

*Synoptic Reference I: The First 500 Remedies*

By Frans Vermeulen

2012, B Jain Archibel, Assesse, Belgium, hardback 1750 pages. £75.00

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Reviewed by Francis Treuherz

The latest edition of the Synoptic series is a pleasure to read. My first worry was the limit of 500 remedies. Frans assures the reader that he is already at work on the next 500. Here is a reference book of new, old, polychrest and small remedies with an introduction written in an engaging style. I wish this was longer or maybe your editor can persuade him to write an article in the same vein for the journal on how he goes about creating his great books. It is full of anecdotes about at least one remedy from each family to whet the appetite. Why do *Argentum nitricum*s burp loudly, or *Ginkgo biloba* has a delusion of being old? Read the book!

Frans has tried to go back to sources, to original provings and well-regarded clinical authorities from all centuries. The material of remedy is introduced as hints and lessons can be learned from the background. Affinities, mentals, generals, locals and sensations are listed, with a long section on the rubrics strange, rare and peculiar and another on foods and fluid. Finally there are 'several distinctive symptoms and characteristics which define the remedy' - which crowns the information really well. The introduction also lists remedies by family but the book is alphabetical in its arrangement.

I decided to study some well-known remedies, which I thought I 'knew' well. Little did I know that there is still more to read about *Sulphur*, 'Omnipresent, multiform, super-reactive and versatile [or so he wants to believe]' writes Frans [author's parentheses], combining the reality of the chemical with the delusion of the character. I had not realised that *Calcareo carbonica* steals money. I studied some small remedies that have recently been prescribed for me, *Ginkgo biloba* for example, about which I could find very little until I read the details here. Frans says he has combined some food rubrics such as veal, pork and hamburgers into meat; oranges, mangoes and tomatoes become fruit. I realise he had to do some of this for lack of space and simplicity. Frans claims he has gone back to original sources, perhaps it is unfair to find more as it is an impossible mountain to climb: I looked at the original proving of *Lyssinum* by Hering, to better understand the desire for chocolate which is now so common in our over-sweetened diet. 'Aversion to drinking water, but can take small quantities of chocolate' is the description in the appetite section of Hering's *Guiding Symptoms*. There is no desire for chocolate but another aspect of hydrophobia and the chocolate is drinking chocolate.

Another problem are his sources: Frans is conscientious in naming his sources at the end of the introduction to every remedy and uses an initial to reference the sources in the text. But while he names the authors he does not reference the full title or journal or date so for *Lyssin* he references Klein as a modern clinical source [K] but no more detail. So it is quite hard even with a computer, to trace the reference. I suggest that an online file is created for the full bibliography on the lines of the helpful reference sources created for the first rate new 4 volume set on *Plants*, [www.plantfamilies.net/](http://www.plantfamilies.net/). He explains that he has accessed both the *Synthesis* and *Complete Repertories*, which also cite their sources in detail.

I really have no real doubts about the reliability of this book compared with so many classic abbreviated texts – it is just the role of a reviewer to find a flaw and hopefully entertain the reader in the style of the original author. I have definitely decided that I shall look at this book before I look at Clarke, for any remedy which is present here, and that is a huge leap for me. Despite the very few shortcomings this new book is surely destined to become a modern classic. Every homeopathic home should have one.

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*Concordant Reference: Complete Classic Materia Medica*

By Frans Vermeulen

2011, B Jain Archibel, Assesse, Belgium, hardback 2074 pages. £90.00.

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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.