

Looking into
HAHNEMANN'S MATERIA MEDICIA

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Introduction

Many homœopaths today are under the impression that *provings* form the sole basis of our homœopathic materia medica. It may therefore surprise some to realise that although all of the drugs in Hahnemann's *Materia Medica Pura* [MMP] and *Chronic Diseases* [CD] have undergone provings to determine their effects more precisely, most also include information from other sources.

Along with his methodical provings, Hahnemann included a good many symptoms from the *old school*, including many derived from toxicological reports recorded before and during his life time.¹ Poisoning incidents were common place in his day and many valuable accounts can be found in the literature (accessible today using internet searches), describing the after effects of consuming toxic substances, whether given maliciously, taken accidentally, or prescribed in overdose.

Hahnemann spent countless hours scouring the many medical journals in order to find accurately reported substance effects. His knowledge of languages allowed him to access a wide range of publications including those in English, French, German, Italian, Latin, Portuguese, Spanish, Swedish, etc. Hahnemann was very particular about which symptoms should be included in his materia medica; being both experienced and discerning, he knew precisely the symptoms to include and those to ignore. He was on the lookout for symptoms which either had been reported numerous times or those which confirmed what was already known to him, regarding the possible action of a medicine. Most importantly, we have learned from our research here at the *Hahnemann Institute Sydney* that Hahnemann NEVER THEORISED regarding the possible indications of drugs - he didn't need to, because the symptoms he recorded speak for themselves.

With a little searching we can retrace the process Hahnemann undertook in creating his materia medica and in so doing better comprehend the foundations of Homœopathy, as well as come to learn more about the substance effects themselves.

Some of you may have attempted to study materia medica from Hahnemann's MMP and CD, but although these books are among our most valuable reference works, on first examination they appear to consist of lists of isolated symptoms that have little or no connection to each other. Reading the symptoms in this format, it is difficult to gain a clear image of the scope of a medicine and many students give up, due to not knowing where to start.

What is important to realise is that MMP and CD are actually more of an *index* and that each symptom listed has actually been extracted from a bigger and more complete picture, before being placed in its relevant position in the head to foot schema of a medicine.² If you are lucky, your reprint of MMP and CD will have the symptoms numbered, and have also attached the names of the contributor/s, whether originally from a proving, or a toxicological report from the *old school*. It is a great pity that these valuable references have been removed in recent times by publishers who had no knowledge of their significance:

5. Vertigo, as from intoxication (immediately). [Stf.]
Swaying about from one side to the other. [Stf.]
Staggering. [J. LA SERRE,² in *Misc. Nat. Cur.*, Dec. ii, Ann. 5,
Obs. 78.—GRÜNEWALD, l. c.]
They staggered as if intoxicated.† [CAGNION,³ in *Desault's*
Journal de Chirurgie, tom. i, p. 370.]
Intoxication. [SLOANE, l. c.—J. F. GMELIN,⁴ *Reise durch*
Sibirien, Gött., 1752, vol. iii, pp. 84, 85.‡]
10. Unconsciousness: he is insensible to pinching and nipping.§
[ARCH. HAMILTON,⁵ in *Neue Edinb. Versuche*, ii, p. 275.]
Stupefaction.¶ [STEDMAN, l. c.]

Figure 1

Example of the symptoms listed under
Hyoscyamus in the *Materia Medica Pura*
(Dudgeon translation, B.Jain Publishers)

Looking at “old school” sources

Although easy to overlook, I wish here to draw your attention to the cited *old school* sources and to demonstrate how they can be used as a key in order to gain more information about any substance to be studied.

Looking at *Hyoscyamus* in MMP we find the following nine symptoms have each been referenced to the (French) *old school* source “CAGNION, in *Desault’s Journal de Chirurgie*, tom I, p.370”:

- 08 They staggered as if intoxicated.
- 80 Intoxicated appearance, for a long time.
- 150 Thirst and dryness in the throat.
- 391 Long-continued weakness of the legs.
- 446 Frequent twitchings.
- 491 Complete loss of consciousness.
- 540 They ran against all objects that stood in their way, with open, wild eyes.
- 575 Peculiar fear of being bitten by beasts.
- 581 Long-continued fearfulness.

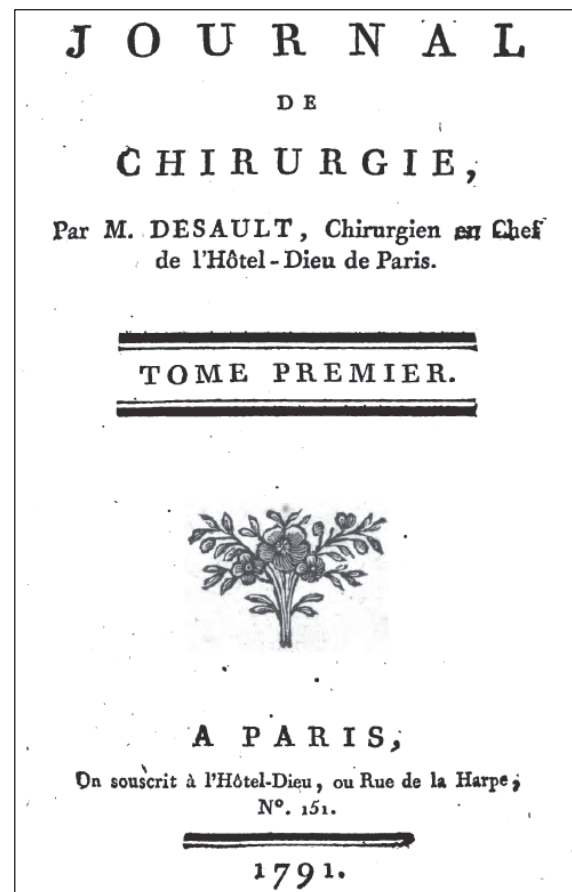
A search for “Cagnion Jusquiame” (*Jusquiame* is French for *Hyoscyamus*) in *Google Books* locates the original reference:

Cagnion, M.: *Effets facheux de la racine de jusquiame, prise interieurement* [Untoward effects of the root of henbane, taken internally], in Desault, P.J., *Journal de Chirurgie* [Journal of Surgery], Paris, 1791, vol.1, pp.370-371

Here is the passage (translated using my rudimentary French below):

“Au mois de Décembre 1790, trois enfans, l’un âgé de six ans, et les autres de sept, en rémuant de la terre, avec leur couteau, dans la cour du vieux château de la paroisse de Marchainville, département de l’Orne, découvrirent des racines de jusquiame, qu’ils prirent pour des raves. Ils en mangerent un peu vers les quatre heures du soir, et, aussitôt après, en retournant chez leurs parens, ils donnerent des marques de la plus grande soif, et se plainrirent d’avoir la gorge pleine de poussiere. Bientôt ils parurent ivres et chancelans, et se heurterent contre tout ce qu’ils rencontroient. Ils avoient les yeux grands et hagards, de légers mouvemens convulsifs, des frayeurs, dans lesquelles ils imaginoient que des hommes et des animaux vouloient les dévorer. De violentes convulsions succederent, puis la perte de connoissance, qui dura, avec les autres accidens, jusqu’à quatre heures du matin. Ce fut alors que la nature procura une crise par. le vomissement: les racines avalées furent rejettées avec beaucoup des glaires. Immédiatement après cette évacuation, les malades se trouverent mieux, mais l’état convulsif continua toute la journée: il diminua néanmoins vers le soir. Après cette époque, les accidens se dissipent par degrés. Les enfans conserverent cependant encore quelques temps l’air ivre, des frayeurs particulièrement nocturnes, des légers maux de tête, une foiblesse considérable dans les extrémités inférieures; mais au bout de huit jours ils furent fort bien rétablis. On se contenta pour tout traitement de leur faire boire beaucoup de lait.”

[In the month of December 1790, three children, one aged six and the others seven, went for a walk, with their knife, in the courtyard of an old castle in the parish of Marchainville, district of Orne, they found some roots of Henbane which they had mistaken for carrots. They ate some at about 4pm and soon after, on returning to their parent’s house they developed a great deal of thirst and complained that their throat was full of dust. Soon after this they appeared to be intoxicated, staggering and crashing into everything in their path. Their eyes were wide open and wild, with slight twitching movements, they were fearful and imagined that men and animals wanted to eat them. Violent convulsions followed and then loss of consciousness which lasted until the morning hours. It was then that nature brought on a vomiting crisis and the roots were vomited with lots of phlegm. Immediately after vomiting the children were better though the convulsions continued throughout the day, diminishing in the evening. Following this stage the symptoms gradually decreased. The children continued for some time to appear as if intoxicated and fearful particularly at night, with slight headache, considerable weakness in their legs; however in around eight days they had made a good recovery. For treatment they drank plenty of milk.]



In the above passage we can identify all the symptoms Hahnemann references to *Cagnion*. Studying this passage we gain an understanding of the process undertaken by Hahnemann in creating his materia medica and at the same time are left with a vivid image of some of the observed effects of *Hyoscyamus*.

Let us look at an example for *Cuprum metallicum*:

Cosnier, M.: Sur de nouveaux accidens arrivés par des aliments préparés dans des vaisseaux de Cuivre [New effects arising from food prepared in copper vessels], *Recueil périodique d'observations de medecine, chirurgie, pharmacie*, Paris, 1755, vol.3, p.260.

Below a fascinating passage referenced to *Cosnier*. The original was also in French and I give my translation:

“A woman named Marechal, living in Paris, Rue de la Harpe, was poisoned, along with her four girls on the 21st May last. She prepared a soup of milk and sugar which she heated until it was reduced to a caramel in a pan made of yellow copper.

Two hours after eating the soup all five persons suffered strong and intense pains in the stomach region, followed soon after by convulsions, mostly affecting the upper limbs and chest, i.e. in general more in the upper limbs than lower limbs. They then began to cry out – terrible and extremely high pitched screams and yells, or croaking like some sort of frog. They heaved (convulsed) violently on their beds, and even the strongest person was unable to stop their movements. They appeared completely deranged and frightened, attempting to escape. Their eyes were sparkling and bulging and had a ferocious appearance. They continued to be easily frightened and particularly two of the sisters, when one screamed the other did also and when one became upset the other also reacted, even when placed in two different rooms. ...

The two I saw as patients afterward continued to suffer pain, hardness and tenderness in their lower abdomen. The weakness in their stomachs remained, also a pain between their shoulders, and in their elbows and knees, with lassitude in all their limbs.”

From this vivid description Hahnemann derives the following symptoms for his materia medica of *Cuprum metallicum*:

- 22 Frightened confusion of mind, he seeks to escape.
- 76 Protruding, glistening eyes.
- 113 Crying, like the croaking of frogs.
- 164 Weakness of the stomach.
- 166 *Excessive, fierce pains in the stomach and in the gastric region.*
- 176 *Abdominal pains.*
- 189 Violent cramps in the abdomen, and in the upper and lower limbs, with piercing, torturing screams.
- 319 Pain between the scapulæ, in the knee-joint and elbow-joint.

Here is one more example this time from *Spigelia* where Hahnemann cites “J. Linning, in den neuen Edinb. Vers. Th. I.” This was a German translation of the original English (it was then not uncommon for publications in one language to appear subsequently in another language). The below passage is from the original source.

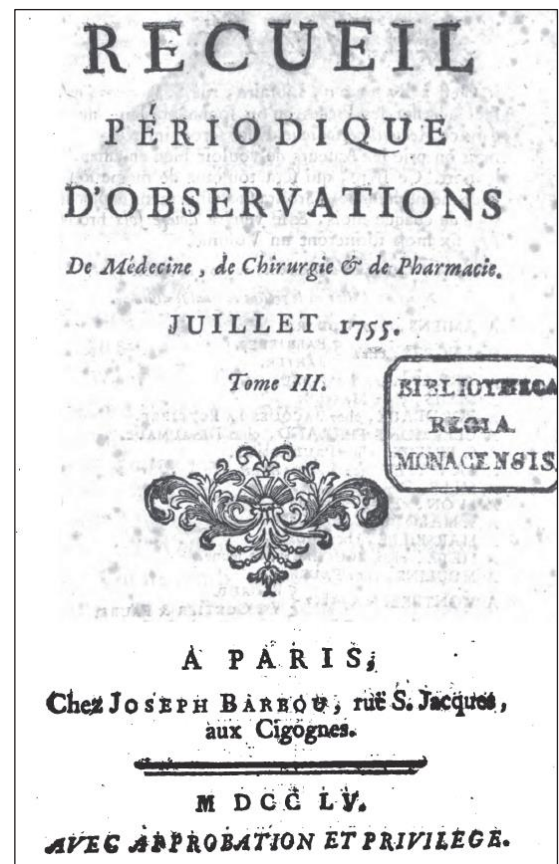
Linning, John: Of the anthelmintic Virtues of the Root of the Indian Pink [*Spigelia*], in *Essays and Observations, Physical and Literary*, Edinburgh, 1754, vol.1, p.386

On p.388 we read the following interesting account:

“When too great a dose of the powder or infusion is given, it has some strange effects, which appear very soon after the dose is taken. Children become vertiginous, complain of a pain in and over their eyes, and the *musculi adductores* and *abductores oculorum* seem to be greatly affected, from their irregular actions, while the other muscles of the eye, so far as I have had an opportunity of observing, remain unaffected.”

The following three symptoms for *Spigelia* were derived from Linning:

- 01 Vertigo.
- 118 Pain in and above the eyes.
- 133 The eyes move involuntarily left and right, from irregular actions of the ocular muscles that draw the eye inwards and outwards.



This interesting account explains the reason why *Spigelia* also records pains and difficulties in turning their eyes sideways to look askew via innervation of the *medial & lateral recti* muscles (MMP 126):

“Intolerable aching pain in the eyeballs, aggravated by turning the eyes; if he attempts to look with the eyes askance he becomes giddy; he must, consequently, when he wishes to look to the side turn the whole head. [Myr]”

From the above *first-hand* accounts, it is possible to gain a good deal of valuable understanding regarding the action of these toxic substances, as well by also comparing them to the symptoms derived from methodical provings conducted by Hahnemann and his followers. Many hidden literature gems are ready and waiting to be discovered with relative ease, thanks to the internet. Studying these accounts leaves the reader with a vivid image of the scope of each substance without needing to create a theoretical image of the remedy by conjuring up interpretations and pure figments of the imagination as has become so common place in recent times, as Hahnemann himself stresses (*Organon*, §110):

“I saw, moreover, that the morbid lesions which previous authors had observed to result from medicinal substances when taken into the stomach of healthy persons, either in large doses given by mistake or in order to produce death to themselves or others, or under other circumstances, accorded very much with my own observations when experimenting with the same substances on myself and other healthy individuals. These authors give details of what occurred as histories of poisoning and as proofs of the pernicious effects of these powerful substances.... None of these observers ever dreamed that the symptoms they recorded merely as proofs of the noxious and poisonous character of these substances were sure revelations of the power of these drugs to extinguish curatively similar symptoms occurring in natural diseases, that these, their pathogenetic phenomena, were intimations of their homœopathic curative action, and that the only possible way to ascertain their medicinal powers is to observe those changes of health medicines are capable of producing in the healthy organism; for the pure, peculiar powers of medicines available for the cure of disease are to be learned neither by any ingenious *a priori* speculations, nor by the smell, taste or appearance of the drugs, nor by their chemical analysis, nor yet by the employment of several of them at one time in a mixture (prescription) in diseases; it was never suspected that these histories of medicinal diseases would one day furnish the first rudiments of the true, pure materia medica, which from the earliest times until now has consisted solely of false conjectures and fictions of the imagination—that is to say, did not exist at all.”

Conclusion

The search for these original sources involves some detective work and sometimes creativity in tracking them down on the internet or maybe from libraries on the other side of the world. However, overall the task is an exciting and rewarding one, with so much to be learned from this wealth of information, overlooked for far too long. Examining these sources, you will find, leads to a step-by-step retracing of Hahnemann’s path. Following this process results in a greater understanding of just how our *pure* materia medica (i.e. devoid of conjecture) was formed.

Moreover, the vivid descriptions of patients suffering, sometimes to the point of death, provide homœopaths with a wonderful opportunity to better understand the scope and action of the medicines we have on hand. This can only result in greater accuracy in the selection of the *similimum* and as a result increase our ability to heal the difficult and complicated cases we see in our clinics.

I encourage each of you to take up the challenge of researching a remedy through looking closely at its old school contributors.³

Notes to text

¹ MMP, Preface, p.2:

“Among the observations from extraneous sources in the following pages are some which were observed in patients; but as these were the subjects of chronic disease whose morbid symptoms were well known and were not confounded with the new effects caused by the medicine... these observations are not altogether valueless...”

² MMP vol.1, Preface, pp.4-5

“I have arranged the symptoms of the more perfectly observed medicines in a certain order, whereby the search for the desired medicinal symptom will now be facilitated. In the complex symptoms, however, there occur not unfrequently some to which, if I had had time, I would have added parallel citations referring them to their proper position.”

³ Here at Hahnemann *Institute Sydney* we are happy to receive volunteers willing to assist in such work, especially in translating the many non-English sources – particularly for those able to read the old Latin references. The aim of our ongoing *Materia Medica Hahnemannica* project is not only to make corrections to the current materia medica but also to make available these old school sources, alongside their associated medicine.

Acknowledgement

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