



THE GRAND-OLD MAN OF HOMEOPATHY- Dr. RICHARD HUGHES - A REVIEW

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ABSTRACT: One of the homeopaths who both admired and criticized homeopathy was Dr. Richard Hughes, who set standards for the development of the system in terms of modern theories, during the early phases of development- through scientific and evidence-based approaches. This article deals briefly with the life history and explanation of certain contributions of Richard Hughes for which a review of his writings, lectures, articles, and online resources were conducted between October 2024 and February 2025. Dr. Richard Hughes, was a convert homeopath, often called the "Grand Old Man of British Homeopathy," he was a prolific writer and scholar. He was a proponent of low potencies, and a pathological prescriber who stressed the importance of a scientific foundation for homeopathy; which is important for the present day. He also criticized certain concepts of Hahnemann like Psora theory, Vital force, and Dynamization. Hughes urged ongoing drug reproofing to address gaps in homeopathic literature. He integrated elements of both allopathic and homeopathic approaches, a practice that foreshadowed the modern concept of integrative medicine

“Criticism may not be agreeable, but it is necessary. It fulfills the same function as pain in the human body. It calls attention to an unhealthy state of things.”-Winston Churchill.

One of the homeopaths who both admired and criticized homeopathy was Dr. Richard Hughes, whose critical analysis led to the development of the system in terms of modern theories. He is known as the 'Grand Old Man' of British homeopathy with great experience. He also worked for the integration of allopathy and homeopathy ¹

INTRODUCTION

It's important to note that the homeopathic community has always been diverse, with various approaches and schools of thought. While there may have been disagreements and debates among homeopaths over the years, the overall goal has always been to promote homeopathy as a safe and effective form of healthcare.

He was one of the Homeopaths who set standards through scientific and evidence-based approaches during the early phases of development of the Homeopathic system.

In the words of Dr. RE Dudgeon, ‘Dr. Hughes was the greatest, ablest, and most faithful exponent of the great therapeutic truth revealed by Dr. Hahnemann and the most zealous, enthusiastic, indefatigable, and clear-headed disciple of the illustrious founder of the great medical reformation.’²

BRIEF LIFE SKETCH:

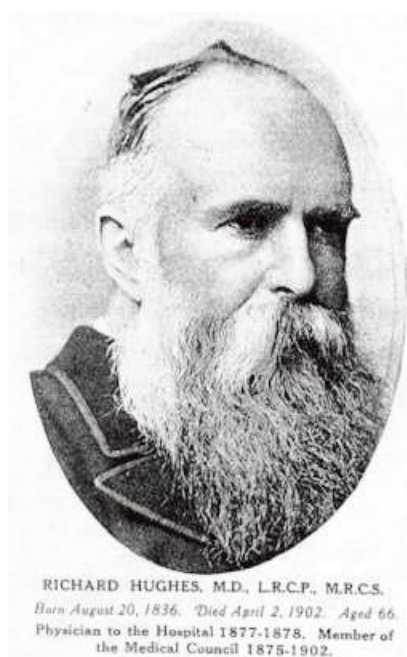


Figure 1: Dr. RICHARD HUGHES



Richard Hughes was born in London, England. (20 August 1836 – 3 April 1902) was an orthodox physician, a great writer, and a scholar. He played the most important and influential role through his teachings and writings. He was a converted Homeopath, with educational degrees like FRCS and LRCP. *In the year 1898, he was also present at Hahnemann's reburial at Pere-Lachaise Cemetery (Hahnemann house)*

Richard Hughes died in Dublin on 9 April 1902, one year before his death; he became a Catholic Apostolic church pastor and was buried in Albury, Surrey^{3,4}. Nevertheless, after Richard Hughes's death, British homeopathy moved decisively away from science, and Richard Hughes himself received the contemptuous Hahnemannian label of "half-homeopath".

CONTRIBUTIONS OF RICHARD HUGHES:

- ◉ For thirty years, he dominated the homeopathic world. He is sometimes referred to as 'a rebel,' like our founder, Hahnemann. His legacy is enduring and is celebrated every year by the Faculty of Homeopathy who invite the entire homeopathic community to the for his Memorial lecture ⁵.

Literary contributions:^{3,4}

- Manual of Pharmacodynamics (1867)
- A Manual of Therapeutics (1869)
- On the Sources of the Homoeopathic Materia Medica: Three Lectures (1877)
- Hahnemann as a Medical Philosopher (1882)
- The Knowledge of the Physician: A Course of Lectures Delivered at the Boston University School of Medicine (1884)
- A Cyclopaedia of Drug Pathogenesis (1887)
- The Principles and Practice of Homeopathy (1902) – containing philosophy part and therapeutics, a must-read book by every homeopath

Other contributions:^{4,5}

- ◉ Dr Richard Hughes held every office in the British Homeopathic Society like Secretary, Editor, Vice-President, President.
- ◉ He was the editor of British Journal of Homoeopathy.
- ◉ He was Permanent Secretary of the International Homeopathic Congress for many years.

- ⊙ Hughes contributed extensively to medical literature, authoring numerous papers for both English and American journals, and produced widely successful textbooks that were translated and sold thousands of copies.
- ⊙ A joint effort of the British Homoeopathic Society (BHS) and the American Institute of Homoeopathy (AIH), the four-volume Cyclopaedia of Drug Pathogenesis was a monumental work that occupied Hughes for almost seven years.¹
- ⊙ Edited the 6 volumes of ‘Cyclopedia of Drug Pathogenesis’ & worked with T.F. Allen on his 10 volumes of ‘Encyclopedia Materia Medica’.
- ⊙ Helped Dr. Dudgeon in translating Hahnemann’s ‘Materia Medica Pura’ into English

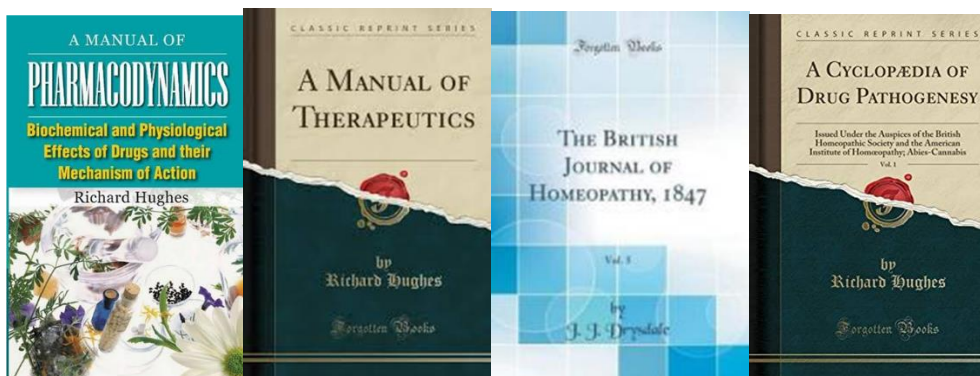


Figure 2: Certain books authored by Dr. Richard Hughes

HUGHES CONCEPTS

Richard Hughes’s contribution to homeopathy was not just confined to a critical discussion of Samuel Hahnemann’s writings but had a scholarly approach to homeopathy.

Hughesian homeopathy exhibits both the strengths and the weaknesses of the scientific version of homeopathy. The essential characteristic of Hughesian Homoeopathy was that it lay at the scientific end of the Homoeopathic spectrum of opinion. That is, it was pragmatic and anti-mystical.⁶

HUGHES CONCEPTIONS

1. Homeopathy is a therapeutic method not-- a system or doctrine.
2. Similia similibus curantur NOT similia similibus curenter

REJECTED CERTAIN THEORIES LIKE

- 1) Psora theory
- 2) Use of high potencies
- 3) Concept of vital force
- 4) Theory about how homeopathic medicines work

Figure 3- HUGHES CONCEPTIONS



THERAPEUTIC METHOD⁷

- Homeopathy is a therapeutic method, not a doctrine or system, an instrument for selecting the most suitable remedy for each case of disease.
- “*We are Homeopaths, not Hahnemannians*” adopting the homeopathic method of Hahnemann as our chief guide in therapeutics. We do not necessarily become followers of him in other departments of thought. This statement also suggests that while homeopaths may follow Hahnemann's therapeutic methods, they do not necessarily accept all of his other beliefs or ideas.
 - He says “*Homeopathy, like the candlestick of Hebrew tabernacle, has been shaped by hammering not by casting*”⁷, which means homeopathy has developed through experience and experimentation over time, and a system constantly evolving through the effort of many homeopaths. Overall, this metaphor also suggests that homeopathy is a living and evolving practice shaped by the collective experiences and insights of its practitioners over many years.

SIMILIA SIMILIBUS CURENTUR Vs SIMILIA SIMILIBUS CURANTUR

Hughes says that Hahnemann used Curentur in his Organon but it was substituted by Curantur in his lifetime. And Hahnemann was annoyed by this change.

Dr. Ryan, a scholar, urged to revise Hahnemann's original wording of Curentur to Curantur (which means “are treated”)⁷. Everyone deserves to be treated and should not have any doubt about being cured.

Curentur implies “*let likes be treated by likes*”, while Curantur asserts “*likes are treated by likes*”. Hughes was convinced by Ryan's reasoning and expressed his preference for Curantur over Curentur.

HUFELANDS REMARK

“*If homeopathy succeeded in becoming general medical practice, it would prove the grave of science.*”⁸ This was Hufeland's statement. Hughes in response to this criticism says that –“if science dies and is buried, its corpse enriches the ground that covers it and thereby grass springs and fruits ripen for practical use” meaning that even if science were to die and be buried, its legacy would enrich the field, leading to practical advancements. Hughes viewed homeopathy as an art while characterizing general medicine as “blind empiricism,” an applied science rather than an art.”⁸



CRITICISM OF HAHNEMANN'S CONCEPTS

As a homeopath, Richard Hughes naturally placed the similia principle at the center of the stage but his attitude to it was relaxed and non-dogmatic. It was, he said, not a law of nature as Samuel Hahnemann claimed but simply a rule of thumb – a key to try in the therapeutic lock. It often gave the right answer but not invariably, nor was it the only key worth trying.

Richard Hughes, Robert Ellis Dudgeon, and other leading British homeopaths of the day rejected Samuel Hahnemann's concept of the *vital force*, his theorizing about *how homeopathic medicines worked*, *potency*, and the *Psora theory*.⁶

CONCEPT OF VITAL FORCE

The concept of the vital force introduced in the 5th edition of the Organon is among the theories criticized by Dr. Hughes⁶. According to Hahnemann, the vital force is the source of all phenomena of life in which disease and medicines act. It controls every cell of the living organisms. Hughes criticized the concept of vital force by referencing the perspective of modern science on living organisms. According to him, "*Recent science is to regard the organism as no monarchy, wherein some Archeus lives and rules, but as a republic in which every part is equally alive and independently active, the unity of the whole being secured only by the common circulation and the universal telegraphic system of nerves. Unfortunately, Hahnemann introduced the Theory of vital force in later editions of Organon and one would have been glad if the Organon had kept itself clear of such questions and had occupied only the solid ground of observation and experiment.*"⁹

POTENCY

Hughes was unhappy regarding potency. While he recognized that some high dilutions, up to 30C, demonstrated apparent clinical efficacy, he also acknowledged the challenge of providing a satisfactory scientific explanation, given the limitations of contemporary physics and chemistry. The predominant mode of prescribing in British homeopathy during this period involved the use of very low dilutions, generally 6C and below.

He pointed out, for example, that Samuel Hahnemann's laying down the rule that the 30th potency should be used for all purposes had fossilized homeopathy most undesirably⁶. Hughes further established that the provings contained within The Chronic Diseases were not conducted in the same manner as those of The Materia Medica Pura, thus rendering them unreliable as accurate representations of the effects of the novel medicines.⁴



DRUG DYNAMIZATION

Dr. Hughes questioned the feasibility of drug dynamization. He argued, "I must advise you to reject these preparations, not so much upon the grounds of science and reasons as upon those of pharmacy. They are simple impossibilities." He supported this claim by demonstrating that producing the millionth potency of a single medicine as prescribed by Hahnemann would demand 2,000 gallons of alcohol and over a year of processing time, a practical impossibility.^{9,10}

CONCEPT OF MIASM

Dr. Hughes criticized the concept of miasms by saying "*Now it is easy for us, knowing what we know (or suppose we know) about the itch to make merry over this theory of Hahnemann's but to condemn or ridicule him for it is a gross anachronism.*" "*In reading the Organon let us determine to ignore it, or to translate its language in the way I have suggested; we shall do greater justice to the main argument of the treatise.*" Dr. Hughes established that the miasm theory is equivalent to the modern germ theory in infectious diseases. According to him, Hahnemann has held the invisible living creatures as the cause of cholera referring to them as cholera miasm. Naturally, minute organisms have been referred to as miasm¹¹.

PATHOLOGICAL PRESCRIBER¹²

Richard Hughes believed that a serious application of the "similia" principle necessitates incorporating pathology. He argued that while Hahnemann's assertion that disease mechanisms were unknowable may have been valid in his time, advancements in pathology now provide greater understanding, which should be integrated into homeopathy.

Richard Hughes believed that medicine selection should be based not only on subjective symptoms but also on the known pathological effects of the substances on humans and animals. For example, he advocated choosing a medicine known to cause ulcers for a patient suffering from an ulcer. This emphasis on pathology in prescribing led to him being labelled, sometimes negatively, as a "*pathological prescriber.*"¹²

Unlike the majority of homeopaths outside Britain, particularly in America, who primarily relied on Samuel Hahnemann's later publications, such as the fifth edition of The Organon and The Chronic Diseases, Richard Hughes examined Hahnemann's body of work in



its entirety. He meticulously documented the changes in Hahnemann's philosophy throughout his career and openly expressed his views on where those changes were detrimental.

MATERIA MEDICA

Richard Hughes's contribution to homeopathy extended beyond critical discussion of Samuel Hahnemann's writings. His most significant project was undoubtedly his attempt to revise and purify the homeopathic Materia Medica, culminating in the Cyclopedia of Drug Pathogenesis.¹²

Richard Hughes had previously collaborated with American Timothy Field Allen on an Encyclopaedia. However, he later felt that Allen had been too uncritical and had included material that should have been omitted.

Hughes believed that the Materia Medica had strayed too far from its original basis in provings and reports of poisoning. He criticized the inclusion of "clinical" symptoms lacking proving data and the practice of authors uncritically copying from one another.¹²

Richard Hughes undertook the monumental task of sifting through existing material to publish only what he deemed reliably established. This effort culminated in the four-volume Cyclopedia of Drug Pathogenesis, a work that occupied him for seven years (1884-91) ¹². His goal was to encompass all reliable information current at the time, except for that contained within Samuel Hahnemann's writings. This involved a vast amount of translating, sifting, and editing. Many rules were adopted to eliminate untrustworthy reports.

The Cyclopedia of Drug Pathogenesis adhered to strict inclusion criteria, omitting purely clinical symptoms and those derived from high dilutions (above 6C) unless corroborated by provings using more material doses. Notably, all provings were presented in a narrative format, facilitating sequential reading.

The Cyclopedia of Drug Pathogenesis was a unique effort to provide a critically comprehensive collection of Materia Medica, requiring strong dedication from its readers. The author acknowledged the numerous shortcomings of homeopathy as well as the "fancies and follies" that had become part of it. Richard Hughes himself did not question where such changes would eventually lead.



Hughes urges us for reproving and fresh experiment, as there are many gaps and deficiencies to be filled and to improve on the material that we have on provings. In colleges under respective professors each year a single drug is to be proved so that we have the body of experimentation of which we may be proud¹³.

Richard Hughes himself recognized that if he had succeeded in reconciling homeopathy with orthodox medicine, it likely would have led to the disappearance of homeopathy as a distinct form of medicine, a phenomenon that later occurred in the USA.

INTEGRATIVE MEDICINE

As one might expect, Hughes's promotion of closer collaboration between homeopathic and allopathic physicians, representing a significant shift towards integrated medicine, generated considerable opposition within both the homeopathic community and beyond.¹

He was the person who wanted approach of integrative medicine- bringing together conventional medicine with holistic approaches, through integration and accepting a wider medical field.

CONCLUSION

Hughesian approach to Homeopathy, with its emphasis on scientific principles, presents both strengths and weaknesses. For modern physicians, Richard Hughes' writings and those of his associate Robert Ellis Dudgeon, stand out as particularly accessible, even compared to 20th-century homeopathic texts. Despite the obsolescence of their medical theories, their pragmatic and critical perspectives lend their work a remarkably modern feel and enduring readability. Hughes also made a critical distinction within the homeopathic community. While recognizing Hahnemann's foundational contribution and endorsing his therapeutic methods, Hughes asserted that homeopaths are not bound to all of Hahnemann's doctrines. This stance reflects a willingness to adapt and evolve within the framework of core homeopathic principles.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST- Nil



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