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Dr. Henna Khanam

Lecturer, Department of
Homoeopathic Materia
Medica, Pratap Chandra
Memorial Homoeopathic
Hospital and College, Kolkata,
West Bengal, India

Dr. Supriya Halder

Lecturer, Department of
Anatomy, Pratap Chandra
Memorial Homoeopathic
Hospital and College, Kolkata,
West Bengal, India

Corresponding Author:

Dr. Henna Khanam

Lecturer, Department of
Homoeopathic Materia
Medica, Pratap Chandra
Memorial Homoeopathic
Hospital and College, Kolkata,
West Bengal, India

Cowpertwaite's textbook of Materia Medica & therapeutics: A book review

Dr. Henna Khanam and Dr. Supriya Halder

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Abstract

A Textbook of Materia Medica and therapeutics came into existence amidst the era of competitive compilations where different types of Materia Medica from various sources and in different hues were being reflected but this book, without aiming to supersede the works of others intended to bring about the practical and therapeutic utility of Materia Medica in its own unique way, which in turn could serve as reliable and dependable reference book for amateurs as well as practitioners.

Keywords: Therapeutics, homoeopathy, Materia Medica and therapeutics

Introduction

Homoeopathic literature is already rich in valuable compilations of Materia Medica obtained from various authentic sources. In the meanwhile, Dr. Allen Corson Cowperthwaite of US, came with his Textbook of Materia Medica & Therapeutics, not aiming to supersede nor to condemn the previous works useless, but to present a work that would be clear and concise, consisting of the most prominent features of our most common remedies, thereby, furnishing the beginners with a systematic approach to the study of the drug enable them an easy and ready reference for clinical use in day-to-day clinics.

Years of publications

1ST edition-1879; 2nd edition; 3rd edition-1885; 4th edition-1887; 6th edition-1891; 7th edition-1896; 9th edition-1904; 10th edition-1909; 11th edition-1916; 13th edition.

Sources: In the preparation of the materials of this work, the collective reference has been made freely to every available works on Materia Medica published at that time and also some works which had been out of print so long. The author acknowledges his indebtedness to Hahnemann's Materia Medica Pura, Hahnemann's Chronic Diseases, Allen's Encyclopedia of Pure Materia Medica, Hering's. Condensed Materia Medica, Lippe's Textbook of Materia Medica, Jahr's New Manual by Hull, Hale's New Remedies, Hughes 'Pharmacodynamics and Dunham's lectures.

Reforms in various editions

1st Edition

1. Until that time, even the most condensed works on Materia Medica were exhausting with a bulk of *pathogenetic* symptoms with no comparative indications thereby depriving the students of the interest in the subject and difficult grasping of its clinical utility.
2. Hence, keeping this in mind, the author presented only the characteristics points as complete as possible.
3. To ease the use of this volume, the names of remedies having *similar* symptoms have been recorded in the text for comparison. E.g.:- under Bryonia - Great dryness of mouth, lips and tongue (Acon, Ars, Hyos, Kali nitro, Nux m).
4. In presenting the Therapeutic Range of each drug only those diseases or morbid conditions have been named in which of the symptoms of the drug are most likely to occur and has been clinically verified.

2nd Edition

1. A great number of remedies have been incorporated which were not included in the first edition, while the original drugs have been thoroughly revised and many new symptoms have been added.
2. The comparative remedies have also been revised, extended and made reliable than before.
3. Those symptoms having “grand characteristics” is usually given in italics. E.g.: - excessive weakness and exhaustion of limbs, obliging him to lie down. (Arsenicum, album).
4. The term “Elementary” has been removed from the title as it sounded unauthentic, as the book comprises only of the essentials and characteristics points.

3rd Edition

1. The text was entirely re-written and many symptoms especially clinical have been added, while 100 remedies which were not included in the second edition have been added.
2. For the sake of uniformity in literature of Homoeopathic Materia Medica, the author has changed the nomenclatures of *Actaea racemosa* and *Calcarea ostryearum* to *Cimicifuga racemosa* and *Calcarea carbonica* respectively.
3. The valuable *Pronouncing Index* has been prepared for which the author credits Dr. Jas. E. Gross, who compiled it helping the pronouncing of these terms more uniform. E.g.: - Hepar Sulphur- (*He' par Sulfur*).

4th Edition

1. This edition brings in effort from the author to eliminate the errors that still remained in the 3rd edition.
2. There has been an addition of alphabetically arranged *Clinical Index*, from Abortion to Zona, which is simply an indicative of the remedies most apt to be employed in a given diseased state, thus guiding the physician in the selection of remedy. For example- Brain, *Paralysis of- Zinc*; Hemiopia-Aur. (*Horizontal*), Lith., Lyc. (*Lateral*) etc. There has been two typography used here- italics and normal font. E.g.: - An aesthesia- Aco., Can. Ind., *Kali broom*.

6th Edition

1. This edition many amendments were made. The entire text was completely re-written and thoroughly revised.
2. Every symptom of doubtful origin has been removed and a few authentic symptoms not appearing in the former editions have been added.
3. The “General Analysis” of each drug has been re-written and many instances changed as per the recent investigations in drug pathogenesis. E.g.: - Bromine acts as a powerful irritant to the mucous membranes, especially of the respiratory tract, the larynx being mostly involved. As intense inflammation is established, which tends to the determination of a false membrane, hence its value in the treatment of membranous croup and diphtheria.
4. Those symptoms only, which have been repeatedly verified and which are undoubtedly reliable are retained and these are given a distinguishing mark (°), so that one can easily tell whether a symptom is of a pathogenetic or clinical origin. E.g.: - Hoarseness, especially of professional singers, speakers, etc. (Argentum metallicum).

5. The “*Therapeutic Range*” of the former editions have been changed to a section on “*Resume*” which later on was changed further to “*Therapeutics*”, which gives a resume of clinical uses of the drug and tends to cover the entire range of therapeutic actions along with the chief symptomatic drug indications in all important diseased states. E.g.: *Cina* is mostly useful for children with worm affections, both round and thread worms (not pin worms). Often useful in whooping cough, brought on by irritation from dust.
6. The author has laid his efforts to include everything reliable in *Therapeutics*, as found in *Modern Homoeopathic Literature*, and in this connection, he is highly indebted to *Farrington's Clinical Materia Medica* and *Allen's Handbook of Materia Medica & Therapeutics*, from both of which he has derived valuable data. He also acknowledges *Leora Johnson, MD*. For valuable assistance in thoroughly revising the *Clinical Index*, thereby presenting a flawless work to the profession.

7th Edition

The author has corrected a number of typographical errors that were present in the 6th edition and a few eliminations and additions have been made corresponding to the enhanced knowledge of drug action.

9th Edition

This edition is almost similar to the preceding one except that it has an *appendix* containing a number of remedies, which were not included earlier, thereby making the work all the more updated and complete.

11th Edition

1. Some drugs especially the *animal nosodes* like *Ambra Grisea*, *Crotalus*, *Naja* and *Lachesis* have been added, although the preparations have been in use by the Homoeopathic School much before than the Old School began their laboratory investigations on them.
2. It has been said that while preparing vaccines, a positive physical change takes place in the remedy, so that it is not exactly identical with the poison, as it originally exists in the patient, but only presents a strong similarity. But in Homoeopathy, through clinical experience over the years, a Homoeopath finds it easy to individualize his case and administer his nosodes in those cases where it is most efficacious. Obviously, these indications are not definite, but they are a step in advance of the indiscriminate use of vaccines, corresponding to the “*shot-gun*” prescriptions of some Homoeopaths.

13th edition

The current and latest edition. The names of the drugs here are given as short name and the synonym has been given as full name.

Gradations of Symptoms

For practical utility, the symptoms of the *Materia Medica* may be readily divided into four groups:-

- **First:** Those symptoms which occur often in proving and have been repeatedly verified in practice - “*grand characteristics*”.
- **Second:** those symptoms which occur less often in

proving, but are frequently verified in practice - "characteristics".

- **Third:** those symptoms which are important yet falling short of characteristics expression.
- **Fourth:** those symptoms which occur seldom in proving and lack clinical verification.

All these groups of symptoms find their place in an "Encyclopedia" while it is usually intended to incorporate the first three groups in manuals and textbooks. The present volume, however, includes only the first two, and of these, the first group or the "grand characteristics" are printed in italics while the second group or the "characteristics" is given in the ordinary text.

Although most of the symptoms, given are pathogenetic i.e. results of proving on the healthy, yet it is not advisable to rule out those which are distinctly curative and have been so repeatedly verified as to render them characteristics and hence these curative symptoms are given.

Number of Drugs

- Pronouncing Index-250
- Appendix-44

Arrangement of the Book

- Preface to the 11th edition
- Preface to the 10th edition
- Preface to the 9th edition
- Preface to the 7th edition
- Preface to the 6th edition
- Preface to the 3rd edition
- Preface to the 1st edition
- Pronouncing index
- Appendix
- Drugs - Abies Canadensis - Variolinum
- Clinical Index

Arrangement of Drugs

- Name
- Synonym
- Natural order
- Common name
- Habitat
- Preparations- parts used and its mode of preparation.
- General analysis: briefs the physiological sphere of action of the drugs which is necessary to know the pathogenetic power of each one of them.
- Characteristics symptoms- from Mind to Fever.
- Modalities: aggravation and amelioration.
- Conditions- it gives the constitution and temperament of the individuals on whom it acts.
- Compare: comparison of similar remedies.
- Antidotes- drugs which antidotes the described drug. E.g.: - (under *Lycopodium*) Antidotes-Acon, Camph, Caust, Cham, Graph, Op, Puls, also a cup of coffee.
- Remedy antidote- drugs which are antidoted by the described drug. E.g.: *Lycopodium* Antidotes-Cinch.
- Therapeutics.

Merits

1. It is a complete book of Materia Medica having characteristics, analytical and comparative aspects

given concisely.

2. Symptoms described are to the point, characteristics and not bulky.
3. Therapeutics can be used for easy reference in prescriptions.
4. General analysis gives us the sphere of action at a glance.
5. Similar drugs are given in brackets against the symptom, along with some more drugs that are given in "Compare".
6. The use of distinguishing mark (°) that help us demarcate between a pathogenetic and a curative symptom.
7. Animal nosodes are present.
8. Clinical index can be used as a reference.
9. The grand characteristics and characteristics in a drug will be crystal clear due to different fonts used for them, italics and ordinary text respectively.

De-merits

Most of the drugs lack the amelioration in their modalities. E.g.: *Lycopodium*, *Colchicum*, etc.

Conclusion

This Materia Medica furnishes the grand characteristics and characteristic of each drug in all three aspects- characteristic, analytical and comparative. The use of brief description of repeatedly verified symptoms that appeared in proving and clinical index makes it easy for the beginners to understand the drug and also helps in a shot-gun prescription for the prescribers.

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