

Genius of Homeopathy – a collection of 19th century writings on homeopathy by Francis Treuhertz

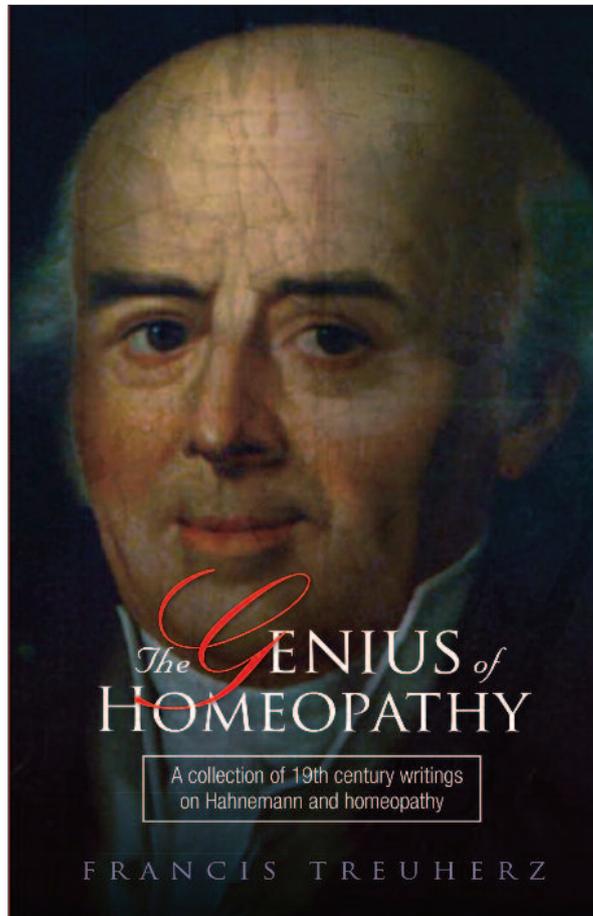
Publisher: Saltire Books • ISBN: 078-0-95590-652-7 • 350 pages • £29.99

Francis Treuhertz is renowned in homeopathic circles for his extensive library of specialist books. Using this vast resource he has to put together a collection of material that he describes as the “the most relevant to the current conflict in which homeopathy is embroiled”. He certainly succeeds in this objective and in furthering our understanding of the history of our chosen profession.

Samuel Hahnemann is hailed as the founder of homeopathy; indeed he has achieved almost cult status among some homeopaths. Admiration is not universal, however, and others criticise him for his attacks on the orthodox medical establishment. And even today his theory of miasms causes great controversy.

All homeopaths are familiar with Hahnemann’s life story; however, the collected letters he penned to his patients help us to understand the man himself. He lived in the time of heroic medicine, a delightful euphemism for the barbaric practices of that epoch. Iatrogenic disease (illness caused by treatment) was in its heyday, resulting in such high mortality rates among the more well-off citizens that death by exsanguinations, poisoning and purging was commonplace for the rich. The poor had no access to the lancet or the apothecary’s poisons; so, as long as they did not succumb to infectious diseases or starvation, they generally fared better. As the surgeon Sir Astley Cooper once famously said: “The science of medicine was founded on conjecture and improved by murder.”

It is little wonder that in the *Organon* (Hahnemann’s original statement of the basic principles of homeopathic medicine) he states that a primary concern for a physician is “to first do no harm”; a sentiment repeated in the Hippocratic Oath. Hahnemann’s letters to his patients show his deep commitment to this philosophy and point out the error of consulting doctors who do not share that opinion. He focuses on



simple measures such as good diet and hygiene, regular exercise and taking a more relaxed approach to life – good solid advice. His ideas were decades ahead of the times.

The records clearly show how Hahnemann was a scientist of the highest order, one that tested hypotheses rather than distorted the facts to prove his hypothesis. As the 19th century French physiologist Claude Bernard stated so eloquently, “When the observed fact does not correspond to a famous theory, the fact has to be accepted and the theory rejected.” An idea he revisited with the words:

“A theory must be modified to be adapted to nature and not nature to adapt itself to the theory.”

The book contains many papers from eminent 19th century homeopaths discussing Hahnemann’s life and his theories. The language is typical of the day, peppered with quotes in Latin, German,

French and Greek, which may put off the modern reader. Unfortunately, there is not always a translation of these texts which I do hope will be rectified in further editions. That aside, it is a fascinating insight into that period of history and the reflections of exalted homeopaths on our founder’s personal history.

James Compton Burnett describes Hahnemann as “an unworthy outcast from the ecclesia medica catholica” (the one true church of medicine); while Dr John Henry Clarke saw in Hahnemann’s zeal for denouncing the barbaric practices of blood letting and brutalising the mentally ill, something of the revolutionary.

Dr Robert E Dudgeon’s commentary is perhaps the most relevant of all the articles, in that it clearly demonstrates ways to rebut the critics of homeopathy. It was obviously written after Oliver Wendell Holmes published his infamous article “Homeopathy and its kindred

delusions”. It would be wonderful to see Dudgeon’s logical article appearing on the internet as frequently as Holmes’s piece, for his arguments, with only a few minor alterations needed, are as pertinent today as when he wrote them.

He says: “The doctrine that whenever pain exists it must be instantly choked off with a narcotic, has led to the manufacture of some of the most distressing maladies.” He also talks of the abuse of antiseptics, the dangers of polypharmacy, and the lack of logic in testing drugs on animals.

Although this book looks at homeopathy through the eyes of Hahnemann and his contemporaries, its relevance to the present day is striking. I highly recommend this book to all who are interested in homeopathy.

*Review by Marysia Kratimenos
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