

***JOHN  
ELLIS***



***PERSONAL  
EXPERIENCE  
OF A PHYSICIAN***

**John Ellis**

# **Personal Experience of a Physician**

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# CHAPTER I.

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We all admit that every one who attempts to act as a physician, should strive to qualify himself, or herself, for the work by obtaining the best education which our medical schools afford; for to physicians are intrusted, not simply the property or money, but the very lives of their fellow-citizens. As the responsibility is great, so the duty of preparing one's self before commencing practice, and of keeping fully abreast of all new and valuable discoveries in the art of healing, is equally great. A physician should not be led blindly by his teachers and prominent medical writers, and so strongly confirm himself in the theories and views which they proclaim that he cannot, without prejudice, examine new views and theories with due care. It has been said that when Harvey discovered the true course of the circulation of the blood, there was not a single professor in the medical colleges of England over fifty years of age, who ever believed "the heresy," as his discovery was called. However this may have been, it is certain that professors and prominent medical writers are not always the first to see and recognize the truth, even when it is clearly presented to their notice.

A native of western Massachusetts, I studied medicine with an intelligent and worthy physician in my native town,

and attended two and one-half courses of medical lectures at the Berkshire Medical College, at Pittsfield, Mass., and graduated in 1841; and during the following winter I attended the Medical College at Albany, N. Y., devoting a large portion of my time to dissecting. After finishing at Albany, I visited various places in western and central Massachusetts, and operated on eyes for strabismus or cross-eyes,—an operation which had then been recently introduced for that deformity; after which I settled at Chesterfield (Mass.), and commenced practicing medicine, where I remained about one year.

One day I visited Northampton, and, calling on a physician with whom I was acquainted, I found upon his table a homoeopathic book. "Why," I exclaimed with astonishment, "you are not studying homoeopathy, are you?" "Yes," he replied, "I am studying it, and trying the remedies cautiously;" and he went on to describe cases which he had treated satisfactorily by the use of the remedies, and among them a case of pleurisy and one of intermittent fever, and he wound up by saying: "Now, if you will go down the street to a book-store and purchase 'Hull's Jahr,' in two volumes, I will give you half a dozen homoeopathic remedies, and you can try them for yourself."

Here was a dilemma. Never until that hour had I ever heard homoeopathy spoken of, by either a medical professor or one of my professional brethren, except with contempt and ridicule. "But," I said to myself, "if there is any truth in homoeopathy I ought to know it, and I cannot treat this physician's testimony with contempt; and it is a duty which I owe to my fellow-men, and especially to my

patients, to investigate the new system carefully." I immediately went and purchased the books, and he give me six bottles of medicine, and I took them back with me to Chesterfield. I remember making but one Homoeopathic prescription before leaving Chesterfield, and that was for a case of uterine hemorrhage, which I had treated unsuccessfully for some time with allopathic remedies. I looked over my Homoeopathic books carefully and found that China (cinchona) was indicated. As that remedy was not among the bottles of medicated pellets which my medical friend had given me, I directed that one drop of the ordinary tincture of Peruvian bark should be dropped into a glass of water, and that, after stirring it well, one teaspoonful of the solution thus made should be given three or four times a day. The patient commenced improving immediately, and was soon well.

Soon after that I removed to Grand Rapids, Michigan, and commenced anew the practice of medicine. I then had neither the knowledge nor the faith in homoeopathy which I thought would justify me in treating any serious case of disease with homoeopathic remedies; but I did not neglect to study the new books. One day, a friend of my younger days, who was residing at Grand Haven, came into my office and said that he had been suffering from the toothache for several days, and that he did not like to have the tooth extracted, and he wanted to know if I could do anything for it without extracting it. I told him that I had recently obtained some homoeopathic books and remedies, and that I had noticed that remedies were spoken of for toothache. So I looked over my books and selected Belladonna as the

remedy suitable in his case, and gave him a dose of it and other doses to take with him if he needed them. We talked in the office for a short time, and then we walked up to the hotel where he was stopping; as we entered, he stood still a moment and remarked: "Well, my tooth does not ache as severely as it did." I saw him weeks afterward, and he told me that he had not had the toothache from the hour he took the medicine.

Away in that new place, then a village of about one thousand inhabitants, with no homoeopathic physician within a hundred miles of me, I commenced cautiously the use of the new remedies; first in mild cases of disease, and in cases where Allopathic treatment failed to produce the desired effect. Among the first of the serious cases where I used the remedies was a case of pneumonia. A young man had been very sick with that disease for many days. I had resorted vigorously to the antiphlogistic treatment then in vogue; a consulting physician was called, and at last we told the family that our patient could not live until the next morning. I then said to the consulting physician: "I have some homoeopathic remedies; suppose we try them?" His reply was: "It does not make any difference what you try; he will not live until morning." Under such circumstances I felt that I was justified in trying the new remedies. I accordingly dissolved a few pellets of Aconite in a glass of water, and of Bryonia alb. in another glass of water, and directed that a teaspoonful of the solution of Aconite should be given once an hour for five hours, and that a similar dose of Bryonia be given instead of Aconite every sixth hour. I sat down by his bedside and watched his case for two hours. At the end of

that period I found that his pulse was five beats less frequent in a minute, and that his breathing was a little easier. The next morning all of his dangerous symptoms had disappeared, and in a reasonable period of time he was restored to health. I talked with the consulting physician about his unexpected recovery, and we were, disposed to think that we had made a false prognosis, and that he would have recovered any way. Still, the case made some impression on me; so that in the next case of pneumonia to which I was called, I resolved to try the same remedies in the same way. The patient was a man about forty years of age. Under the action of the Aconite and Bryonia the patient about held his own, neither gaining nor losing very perceptibly for about three days. At the end of that period I became alarmed, and felt that if the patient were to die I should be guilty of the crime of manslaughter. I discontinued the treatment, and resorted to the then regular antiphlogistic treatment; the patient immediately began to get worse, and at the end of three days more he was a very sick man. I then came to the conclusion that my patient had done much better under the homoeopathic treatment than he had under the Allopathic, and I discontinued the latter and returned to the former, giving the Aconite and Bryonia. The patient ceased to grow worse; he held his own for two or three days, then he began to improve, and was soon restored to health. From that day to this I have never bled a patient suffering from either pneumonia or pleurisy, neither have I applied a blister, or given a cathartic, or an Allopathic dose of tartar emetic, or an opiate, or any form of alcoholic or fermented drinks, either during the continuance of the



above-named diseases or during convalescence; nor have I ever regretted, in a single instance, not having done so.

During the fall of the year we had many cases of dysentery which were very obstinate, continuing one or two weeks or longer, attended by a fever approaching a typhoid character. I found the Allopathic treatment unsatisfactory, as there were quite a number of deaths. So I consulted my homoeopathic books and concluded to try the remedies; but at that time I had only the six carefully prepared remedies given me by the physician in Northampton, and I found that I needed some other remedies; so for Arsenicum I used a drop of Fowler's solution of arsenic in a glassful of water, giving a teaspoonful of the solution thus prepared for a dose, and I also used the tincture of Colocynth and other remedies in the same manner. Even with the help of such crude remedies I found that I could generally control the disease far more speedily and with greater certainty and safety than by Allopathic treatment.

I was called to attend a young man who, while stooping over to set a trap in the woods, was mistaken for a bear by a comrade who was hunting with him, and shot through the neck. To restrain secondary hemorrhage I was obliged, in order to save the life of my patient, to ligature both carotid arteries at the interval of only four and one-half days, which, at that time, had never been done successfully at an interval of less than twelve months between the operations. My patient did not suffer from head symptoms, as I was fearful he would, but his lungs became seriously congested. I resorted to the Allopathic treatment without affording any relief; and, as he was steadily getting worse, I consulted my

homoeopathic works and gave him Aconite, a drop of the tincture in a glass of water; of the solution thus made I directed a teaspoonful to be given every hour; this gave prompt relief to the active symptoms of congestion. For a cough which remained I gave a few doses of belladonna prepared in the same manner, and all of the symptoms soon disappeared. I reported this case to the New York Journal of Medicine, and it was transferred, even to the homoeopathic prescriptions, to the American edition of Velpeau's great work on surgery.

I found when I went to Grand Rapids that the intermittent, remittent, and pernicious fevers, which prevailed in that place and in the surrounding country, were generally treated by the resident physicians with mercurial or other cathartic remedies, followed or accompanied by Quinine and brandy or fermented drinks containing Alcohol, and opiates where they were supposed to be necessary. As I began to look into homoeopathy, I first prescribed Ipecac for the vomiting which sometimes attended these fevers, one drop of the tincture in a glass of water, and giving a teaspoonful from the glass for a dose. For watery diarrhoeas I gave Fowler's solution of Arsenic in the same manner, and in both instances generally with very satisfactory results. As my confidence in the homoeopathic treatment of diseases increased, I sent to New York and obtained an assortment of the remedies and more books, and was then much better prepared to prescribe successfully. I soon found that by their use I could dispense with cathartic remedies and thus avoid the danger of causing a medicinal irritation of the bowels, which it is sometimes difficult to control. I also found that I

could do much better without Alcohol in any form, in the treatment of these fevers, than with it; and I soon ceased to use brandy, wine, beer, etc.

As to Quinine, that remedy will unquestionably interrupt the paroxysms of intermittent and remittent fevers promptly if it is given at the proper time and in suitable doses; and, if the attack is the first the patient has ever had, a return of the disease may at least sometimes be prevented by giving once a week in two or three doses, at an interval of twelve hours, about the quantity which would be required to interrupt the disease in the first instance. These doses should be given the day before the disease is expected to return. I found it much better to give about two large doses of quinine than to give the same quantity in 1 or 2 grain doses. I reported the results of my experiments and observations in the use of Quinine at Grand Rapids to the *New York Journal of Medicine* (allopathic). In all instances where life is in danger from a return of a paroxysm of intermittent or remittent fever, the patient can be rescued from immediate danger by giving Quinine in doses sufficient to prevent a return of the paroxysm. In all other cases, and perhaps even in such, we can rely safely on homoeopathic remedies in minute doses. Quinine in Allopathic doses will rarely cure the disease, excepting, it may be, as named above, in a first attack. If the patient has ever had more than one or two attacks, it is almost sure to return again and again for two seasons, complicated with symptoms caused by the remedy, in spite of Allopathic doses of quinine; whereas by treating the patient homoeopathically, except in old cases, you will not suddenly interrupt the paroxysms, for

they may continue one or two weeks, or even a few days longer, but when they cease there is generally the end of the disease, and the patient speedily regains his ordinary state of health instead of lingering along with frequent returns of the disease for generally two seasons, as he does when quinine is used. Old cases of intermittent fever are frequently cured promptly by infinitesimal doses of homoeopathic remedies. I have never seen Allopathic doses of Quinine do any good in typhoid fevers. And, as to the use of cathartics, from my observation I soon became satisfied that a vast number of lives have been lost by their use in cases of remittent and typhoid fevers, the tendency to irritation of the mucous membrane, which exists especially in the latter disease, being often fatally aggravated by cathartic remedies.

I found the prejudice so strong against homoeopathy when I commenced my investigations, that I generally said nothing about the kind of remedies I was using, and sometimes disguised the remedies by mixing with sugar or pulverized liquorice root, or by mixing or dissolving them in water.

I have given the above details to show how carefully and patiently, step by step, I commenced my investigations, and watched the action of remedies when given in accordance with the Homoeopathic law of cure, and compared the results with the results which followed the use of Allopathic remedies.

I remained at Grand Rapids two years. During that period I gradually substituted the Homoeopathic treatment of diseases for the Allopathic, as fast as I found I could cure

the various diseases which came under my observation with more safety and certainty by the former method of treatment than by the latter.

Now I ask the intelligent, conscientious, and philanthropic reader, Did I do right or did I do wrong in thus investigating homoeopathy and using cautiously the remedies for the cure of the sick, as I found them more efficacious and safe than the remedies which I had been taught to use and had used previously? If it was my duty to thus critically examine the new method of treatment, when my attention was seriously called to it, and to cautiously try the remedies on the sick, is it not clearly the duty of every Allopathic physician in our land to do the same? To thus earnestly call the attention of physicians of every school to the importance of investigating homoeopathy, and carefully using the remedies for the cure of the sick, and to entreat them not to stop and be satisfied with crude doses, such as drop doses of tinctures and the first, second or third dilutions or triturations of remedies, as some have done, is my sole object in writing these pages. The most decided and satisfactory cures which I have ever witnessed have been effected by the thirtieth and two hundredth dilutions. But, according to my experience, it is not well to confine one's self absolutely to either high or low dilutions, as some have done; but if you are satisfied that you have selected the right remedy, instead of changing the remedy when you do not see relief from its use, change the dilution from low to high or high to low, as the case may be. I could detail many cases to show the importance of doing this. No physician should labor specially to sustain either a theory or

preconceived ideas, but to cure his patients promptly. The health and lives of our fellow-beings are too important to be trifled with.

During the early years of my practice of homoeopathy I was called to see a young man recently attacked with "epileptic fits." As he was going immediately to New York, with his sister, I advised them to call on the late Dr. John F. Gray, with whom I became acquainted during my first visit to New York. On reaching New York they called on Dr. Gray, and the young man remained under his treatment for several weeks. Of Dr. Gray's treatment of this patient, so far as remedies were concerned, I know only of a single remedy which he gave, which was Nitrate of silver, which I understood was given in a somewhat crude form, and not even in a low centesimal dilution. The young man, finding little or no benefit from the treatment, went to his home in Georgia, after which I received a letter stating that he had not been essentially benefited by Dr. Gray's treatment, and requesting me to prescribe for him. In response I sent him the 30th dilution of Nux vomica, which he took and soon recovered from the disease, and never had any return of the paroxysms. Dr. Gray was a low dilutionist.

On the other hand, during my second or third visit to New York I called on Dr. Edward Bayard, who was a high dilutionist. I found him in poor health. He had been suffering, as he told me, for some time from a subacute irritation of the mucous membrane of the bowels, with loose passages, and some febrile excitement. He asked me to prescribe for him. After a careful inquiry as to existing symptoms I said to him, "Mercurius vivus ought to cure

you." He replied that he had taken it repeatedly without the slightest effect. I asked him what dilution of this remedy he had taken. He replied that he had taken the 30th and 200th dilutions. I suggested that he should take the 3d trituration. "Why," he exclaimed, "I have not prescribed the 3d trituration of mercury for many years, and I do not know as I have any in my office." But, on looking around, he found a bottle of the second centesimal trituration; and I said to him: "That will answer. You can take a dose of that now [which he did] and repeat it three or four times between now and to-morrow night, after which take a dose of the 30th or 200th dilution of sulphur." The next time I saw him he told me that my prescription cured him promptly.

That the careful treatment of diseases by the use of low dilutions of Homoeopathic remedies, when compared with the Allopathic treatment, is wonderfully successful I well know; for it was by the success which attended the use of the low dilutions that I was led into the new practice, as thousands of other graduates of allopathic colleges have been. Still, I know very well by experience that the low dilutionists, in a very large number of cases, fail to cure patients promptly, and in many cases fail to cure them at all when they could cure them promptly by the use of the high dilutions, often by the very same remedy which they have been using. I was called to see a patient suffering from puerperal anaemia, with "nursing sore mouth." She was greatly exhausted; her stomach, which was very acid, would retain very little nourishment. She had been under Allopathic treatment for some time without experiencing any relief. I gave her a low dilution of Pulsatilla, which

afforded her no relief. Then I selected other remedies, from which she derived no benefit. After that I gave her the 200th dilution of Pulsatilla, the first dose of which produced, as she declared, a change for the better within an hour, and she rapidly recovered under its use. A lady who had for two winters been sent to Florida by her Allopathic physician for a severe cough, attended by the physical signs of induration of the summit of one of her lungs, called on me early in the fall, saying that her physician advised her to go again to Florida, but that she did not like to go, and wanted me to prescribe for her. After examining her symptoms carefully I gave her a single dose of Sulphur, 200th dilution; at the end of a week she was better, at the end of another week much better, and at the end of the third week she had but few symptoms remaining, for which I gave only one dose of Arsenicum, 200th, which completed the cure.

Having practiced medicine for two years at Grand Rapids, I spent a winter East and visited New York, making the Acquaintance of Homoeopathic physicians, and conversing with them about the new system of treating disease, attending medical lectures and clinics at the two Allopathic colleges. I remember very well attending a clinic at the College of Physicians and Surgeons, held by the late Prof. Willard Parker, when a little child was brought in suffering from whooping cough. Prof. Parker, looking around upon the students, said: "Here, gentlemen, is a case of disease which, like the small-pox, measles, and scarlet fever, runs a definite course; if you will let the patients alone they will generally get well, but if you commence dosing them you will often bring on complications and they will die." This



statement, coming from a medical man of his prominence, surely was worthy of consideration.

After spending the winter at the East I went to Detroit, Mich., and opened an office in connection with Dr. P. M. Wheaton. I practiced in Detroit for fifteen years, excepting that during the last six years of that time I spent a part of each year at Cleveland, giving a course of lectures on the Theory and Practice of Medicine at the Western Homoeopathic Medical College, of Cleveland, Ohio.

When I went to Detroit the prejudice against homoeopathy was very strong, especially among physicians. An attempt was made to pass a bill through the Legislature of Michigan which would virtually prohibit the practice in the State. The bill passed the Senate, but, owing to the prompt action of the friends of homoeopathy in exposing the design of the advocates of the bill, it was defeated in the House of Representatives. The presence of the Asiatic cholera in 1849 in the city, and the success which attended the homoeopathic treatment of that disease, was instrumental in calling the attention of large numbers of the most intelligent and influential citizens to the new practice and establishing it upon a firm basis. When the disease first appeared in the city, we furnished the families which we were accustomed to attend, and all others who desired them, with *Veratrum album* and *Cuprum metallicum*, which had been earnestly recommended by Homoeopathic physicians elsewhere, who had had experience in treating the disease, as preventive remedies, a dose or two of each to be taken daily. As a result, very few among the families which we were accustomed to attend were attacked with