact, that in none more completely than in the most dangerous diseases does homeopathy stand successfully over the practice of the old system.

The same objection is also attempted to be made by the greater portion of our medical brethren of the old school, and has been often witnessed in the first trials of the homeopathic principle and medicines by allopathic practitioners, in their transition state from the uncertainty of their former practice, to the true 'rational medicine' of the Homeopathists, founded on a general law which
experience proves to be unerring in its guidance, in the proper adaptation of medicine to disease.

To be able to dispel this illusion, it has been ever deemed by the true friends of homeopathy, most desirable to accumulate evidence, by submitting the system to the most severe and open tests, whenever the opportunity presented itself for applying it in the treatment of acute diseases. It has been felt, indeed, that the success gained in trials of this nature must be the true touchstone of the system, inasmuch as the most favourable results in chronic diseases may always be exposed to special criticism and ingenious explaining away, which writers like Dr Forbes, confessing the force of the results, but not inclined to give credit to the means, are usually ready to make use of when no other arguments remain.

Thus it is that the full confidence in the truth and universal applicability of the homeopathic principle has ever caused its professors to look with delight on every possible opportunity of testing its actual value as well as in individual cases as in the severest epidemics, whenever and wherever occurring.

The treatment of the epidemic of typhus fever which occurred in Germany in 1813, by Hahnemann himself, is a prominent instance of this kind, when nearly two hundred patients were treated without the loss of a single case, at the time when an enormous mortality attended the mode of practice sanctioned by ages. Again, we have an equally remarkable instance in the promptitude and zeal with which numbers of homeopathic practitioners in Germany, Russia and France, came forward to

A most interesting and curious proof of the certainty with which the homoeopathic law enables practitioners to apply medicines to any disease may be found in the fact that the medicines used by Hahnemann in 1813, in typhus with such success (Bryonia and Rhus tax), and by Dr Quin, of London, in the typhus fever following cholera in Moravia, in 1831, were those which a comparison of the typhus in Ireland with the materia medica enabled me to select, and which my experience found most useful, although ignorant at that time of their use in either of the former cases.
apply the treatment in the Asiatic cholera, at the last visitation in 1831-2.

Also in various epidemics of scarlatina, measles, etc., treated homeopathically on the continent and in this country, a very interesting account of an epidemic of scarlatina thus treated being contained in the *British Journal of Homoeopathy*, Vol. III. p 91, by Dr Ozanne, of Guernsey, and another of measles, in the January Number of the present year of the same Journal, by the same able practitioner, in both of which remarkable success resulted from the means employed.

As evidence of the same, may be adduced the results obtained in the treatment of acute diseases at the homeopathic hospitals of Vienna and Linz, where the most dangerous diseases have been treated with such success as to have caused the violent remedies of the old system to be laid aside, and to be considered,

1848.
Comparative results of homoeopathic and allopathic treatment in certain acute diseases, furnished by Dr Fleischmann, of the Homoeopathic Hospital at Vienna (from *Introduction to the Study of Homoeopathy*, by Drs Drysdale and Russell).

**PNEUMONIA (Inflammation of Lungs).**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authorities</th>
<th>Number of Cases</th>
<th>Deaths</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Guisolle</td>
<td>304</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Briquet</td>
<td>364</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edinburgh Infirmary</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skoda</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>909</td>
<td>212</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mortality 23.32 per cent, or nearly one out of four.

**Mortality under Homoeopathic Treatment**

- Fleischmann 299 19
  - 6.70 per cent, or about one out of fifteen.

**PLEURITIS (Inflammation of the lining membrane of Lung).**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authorities</th>
<th>Number of Cases</th>
<th>Deaths</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Edinburgh Infirmary</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

12.61 per cent, or about one out of eight.

(Contd. on page 46)
indeed, positively injurious by many of their former most attached admirers, one of the most celebrated of whom (Skoda, Physician to the General Hospital at Vienna,) now regards 'hay water' as the best and universal medicine for all diseases. Finally, perhaps, the same confidence in the truth and universal applicability of the homeopathic system may be found in the results of its trial in the epidemic of fever and dysentery in Ireland, in 1847, undertaken by myself, at the request of the committee of the English Homeopathic Association, and carried out in the face of difficulties and dangers not to be surmounted, save by a firm confidence in the unvarying truth of the homeopathic law.

As introductory to our more immediate object, a glance at the history of the great Irish famine of 1846–7, will be necessary.

Ireland has been visited, from time to time for centuries, with partial and almost periodical famines, which except as matters of history, and for the suffering produced in the localities afflicted, were soon lost sight of, and their sad but instructive lessons unheeded. Few of the present generation will ever forget

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mortality under Homoeopathic Treatment</th>
<th>Fleischmann</th>
<th>224</th>
<th>3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.24 per cent, little more than one out of a hundred</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

PERITONITIS (Inflammation of the lining membrane of the Cavity of Abdomen and of Intestines).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mortality under ordinary treatment</th>
<th>Edinburgh Infirmary</th>
<th>21</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>27.61 per cent or more than one out of four</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mortality under Homoeopathic Treatment</th>
<th>Fleischmann</th>
<th>105</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.76 per cent, or less than one out of twenty-five.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the year 1740-1 (called the year of slaughter), it was estimated that one-fifth of the entire population perished of want and fever! In the years 1798 to 1800, general scarcity and dearness of all provisions. In 1817-8, general distress all over Ireland, from the same causes, one million and a half of the population having been affected with fever that year. In 1822, almost total loss of the potato crop in Munster and Connaught. In 1831, the same in Galway, Mayo and Donegal. In 1835-6-7, partial famine in various parts of Ireland. In 1839 a partial failure of the potato crop in most parts of Ireland.
the melancholy visitation of 1846-7, when, at the approach of some unseen but all-powerful agent, of which we know exactly nothing, the food of millions of human beings was destroyed in the course of a very few days, and when in the face of the most amazing efforts made for its relief by all classes of society in England, America and various continental countries, hundreds of thousands of victims told how insufficient all human aid must prove at such a crisis.

The recent potato disease first appeared in Ireland in the autumn of 1845, and caused the destruction of a large portion of that season’s crop, but only in particular districts, and to a partial extent, which was in some degree compensated for by an abundant crop of corn and green vegetables, hay etc., so that none were prepared for the universal destruction of the next year's crop, which occurred much earlier in the season (long before vegetation had ceased), and more generally than at the previous visitation. The corn crops also proved very deficient, both in those countries, and all over Europe, necessarily followed by an extraordinary increase in prices, so that in most parts of Ireland the cost of provisions became more than doubled, and in many places (where food at other times was cheapest) nearly trebled. The almost inevitable consequences soon followed; the greater part of the population, previously existing - almost without the use of money - on potatoes, easily obtained by a small outlay of labour and seed, found themselves without food, or the means of purchasing

The following extract from the able and impartial history of the ‘Irish crisis,’ by Mr. Trevelyan, in the *Edinburgh Review* (January 1948) conveys a good description of the rapid destruction of the potato crop which then took place: “On the 27th of last month (July), I passed,” Father Matthew writes in a letter published in the parliamentary papers, “from Cork to Dublin, and this doomed plant bloomed in all the luxuriance of an abundant harvest. Returning on the 3rd instant (August), I beheld with sorrow one wide waste of putrefying vegetation. In many places the wretched people were seated on the fences of their decaying gardens, wringing their hands, and wailing bitterly at the destruction that had left them foodless.”
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