

The Western Journal of the Medical and Physical Sciences was founded and edited by Dr. Daniel Drake, a leading physician during the 1800s until his death in 1852.¹ He was taught by the most renowned American physician of his time, Dr. John Cooke.² In contrast with Cooke, who was an extreme supporter of the use of calomel for treatment of all illnesses, Drake was vocal against the excessive use of calomel by 1833;³ however, he is recorded as having continued to prescribe it in small doses for the remainder of his career.⁴ Moreover, despite any of Drake's reservations regarding the popular treatments used by regular physicians of his time, he took a strong stand against an opposing sect, homeopathy, in his Editorial prefacing the tenth volume of *The Western Journal of the Medical and Physical Sciences*. This Editorial sheds light on homeopathy's growth, popularity, and strength in the major cities of Kentucky.

Clearly, if it warranted attention in the Senior Editor's preface to a respected journal, homeopathy had become a significant medical sect. Several of Drake's comments support this impression. Homeopathy's tenet of minute doses was well known enough that Drake could refer to "homeopathic portions"⁵ without any explanation of the term's meaning. Drake himself writes that homeopathy had become a method of treatment "for the higher classes- the intellectual and refined"⁶. Moreover, strongly apparent throughout Drake's writing is his offense at homeopathy's popularity, which he speaks of as an infestation imposing itself upon the cities of Kentucky through

¹ Rosenberg. *The Cholera Years*, pg 70

² Ebersson. *A Great Purging*

³ Baird. *A Study In Panic And Fear*

⁴ Ebersson. *A Great Purging*.

⁵ *The Western Journal*, Pg 176

⁶*Ibid*, 177

large handbills, smells from warehouses, tracts, and advertisements in the newspapers, while regular medicine had become worthy of only the “applause of the vulgar, who guzzle down the newest patent purging pills”.⁷

Drake wrote long and scathingly about homeopathy’s popularity with the elite. He was clearly disappointed that “wealth and refinement [cannot] raise a people above the range of credulity”⁸, and that if one “aspires after the admiration of first-rate ladies and gentlemen...let him turn homeopathist”⁹. He wrote that homeopaths, by virtue of their popularity, had risen well above regular physicians in wealth and fame, “driv[ing] through the streets in a barouche, while the ‘reg’lar’ doctor trundles in a buggy”¹⁰.

Drake went on to accuse homeopathy of being no more than quackery that claimed to cure the “incurable and insignificant,” the patients’ “imagination supply[ing] the place of active medicinal qualities” in their treatment.¹¹ Drake concluded by noting the beginning signs of the homeopathic infestation in his own neighborhood, in a small office dedicated to the treatment of “Diseased Lungs, Bronchitis, and Asthma”- medical maladies whose treatment all hinged on the use of the stethoscope, a relatively new medical tool that American medicine may not have accepted yet.¹² Whether the stethoscope was accepted yet or not, Drake’s scathing sarcasm, commenting that the stethoscope was certainly a more attractive tool than the more lowly mortar and pestle, and that the doctor promising treatment for these maladies would certainly “assemble around him a host of incurables”, is evidence that treatment for these maladies was clearly unaccepted as of the writing

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Ibid, 176

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ Ibid, 177

¹² http://www.antiquemed.com/monaural_stethoscope.htm for information on the development of the stethoscope.

of Drake's editorial. The editorial, overall, provides evidence that homeopathy had grown in popularity and practice, and was perceived as a threat to regular medicine; furthermore, homeopathy was apparently more progressive than regular medicine, possibly contributing further to its success.