

*Concordant Reference: Complete Classic Materia Medica*

By Frans Vermeulen

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Reviewed by Francis Treuherz

I want to have a copy of this book not only on my bookshelf, but also in my clinic, by my bed, in my bag to read on bus or train, and maybe even in the bathroom and certainly on my laptop as a stand-alone e-book. It is the best single volume materia medica I have ever seen.

My first materia medica was a Boericke *Pocket Manual*, 1927 edition, which looks so like a Bible or prayer book that people on the tube took me to be devout. I soon bought an ancient Clarke *Dictionary* in 3 volumes, and later a Margaret Tyler *Drug Pictures* when I started at college. Tyler quoted copiously from the classics, which I then bought and endeavoured to read in chronological order of publication. I soon found out which books were originals and which quoted each other – but I had acquired the habit of daily study of materia medica, which is still with me.

Frans Vermeulen started out with a *Concordant* in 1994, 1018 pages long. In 1987 it had expanded to 1686 pages and now it has grown to 2074. It is sturdily bound and on Bible paper and is probably about as big as it can get; hence the need for an e-book. All the remedy names and abbreviations are indexed at the start; pages are shaded to access the remedies in alphabetical order. The font is small but clear. And as it reaches from 1796 to 1930 a second volume will be needed for the newer medicines. I do hope that he has started on this.

It is both an expansion and a revision of the earlier books. New developments in nomenclature and family classification are there. 10 sources are used plus Vermeulen's own additions, comments and corrections: Boericke; Boger – both his own *Synoptic* and the Boennighausen; von Lippe's *Key Notes and Red Line Symptoms*; TF Allen's *Primer*; Alfred & Dayton Pulford's *Graphic Drug Pictures*; Cowperthwaite's *Textbook*; Kent's *Repertory and Lectures*; Clarke; Hering's *Condensed and Guiding Symptoms*; and finally TF Allen's *Encyclopedia*. The distinction is well made between cured or clinical symptoms – as sourced from Hering; and proved symptoms from Allen. These distinctions and many more are carefully referenced in the text. This is what distinguishes Vermeulen's work from rival modern materia medica, a regard for the transmission of carefully documented information.

Vermeulen has been fastidious and conscientious. What we have erroneously called small remedies, the little guys apparently entered as afterthoughts in Boericke, have been liberated. Inside every small remedy is a polychrest struggling to escape. These less well-known remedies have their own entry with much more information than before, with a retained identity of the source. He is aware of the value of such background information as the friendship of Compton Burnett with Clarke. Clarke added Burnett's comments to his work, which in turn has been included here. Chemical formulae are cited, as are botanical and animal families in both older and modern versions. He has not graded the symptoms in the main, as their inclusion in itself is a sufficient indicator of their value. His focus is 'to stay focused on symptoms and tune out gradations'. Categories of symptoms like concomitants, alternating, extensions, better, worse are all signified with neat symbols. Relationship of remedies is derived from Clarke, even if considered complicated and vexatious. I shall not go on into even more detail but to remark that there is a thorough 6-page introduction, which has not left me with any questions.

Samuel Johnson, creator of a famous modern dictionary of English in the 18<sup>th</sup> century therein defined a lexicographer as 'a writer of dictionaries, a harmless drudge'. Here is an example of most fruitful drudgery. The result is a pleasure to read and study. I have solved a few cases on the Homeopathic Helpline this week by leaving my copy close to the phone.

670 words.