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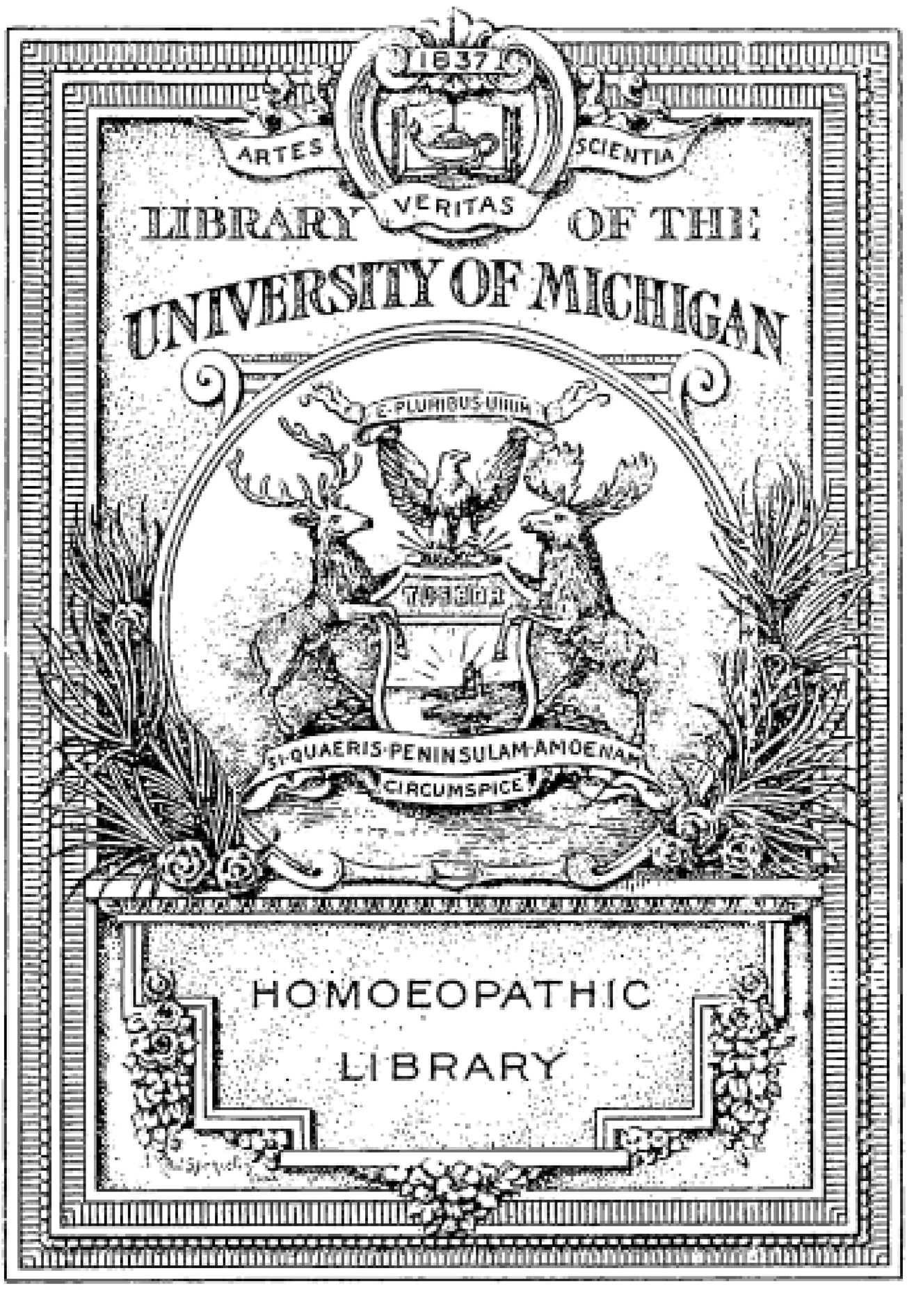

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HOMŒOPATHIC MEDICINES,

Prepared with the greatest care, and by himself solely, may be had of

WILLIAM HEADLAND,

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THE HOMŒOPATHIC SANATORIUM;

THE EDINBURGH HOMŒOPATHIC DISPENSARY;

THE MARYLEBONE HOMŒOPATHIC DISPENSARY;

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Preparing for the Press,

AN INQUIRY

INTO THE

HOMŒOPATHIC PRACTICE OF MEDICINE,

BY WILLIAM HENDERSON M.D.,

Professor of Medicine and General Pathology, and lately one of the Professors of Clinical Medicine in the University of Edinburgh.

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AN

INTRODUCTION

TO THE

STUDY OF HOMŒOPATHY.

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PREFATORY NOTICE.

Inquiries are often made by liberal persons for some concise, simple, and yet not superficial Treatise upon Homœopathy. Their wish is to have, within a small compass, an explanation of the peculiarities of the Homœopathic doctrines, accompanied by a statement of the evidence by which those doctrines are supported, and of the results of their application to practice. To meet this demand, we have selected various papers from THE BRITISH JOURNAL OF HOMŒOPATHY and some other sources, and have arranged them in such a manner, as to present the subject in a way not repulsive to the professional, nor unintelligible to the literary, reader.

As we wish this Volume to be considered as only an introduction to the study of greater works, we have purposely omitted any reference to minor

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pharmaceutical and pathological questions still under discussion among Homœopathists themselves. It is our aim to remove the preliminary difficulties that impede the calm consideration of the subject; and if any of our readers be induced to undertake an experimental investigation of the doctrines and practice of Homœopathy, the end we had in view in publishing this compilation will be amply fulfilled.

J. J. D.
J. R. R.

February 1845.

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INTRODUCTION

TO THE

STUDY OF HOMŒOPATHY.

CHAPTER I.

CHARACTERISTICS OF HOMŒOPATHY.

HEALTH is of such paramount importance to man, and Homœopathy—if Homœopathy be true—must be of such paramount importance to health, that the subject ought to command the attention of every class of readers, without regard to the conclusions they may eventually arrive at concerning its merits. Both indifference, which cares not to know, and dogmatism, which stoops not to examine, are courses deviating no less from the practice of a sound policy, than from the principles of true philosophy. It should be recollected, that if Homœopathy, on the one hand, boasts of adding to the scientific conquests of the mind, and of conducing to the greatest interests of the body, it is quite willing, on the other hand, that the validity of its claims should be tried before an

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authority commensurate with their magnitude in the severe rules of discipline which it enforces, and in the decisions without appeal, which it has a right to pronounce. Homœopathy challenges no less peremptory, unexceptionable, and accessible a tribunal than that of experience. It is neither fair nor safe summarily to dispose of its claims upon the assumption of its unworthiness, when we can take the advocate for Homœopathy at his word, and bring the regular, and, on that account, more authoritative forms of investigation to bear upon him and his cause.

Homœopathy has now attained the growth of nearly half a century;—old Saturn has spared it, the devourer of fashions and baubles, of shams and lies. Hahnemann's system has outlived its promulgator, and no signs of a shaken or threatened vitality as yet appear. A numerous body of men—most of them trained up in the purest academical orthodoxy—have made, and are making, their willing choice of Homœopathy, and practise it in various quarters of the globe;—there is such a thing as a homœopathic literature, periodical and otherwise, expounding the doctrine, exhibiting its methods, and challenging inquiry into its results:—there are official statistic documents to be appealed to in homœopathic hospitals;—there are dispensaries, or similar establishments, in the chief towns both of Europe and America, bringing daily to the test of experience the efficacy or inefficacy of infinitesimal doses, and throwing open their doors to friend and foe alike. If all this is too little to establish the truth of the system, is it not at least too much, far too

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much, to allow it to be taken for granted that Homœopathy is an obvious fallacy or an absurdity ?

Really, did we take the latter view of the question, our curiosity would be whetted to the sharpest edge, to discover how—by what portentous process, through what singular plausibilities, or owing to what unprecedented infatuation in men's mind—an absurd or fallacious scheme bearing immediately upon health and life, and substantiating itself into something exclusively and permanently experimental, could have stolen into the dignity of a system. We would wish to be able to solve the riddle, how a nonentity could counterfeit so well the bulk and gait of a reality as to become the rallying point of a minority—a respectable and intelligent minority, we trust—of the medical class. Over and above all, we would grapple body to body with this phantom: we would leave no feature in it unexplored, no part of it undisturbed, no boasted evidence unrefuted, no alleged fact undestroyed, the sooner to force it back to its original nothingness.

But has not a process of the like description been gone through more than once ? Has not Homœopathy been refuted *usque ad satietatem ?*

If Hahnemann's system did stand, and does, it was certainly not for lack of would-be demolishers. Professional Europe shook her sides with laughter at the first announcement of the Hahnemannic discoveries. That one *Herr* Hahnemann, a physician of no great notoriety, should have found, as it were, in one day, and in his individual head, what ages and the collective wisdom of ages had not discovered, namely, a constant empirical criterion to act upon, in the choice of medicines, looked

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improbable enough ;—that, as a scholion to the first proposition, the medicine made choice of, according to the above criterion, should be administered in infinitesimal doses, appeared such an absurdity as could only be met with Horace's '*Risum teneatis, amici?*' When the system began to work, however, and to work well—had the thing looked never so strange, had it been never so repugnant to the former notions and habits of the mind, since experience was appealed to, and the experience was within every body's reach, a serious, philosophical and matter-of-fact discussion would have been no less honourable to the medical class, than beneficial to the public at large.

Was such a course adopted ?* How can it be said, in any proper sense, that Homœopathy has been refuted, when the only weapons brought to bear upon it, are ridicule and obloquy? You may kill with such weapons ; you can hardly prove. In the history of the advance of human intellect, discoveries can be pointed out, which have called up hatreds more fierce : no one, in our recollection, has been assailed with jest and with sneers, in the same degree with Hahnemann's. We have met with many a ludicrous account or abusive denunciation of a medical hoax, going by the name of Homœopathy ; we have read witty sayings or grave rebukes concerning the homœopathic administration of 'nothing' to patients ; we have admired the industry of certain reviewers, in unstringing quotations from their antecedents and consequents, and then stringing them up again into a nice suicidal contradiction, so as to impose upon the system the trouble of

* See Appendix.

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demonstrating its own absurdity, and revealing the true character of its supporters,—being that of, in most cases, disguised allopaths,—enlivening the picture with an occasional inferred charge of poisoning, or underhand cocoa-vending, according as a tragic or comic demon lashes them on; but we know of no substantial argument, of no genuine unbiassed evidence being resorted to in the confutation of the homœopathic system. To the very few who have animadverted upon Homœopathy, with something approaching to gravity, we must, from the rarity of the cases, profess ourselves greatly beholden; even with such, however, the train of reasoning resolves itself into a begging of the whole question, since they generally assume, that homœopathic medicines, from their extreme attenuation, cannot have any action upon the economy of the human body. To this point we shall revert hereafter.

It is not with recriminatory feelings, nor in a tone of complaint, that we advert to the obloquy and ridicule constantly cast upon Homœopathy and Homœopathists. The best feelings of our nature may have been shocked, when, upon so solemn an occasion as death, even the death of our venerable Master, the only exceptions to the grave and respectful tone, assumed by the European press in recording the event, were British periodicals, scientific periodicals to boot; we may have felt disgusted, when, upon the newly-closed grave of a good old man, the most scurrilous imputations were laid by those 'exceedingly honest' reviewers, who, after gainsaying his genius, caricaturing his doctrine, and misquoting his words, must now proceed, forsooth, to slander his morals. But these

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were extreme cases, and could rouse but transient emotions.

So far, indeed, are we from any spirit of recrimination, that we look upon the whole warfare, epigrammatic and otherwise, carried on against Homœopathy, as quite a matter of course. Precedents, at any rate, will not fail it: old as the world, new as the present century. What can the unfortunate, and yet fortunate man, borne away by his genius from the beaten track, expect to find in the untrodden paths which it is his task to clear, but weeds and thorns? His eagle eye may descry from afar sunshiny hills, wide-sweeping horizons, glorious and blessed fields: but the way thereto is a wilderness, and that is *his* way. And it is good it should be so. Truth were not the heavenly, the god-like thing it is, could it be otherwise won than by magnanimity and self-denial. Genius were not the highest privilege in nature, were it not attended with infinite labour, with stringent duties, with struggles and trials. In the history of all discoveries and discoverers, we can read this lesson, while we run. Indeed, one must refrain from quoting names, not to be tedious. 'The enunciation of a great truth, and the ingratitude of mankind towards their benefactor, are phenomena so constantly coexistent, that the most consolatory aspect of the stern fact, is to consider it to be a law by which the race is benefited at the expense of the individual. Truth is so terrible when exhibited in its concentrated form of a principle, and involves such consequences, that all the energies of man are required to test it in the furnace of human passions, ere it can be purged of its dross, and fitted

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