

we know only in part. All around us are agents with properties, we doubt not, of inestimable value, but quite unknown. The limitation to our knowledge may be our own fault, but it is not the fault of our principles. They call for an accurate knowledge of the properties of medicines. Nor can our *practice* ever be perfected until this is at least measurably secured.

Among the methods of ascertaining the properties of a medicine, we think the best consists in careful trials of it in health. The normal condition of the organic structure and functions should be the standard, all variations from which possess a definiteness and importance which cannot be expected where the symptoms of the remedy are intermixed with, or modified by those of disease. We deem no labor too great, and no care needless, if they aid us in determining the pure effects of medicines. To that end, no attainable facts are to be treated as irrelevant or unimportant, provided they are real changes—not imaginary ones. A slight change of sensation is not (in the present state of our knowledge) to be weighed, as to its pathological import, before it can be accepted. The minute characteristics which distinguish a remedy from all others, and the great features which link it with a class of agents, are all to be sought. If an agent destroys whatever tissue it is brought in contact with, but in small doses merely causes intermittent neuralgia of a particular set of nerves, perhaps the latter fact is as likely as the former, to elucidate its therapeutic power. Nor are we to disregard the effects which occur in special idiosyncracies, as perhaps these cases of extreme susceptibility may best suggest to us where the true force of the medicine is to be found.

If the objection which we are considering is, that we willingly ignore any attainable facts in regard to the action of medicines, you are certainly mistaken. If it means that we hold as facts what are not such, we would say that, if it be so, it is unintentional, and we desire to be set right. We are not conscious of any unwillingness to yield our views of a medicine to evidence acquired by more faithful observation, and more careful experiment. Whenever any one can furnish us a generalization of facts hitherto isolated, we are glad to receive it as a matter of convenience. Even speculations we should feel bound to listen to, as suggesting fields for experiment. In short, all the variations from healthy action caused and remedied by a medicine, we are anxious to learn; but beyond this, we plead ignorance.

The objection admits of a signification which it is most important to distinguish. Beyond the range of ascertained facts, there are some opinions held as to the action of medicines, about whom there is room for difference. We fully admit, on our part, that we cannot explain *how* medicines act, though we have some notions on the subject which seem to us worth as much as any others are. We have indeed a rule which aids us in the selection of our remedies, but of the mysterious processes whereby they change morbid action to healthy, we know but little. Is your position irreconcilable with this?

If there is any medicine whose action is fully understood by you, it would seem that *mercury* ought to be the one. Its long and extended use, its great activity, its good and its bad effects are so strongly