

Charles Everett Toothaker

1853 - Incidental Provings

"Of the value of incidental provings of Homoeopathic remedies, much has been, but much more might well be written. Since Homoeopathy has its foundation in experimental, rather than theoretical philosophy, it is upon observed phenomena alone that we can depend for illustrations of its truthfulness, and the physician who carefully observes and records such facts in regard to the action of medicines, as may come within his sphere of observation, is doing a service to the cause of Homoeopathy, which no purely speculative theorist can ever equal. It is, indeed, greatly to be regretted that we have no more records of the numerous incidents of this nature which have occurred, and which are continually occurring in the practice of every respectable physician. Such records would form a volume of the highest value, illustrative and confirmatory of much that is now perhaps but imperfectly known, or the knowledge of which is confined within the narrow circle of individual experience, but which ought long since to have been thrown out broadcast upon the earth, where its enduring imprints would have left memorials for the instruction of successive generations.

The American Institute of Homoeopathy, at a very early period after its formation, established a bureau for the improvement of the *Materia Medica*, one of the objects of which was to collect and embody information upon the very subjects to which I would now invite the attention of the profession. The following, from the proceedings of the American Institute for 1844, with reference to a circular issued by that bureau, shows the high estimate the Homoeopaths of that day placed upon these incidental provings, as well as upon various other circumstances calculated to elucidate or confirm the regular provings, or to unfold to the practitioner the true and legitimate uses of remedies : -

"A circular was addressed to all the Homoeopathic physicians of this country, known to that body at that time, by the Central Bureau, soliciting information on these subjects, viz.: -

"1st. The effects which you have observed from remedies not mentioned in Jahr's Manual, whether in health or disease, stating the precise localities of the symptoms, the times of the day at which they occurred, with all the attending circumstances.

"2nd. New symptoms, either pathogenetic or curative, which you may have observed from the remedies in Jahr's Manual, which are clearly ascribable to those remedies, with the particulars of each case.

"3rd. The symptoms which you have seen confirmed most frequently in your practice, also any remarkable coincidences in Allopathic or popular practice, and especially cases of poisoning, which may have come under your observation."

And here I would urge upon every practitioner of medicine a duty, which I think must be acknowledged to be incumbent upon all. Hide not your light under a bushel. Make a record of every fact which appears to you of interest in your professional experience, and having recorded it for your own benefit, publish it for the benefit of others. You will thus contribute to the establishment of Homoeopathic literature upon a basis truly scientific, you will aid in the cultivation of a purer taste in the profession, and in banishing from our journals and other publications, much of that fulsome adulatory style of self-congratulation, with which, too often, our publications abound; and you will be rendering the highest possible service to humanity, inasmuch as you are enlarging and improving, rendering broader, firmer, and consequently safer, the only true path to the improvement of the healing art.

From considerations of this kind I have been induced to present for publication the following record of symptoms, resulting, apparently from what I think might be regarded a poisonous dose of Camphor, taken, as I was informed, by mistake for Cholera Mixture. Mr. K, a very respectable and industrious man, residing in the city of Philadelphia, of temperate habits and generally healthy, took for pain in the stomach, a large quantity of Camphor in Alcohol, or Camphorated Alcohol (saturated solution); suppose half a wineglassful to a wineglassful at a single dose. He gives me the following account of his symptoms, nearly all of which (indeed, all that are important) are confirmed by a subsequent narrative which was given me by his wife :-

Passing over the first sensations, immediately after swallowing it, as of little or no moment, he had lain in bed a short time, perhaps half an hour, when he uttered a strange scream, a sort of howl, leapt from his bed, apparently in great agony, and bent on something desperate. His wife, alarmed at his movements, followed and caught him, and assistance being near, he was at length quieted and an emetic administered by a neighboring physician, who was immediately called in. Next day was better, and went to his accustomed employment, but symptoms returned again at night with considerable severity.

He describes his sensations as follows: - Felt as if he could fly, or rather, as if he must be and was being drawn up into the air in spite of himself; indescribable dread of being drawn upwards; drawing sensations all around the head, as if the nerves of the head were all drawn up; drawings for some minutes, then remission, then drawing again; nervous drawing with something like a shivering; indescribable wretchedness; excessively fearful, especially in the dark; dread to be alone in the dark; afraid of the mirrors in his room, as he described it, lest he should see himself in them. So excessive was this fear at times in the night, that he would have got up and broken the mirrors, only that he was still more afraid to get up alone in the dark. Was never afraid of anything before, either by night or day; awful wretched feelings; distressed sleep, with frightful dreams, visions, spectres, &c.; very restless at night; jumps and tosses about; starts in his sleep; often easily startled when awake, and then feels throbbings or palpitations; disposition to cry frequently; he knew not what for, but would frequently find himself crying when at work, or when walking about; often felt as if he ought to kill people, when in the street; never felt a disposition to kill any of his own family, but thought he ought to kill somebody.

The above symptoms continued most of the time for one or two years, during which he had to be carefully watched by his family and neighbors. He was treated by several respectable Allopathic physicians, (among whom was Br. M. of Spruce Street, and Dr. A.) He was salivated by Dr. M., but without benefit, and at last after nearly two years, was greatly benefited by a prescription from an herb-woman.

All the above symptoms were greatly aggravated at night, and as it began to grow dark. Would often be comfortably able to work through the day, and when night came on would be almost raving, wretched, and disconsolate.

Also aggravated by taking cold. Even now, after five years, feels them more or less if he takes a cold, and at night. Never goes into the cellar alone in the night, but will go with his little daughter, a child of only eight or nine years of age. Still troubled at times in his sleep, starts easily and frequently, and is fearful, and at times nervous and depressed, as he had never been till he took the camphor. Would scarcely dare, when at the best, to stay alone in his own house over night.

On comparing these symptoms with the Hahnemannian provings, we perceive the following coincidences:

<p>HAHNEMANN. Cramps and convulsions of various kinds. kinds. Constricting headache, spasms which draw the head to one side. Shivering and chattering of the teeth. Anxiety, great anguish. Disposition to weep. Hides himself, howls and screams. Rage, delirium. Nocturnal sleeplessness. Nervous excitement. Tossing during sleep. Sees objects when closing his eyes, or when going to sleep. The majority of the symptoms appear during motion or at night. Aggravated by cold air. Tearing in different parts of the body, felt most when dropping to sleep.</p>	<p>SYMPTOMS BY E. Drawings of all the nerves. Drawing all around the head. Drawing of the nerves of the head. Drawings, then remissions, then drawings again. Nervous drawings with something like a shivering. Indescribable wretchedness. Awful wretched feelings. He knows not what for, but would frequently find himself crying when at work, or when walking about. Disposition to cry frequently. Jumped out of bed with something like a howl. He jumped from the bed apparently with some desperate purpose. Distressed sleep, frightful dreams, visions, spectres, &c, when going to sleep, or when he first goes to sleep, Restless tossing about during sleep. Starts in his sleep. All the above symptoms worse at night. Often comfortably able to work through the day, and when night came on, wretched, raving, &c. Aggravated by taking cold. Sensations of uneasiness and startings, worse on going to sleep, or when dropping to sleep.</p>
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The symptoms not alluded to or recorded in the Hahnemannian provings, are,

Sensation of going upward, or as if being forced upward. Dread of being drawn upward, or elevated into the air.

Fearfulness; dread of being alone; dread of the dark; afraid to see himself in a mirror, with disposition to break the mirror; disposition to kill some one.

The physical symptoms most manifest were, drawings or contractions, especially of the head; starts or twitchings, especially on going to sleep; shiverings; tossing about; throbbings.

The mental or moral symptoms were, wretchedness; disposition to weep; dread of being drawn upward; fearfulness; especially at night, or in the dark; fear to be alone.

The symptoms most persistent or of longest duration were, fearfulness or hesitancy; fear of being alone; nervous excitability and depression; startings and jerkings; fear of the dark, or in the dark; aggravations at night, and from the effects of a cold.

I have thus endeavored, I know how very imperfectly, to make some valuable use of the above incident. Thousands of such incidents are existent, and accruing daily in practice, which need only to be recorded and analyzed, to be rendered available to the profession. I am ready to pledge myself to furnish at least one case of equal interest every year. How many other of the readers of the Journal will do likewise? In reviewing the above case, I think no one can fail of being impressed with the following reflections:

First, the remarkable coincidence existing between the symptoms experienced by K., and those recorded by Hahnemann, and the numerous instances in which an unlettered man, who had never seen any work on the provings, and who, indeed, knows nothing of the subject, has chosen the same language to express his sufferings, as was chosen by Hahnemann to record the symptoms of the remedy he had incautiously taken.

Second. Many other symptoms corresponding with the Hahnemannian provings no doubt may have existed in this case and been forgotten after five years, which were perhaps perfectly observable at the time.

Third. The effect of emetics and other remedial agents resorted to by the physician, may have modified the physical, such as the gastric, the vascular, and muscular symptoms, much more than they have modified the moral, mental, and nervous symptoms.

And, Fourth, the effects of medicines taken in large or poisonous doses, can move correspondent in all respects with the effects of the same remedies taken in smaller and often-repeated doses by regular provings."

(C. E. Toothaker, M.D., Incidental Provings, The Philadelphia Journal of Homoeopathy, vol. 2, October 1853, p. 408-413)