

THE IMPORTANCE OF HAHNEMANN'S ORGANON*

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Unfortunately it is a sad fact, that most homœopaths are but poorly (if at all) acquainted with Hahnemann's *Organon*.¹ Yet, there is no doubt that this is the *single most important work* on the subject, providing the very basis upon which a truly in-depth study of its single foundation principle (*Similia*) and its application, must begin. That *Organon* remains largely unstudied and even ignored reveals the real *agnosy*² of our institutions and teachers charged with training future generations of homœopaths.

This short article hopes to encourage those who still feel the flame of conviction for *orthodox*³ Homœopathy, to revisit its most basic source, to make it their serious and continued study, and to thereby realise its full relevance and unmatched genius.

Hahnemann himself was annoyed at those who were too lazy to carefully read his directions in *Organon*. He writes:⁴

“Many persons of my acquaintance but half converted to homœopathy have repeatedly begged me to publish still more exact directions as to how this doctrine may be actually applied in practice, and how we are to proceed. I am astonished that after the very particular directions contained in the *Organon of Medicine* more especial instructions can be wished for.”

“I am also asked, ‘How are we to examine the disease in each particular case?’ As if special enough directions were not to be found in the book just mentioned.”

CMF von Bönninghausen, Hahnemann's most respected and trusted student and colleague, stated the following with regard to the general neglect of *Organon*:⁵

“It seems actually at present to be a rarity and an exception when any homœopath again consults the “*Organon of Healing*,” and I know several who do not even possess, and have never read, this book. And yet it is indisputably the basis of the homœopathic healing art, and besides so many valuable grains of gold are enclosed within it that at every repetition of the reading of this remarkable book, especially when read by the older practicing and experienced homœopathic physicians, ever new and important instruction and intelligence may be gained, so that its neglect cannot be too sharply reproved.”

J.T.Kent himself gives the following comments on this topic:⁶

To learn the *Materia Medica*, one must master Hahnemann's *Organon*, after which the symptomatology, and a full repertory must be the constant reference books, if careful homœopathic prescribing is to be attained and maintained.

A. McNeil of San Francisco, in his article *The Homœopathic Library*,⁷ rightly gives the following advice:

“I will therefore proceed to those works which relate to the treatment of patients. The foundation on which all homœopathic therapeutics rests is the *Organon*. Study it frequently and thoroughly. The great Adolph Lippe made it a rule to read it once a year and he said that every time he discovered something he had not before observed. Those sections which describe the examination of patients should be more especially studied, for your repertories and *materia medica* will avail you little if you do not examine your patients as he teaches.”

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A thorough understanding of the foundation principle of Homœopathy is indeed essential to its most effective application in each and every case of illness. After all, the only absolute point of distinction between Homœopathy and *all* other therapies, is its philosophical and practical foundation on *Similars*. But how do we study the *Organon*? It is interesting to read from people who were self-taught in this respect.

Let us look at what the respected *Dr.JN Kanjilal*, who taught himself Homœopathy (after his allopathic medical training), since it provides interesting guidelines for those of us in a similar position where (at the present time at least) a proper, comprehensive, high-level institutional training in Homœopathy is mostly unavailable. Dr.Kanjilal has very well stated the method which he himself utilised in his self-education in Homœopathy, and he offers the following advice relating to the study of *Organon*:⁸

“In the first reading every word of every aphorism together with its footnotes must be read very carefully with meticulous attention to the commas, semicolons etc., as well as the parentheses. Never be satisfied until the whole meaning of the aphorism with its logic and connotation becomes quite clear. In this reading, of course, the whole book, beginning from its NAME to the last line of the Appendix must be gone through.”

“In the second reading each aphorism should be read in the context of the whole *Organon* including the Appendix as given in the 5th Edition, translated by Dudgeon. Before starting the second reading a thorough perusal of the "Contents" of the same book, as given just after the preface to the Fifth Edition...should be given. This will help greatly in forming an idea of the arrangements of the different subjects taught in the book. After that, while reading any aphorism, all other aphorisms dealing with any of the points of the aphorism should be reperused. For example:* The phrase *accessory circumstances* occurs in aphorisms 5, 7 and 94; *accessory symptoms of the remedy* occurs in 163, 167, 180 and 181; *accessory symptoms of the disease* occurs in 5, 7 and 95; and so on. All these groups of aphorisms should be read together, so that the whole sense of the theme becomes quite clear.”

“After these two thorough personal readings, this book should most advantageously be read in a study circle of friends and colleagues who have already given such minimum two readings of the book. Each member of the study circle should try to explain his grasp on each of the aphorisms according to his understanding and sense of logic. In this way by mutual debate all the points will become more and more clear and more deeply comprehended.”

* These references are not entirely verbatim, rather, they are more contextual, most references only dealing with the basic topic rather than using the precise phrase as suggested by Kanjilal. Hence, §§ 5, 7, 94 only relate to accessory circumstances; §§163, 167, 180, 181 only relate to accessory symptoms of the remedy; §§5, 7, 95, only relate to accessory symptoms of the disease [G.D.]

Let me make the point that Hahnemann’s *Organon* is not just a small book on homœopathic philosophy, but a treatise on the application of scientific reasoning to the practice of medicine, as we may read in the following summation of B.K.Sarkar:⁹

“Hahnemann’s *Organon* is a critique of medical philosophy underlying the art of medicine. An analytical study of *Organon* as well as that of the history of Homœopathy and the life-story of its founder show clearly that Homœopathy is a product of inductive logic applied to the subject of Medicine. It is in fact the first as well as one of the most brilliant examples of the application of the inductive method of reasoning to the solution of one of the great problems of humanity viz., the treatment and cure of disease.”

From the very beginning of my own acquaintance with Homœopathy (1977), I made *Organon* the subject of my focus, since, as I could understand it, Hahnemann’s views could most accurately be ascertained from Hahnemann himself, even allowing for difficulties of translation. Through my teachings with *Organon*, I have heard students lament the difficulties of its language, and I of course assured them that its study becomes easier and easier the more often it is consulted and read carefully. I should also note that, when these same students of mine have begun their in-depth study of Hahnemann’s *Materia Medica Pura* (MMP) and *Chronic Diseases* (CD), they soon realised and remarked something along the lines of “*Organon* is easy to read compared to MMP & CD!”.¹⁰

Further, in my own experience, I would say it is not possible to appreciate the depth and implication of Hahnemann’s *Organon* without studying his other available works, from whence the *Organon* was evolved (especially *Essay on a New Principle...*, *Aesculapius in the Balance*, *Medicine of Experience*, *The Medical Observer*) and which have been translated into English and collected into the inadequately named volume *The Lesser Writings of Samuel Hahnemann* (HLW).

Let it not be assumed that *Organon* is merely a theoretical treatise – indeed it is the distillation of Hahnemann’s constant thoughts and significant experiences in the practice of medicine, into a highly condensed expression of a methodical and practical application of his discovery of a single and general therapeutic principle (*similars*) to

the clinical situation for the specific purpose of healing the sick, in the simplest, most gentle and reliable manner.¹¹ Bönninghausen clearly understood this, and through it's constant study, gained such mastery of the art, and Hahnemann's confidence to such a degree, that Hahnemann made the following declaration:¹²

“...Baron von Bönninghausen of Münster has studied and grasped my homœopathic system of treatment so thoroughly that as a homœopath he deserves to be fully trusted, and if I should fall ill and be unable to help myself I would not entrust myself to any other physician.”

Lastly, I would recommend this work to the study of all homœopaths, both student and teacher, and suggest it is never too late to return to it's pages, to study and examine each aphorism carefully, and in context with what Hahnemann had written earlier¹³ (HLW); remember, Bönninghausen was 43 years of age when he undertook its study, and look how much he accomplished!

Notes & References

1. Hahnemann, S.: *Organon der Heilkunst*, 6. Auflage (1842), edited by J.M.Schmidt, Haug, Heidelberg, 1996. English title: *Organon of Medicine*, sixth edition (1842) annotations translated W.Boericke (1921); fifth edition text translated by R.E.Dudgeon (1893).
2. By 'agnosy' (Gr. α [lack of]; γνώση [gnosis = knowledge]) I refer to a lack of knowledge or familiarity.
3. I use the term *orthodox*, from the Greek, ὀρθόδοξος (orthodoxos) in its strict sense, to mean *upright* or *correct*, and in reference to Homœopathy proper, *i.e.*, practiced in strict accord with the observation of *Similia Similibus Curantur* as the immutable therapeutic law of nature.
4. Hahnemann, S.: *Materia Medica Pura*, B.Jain, New Delhi, vol.1, Preamble (1833).
5. Bönninghausen,CMF.: *Typhoid Fever and High Potencies* (1853), in *The Lesser Writings of C.M.F. von Bönninghausen*, compiled by T.L.Bradford (1908) from the German translations by L.H.Tafel; First Indian edition, 1979, B.Jain, p.23 footnote.
6. Kent, J.T.: *Lectures on Homœopathic Materia Medica*, 2nd edition (1911), 1989 Reprint edition, Jain, New Delhi, p.12, Preface.
7. McNeil, A.: *The Homœopathic Library*, talk presented at the seventeenth annual session the International Hahnemannian Association (IHA), Glenn Summit, Philadelphia, June 24-25, 1896, in *Transactions of the IHA*.
8. Kanjilal, J.N.: *Writings on Homœopathy*, 2 vols., Das, Calcutta, 1977, vol.1, pp.255 – 256.
9. Sarkar, B.K.: *Essays on Homœopathy*, Hahnemann Publishing Company, Calcutta, 1968, p.459
10. MMP and CD also become much easier with familiarity and study.
11. Refer Hahnemann's *Organon of Medicine*, 6th edition, §§1,2.
12. Haehl, R.: *Samuel Hahnemann, His Life and Work*, 1922, 2 volumes, Indian edition, BJain, New Delhi, 1985, vol.2, p.483.
13. Sarkar, B.K.: *op. cit.*, p.461:

“The longer one can look back, the further one can look forward. The past supplies the key to the present and the future...In order to grasp fully the significance of the principles of Homœopathy a student should possess the knowledge of the state of affairs in the medical world when Hahnemann appeared on the scene. In order to enter the mind of Hahnemann when he was a homœopath in the making, a student should be acquainted with the original writings of Hahnemann which may be taken as precursors to his immortal work *Organon*...These writings should serve as a good introduction to the study of *Organon* and should go a great way to rouse the critical faculty of a homœopathic medical student.”