

West Coast Homeopathic Society

Celebrating Samuel Hahnemann (1755 - 1843)
at Locarno Beach, Vancouver
Saturday, September 17, 2005

Recollections of the Great Man by his Contemporaries

Selected and Read by Christopher Gehry

As we celebrated the 250th anniversary of Hahnemann's birth at a party on Locarno Beach, Christopher Gehry read excerpts from Trevor Cook's ***Samuel Hahnemann, His Life and Times***, which provided contemporary insights into Hahnemann's appearance and lifestyle.

From von Brunnow we were given a vivid description of Hahnemann at 62 years of age:

"Locks of silver white hair clustered round his high and thoughtful brow, from under which his animated eyes shone with piercing brilliancy. His whole countenance had a quiet, searching, grand expression. . . His carriage was upright, his step firm, his motions as lively as a man of thirty. When he was out his dress was of the simplest; a dark coat with short small clothes and stockings. But in his room he preferred the old household; gaily figured dressing gown, the yellow stockings and the black velvet cap. The long pipe was seldom out of his hand, and the smoking was the only infringement he allowed himself to commit upon his severe routine. His drink was water, milk or beer; his food was of the most frugal sort. The whole of his domestic economy was as simple as his food and drink. Instead of a writing desk he used nothing but a large plain deal table."



We all envied the fortunate few invited to dinner parties described by von Brunnow:

"Perhaps the suppers which were given once or twice a year by Hahnemann to his pupils formed a suitable means of bringing a little change into this monotonous way of living, but he never invited any but those who distinguished themselves through diligence, intelligence and strict morality. During these supper parties things were not altogether homeopathic, for although I can vouch for a perfect simplicity of the food served, yet instead of white beer, a good wine was provided, of which, however, out of deference to the Master, only a moderate amount was consumed. At these entertainments Hahnemann, on the one side and his wife on the other, separated his family from the guests (five daughters -- his son and two married daughters were no longer at home). Joyous humour and wit dominated these gatherings, and the desire to laugh was unending, for as a rule other talented men were invited. Here Hahnemann was the most cheerful man, even entering into the pranks of the others, yet without offending propriety, or making any one present the target of his jokes. When the meal was ended a pipe was smoked, and about 11 o'clock we took our leave and banqueted long after on the recollections of those delightful evenings."

From Franz Hartmann, we gleaned further insight into Hahnemann's personality:

"(In Leipzig in) the evenings, Hahnemann often invited groups of his friends and students to his home for family gatherings, where he kept everyone entertained with his wit and his conversation. . . .

"There sat the silver-haired old man, with his high arched, thoughtful brow, his bright, piercing eyes, and calm searching countenance, in the midst of us, as among his children, who likewise participated in those evening entertainments. Here he showed plainly that the serious exterior which he exhibited in everyday life, belonged only to his deep and constant search after the goal which he had set himself, but was in no respect the mirror of his interior, the bright side of which so readily unfolded itself on suitable occasions in its fairest light, and the mirthful humour, the familiarity and openness, the wit that he displayed were alike engaging.

"How comfortable the master felt in the circle of his beloved and his friends, among whom he numbered not only his pupils but also the learned of other faculties, who did homage to his learning; how beneficial was the recreation which he then allowed himself after eight o'clock in the evening, seated in his armchair wearing his velvet cap and dressing gown, with a glass of light Leipzig white beer and his pipe. It was highly interesting at such times to see him become cheerful, as he related the procedure of the older physicians at the sick bed, when with an animated countenance he moved the little cap to and fro upon his head, and puffed out clouds of tobacco smoke, which enveloped him like a fog; when he spoke of his deeply affecting life and related circumstances of it, his pipe often went out, and one of his daughters was then instantly required to light it again. He liked to converse especially on objects of the natural sciences or on conditions of foreign countries and their inhabitants, and he appeared displeased when in these hours his advice was sought in cases of disease. He was then either laconic, or called out to the patient in a friendly way 'tomorrow on this subject', in order to put the matter aside, but because he was too tired to speak on serious subjects, for often he would refer to the question raised, during his consulting hours on the following day, and stood by with his kind advice. He liked to see people express their opinion openly, even if they contradicted him, and occasionally he would surrender his opinion of that of his opponent."

With these words, the spirit of Hahnemann seemed closer to us than ever!

