

Letter to Hufeland

The following words were addressed to Hufeland, the highly cultured scholar, the eminent and universally esteemed physician, who later became Professor of Pathology and Therapy and who was generous and broad-minded enough to honour-indeed to encourage-Hahnemann's effort without bias or prejudice:

For eighteen years I have been deviating from the ordinary practice of the medical art. Attending to patients in the way our books suggest, it was to me a piaculum-[an action which demands propitiation or revenge]-that I should be continually groping in the dark and, according to this or that (imagined) opinion, be prescribing treatments, which were only contained in the *Materia Medica* according to degree of fitness.

My sense of duty would not easily allow me to treat the unknown pathological state of my suffering brethren with these unknown medicines. If they are not exactly suitable (and how could the physician know that, since their specific effects had not yet been demonstrated?), they might with their strong potency easily change life into death or induce new disorders and chronic maladies, often more difficult to eradicate than the original disease. The thought of becoming in this way a murderer or a malefactor towards the life of my fellow human beings was most terrible to me, so terrible and disturbing that I wholly gave up my practice in the first years of my married life. I scarcely treated anybody for fear of injuring him, and occupied myself solely with chemistry and writing.

But then children were born to me, several children, and after a time serious illnesses occurred, which, in tormenting and endangering my children, my own flesh and blood, made it even more painful to my sense of duty, that I could not with any degree of assurance procure help for them. But whence was I to obtain help-certain and sure help-with our present knowledge of the power of medicines, resting as it does merely on vague observations, often merely in hypothetical opinions, and with the innumerable mass of arbitrary views of disease in our pathologies? This was a labyrinth, in which, only that man can remain at ease who is willing to accept as truth the assertions of the healing powers of medicines, because they are printed in a hundred books, and who, without enquiry, receives as from the oracle the haphazard definitions of the diseases in the Pathologies, as well as their supposed cure in the hypothetical instances of our Therapies.

Whence then was certain help to be obtained?--was the yearning cry of the comfortless father in the midst of the groaning of his children, dear to him above all else. Night and desolation around me-no sight of enlightenment for my troubled paternal heart.

During my eight years' practice my attention had been repeatedly drawn to the delusions of the ordinary methods of healing, and I knew very well from sad experience, what was to be hoped for from the methods of Sydenham and Fr. Hoffmann, from Boerhaave and Gaubius, or from Stoll, Quarin, Cullen and de Haen. Yet perhaps the whole nature of this science, as great men have already said, is such that it is not capable of any great certainty.

"What a shameful, blasphemous thought!"-I clasped my brow-"that the sapience of the Infinite Spirit, animating the universe, should not be able to create means to pacify the sufferings of diseases which He, after all, allowed to arise!"...

Would He, the Father of all, coldly survey the torments of disease of his dearest creatures? Would He leave open no way to the genius of mankind-otherwise so infallible-no easy, certain and dependable way of regarding disease from the right angle, of determining the use and the specific, safe and dependable results obtainable from the medicines?

Before I would have given credence to this blasphemy, I should have forsworn all the school systems of the world...

Well then, I thought, if there must be a safe, more dependable method of healing, as sure as God is the wisest and most beneficent of beings, let me no longer seek it in the thorn hedges of ontological [the doctrine of the existing] statements, in arbitrary opinions and false conclusions, even though they may adapt themselves wonderfully to a splendid system, nor yet in the authorities of highly celebrated men of delusions. No, let me seek it where it might be nearest at hand, and where they have all passed by, because it did not seem artificial or learned enough, and was not adorned with victorious laurel wreaths for its system, its pedantry or its high falutin abstractions. It made its appeal only to me, who, with no system or faction-head to please, wished to be able to look on with normally easy conscience, should my endangered children die