

# Sources and Studies on the History of Homeopathic Medicine (Volume 12)

**Alexander Erlach, *The History of Homoeopathy in Switzerland 1827 - 1971***

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Despite having existed for almost 200 years, historians have, so far, only paid cursory attention to homoeopathy in Switzerland. In the context of his monograph, Alexander Erlach has, for the first time, tackled this subject comprehensively, based on a wide variety of sources. Besides the history of medical associations, homoeopathic hospitals and periodicals, he also looked at contributions from Swiss people in the international homoeopathic organisations, Swiss manufacturers of homoeopathic remedies, aspects of lay homoeopathy and the biographies of homoeopathic doctors.

Firstly, the author dedicates himself to the beginnings of homoeopathy in Switzerland. He shows that its development up to the mid-19th century had a clearly regional character. There may have been homoeopathic doctors, for example in Basle, Berne and Geneva, but there was no interregional homoeopathic network yet. It is difficult to prove that there were contacts beyond the direct geographic vicinity. By contrast, the often tense relationship between medical and non-medical homoeopaths is clearly visible, even in this early phase. The situation of sporadic contact was to change fundamentally, at least for German-speaking Switzerland, with the foundation of the "Schweizerischer Verein Homöopathischer Ärzte (SVHA)". The SVHA created a forum, offering German-speaking homoeopathic doctors regular events at which to make contacts and exchange experiences. The historic development up to the 1970s is presented in detail in a separate chapter. This is followed by an analysis of the development of homoeopathy in French-speaking Switzerland. There, the "Société homoeopathique gallienne", founded in 1832, represented the first gathering of homoeopathic doctors in Geneva.

The next step examines the homoeopathic hospitals in Switzerland. According to the research by the author, the treatment and care facility for the mentally ill "Zur Hoffnung", which passed into the possession of the Berne doctor and homoeopath Jakob Emanuel Niehans in 1839, was the first stationary homoeopathic institution in Switzerland. There were other institutions of this type in countless other locations, such as in Geneva, Nyon and Davos. The Bircher-Benner-Klinik in Zürich, which opened its doors in 1897, also has a long tradition of homoeopathic treatment. Periodicals published in Switzerland or by Swiss people were also taken into account in this work. The first homoeopathic periodical appeared there in the 1830s and was called the "Bibliothèque homoeopathique de Genève". Even if it only lasted for ten years, this periodic was, in Erlach's opinion, one of the most important, on account of its international significance in the propagation of homoeopathy. In addition, the author investigates the creation and development of countless other homoeopathic periodicals, such as the "Schweizer Volksarzt" or the "Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Homöopathie". The last of these shows the difficulties with which publishers often had to deal, i.e. insufficient financial means, a small readership and not enough employees. A certain level of constancy with regard to the regular appearance of homoeopathic periodicals in Switzerland only began in the mid-20th century. During this period, for example, the "Zeitschrift für Klassische Homöopathie" was founded in Germany and was decisively influenced by the Swiss.

The author then sheds light on the activities of Swiss doctors within international homoeopathic congresses and organisations. The Swiss played a key role in the "Liga Medicorum Homoeopathica Internationalis", particularly during the early phase. However, from 1961, Switzerland more or less disappeared from international homoeopathic congresses. It is only recently that the commitment of its homoeopathic practitioners on the international stage has increased. For example, the annual Liga Congress again took place in Switzerland in 2006.

Swiss manufacturers of homoeopathic remedies are also dealt with in Erlach's monograph. The sources scarcely offer any opportunities for tackling the question of how the homoeopaths of the early 19th century obtained their medicines. It is sure that many of them manufactured their own medicines - a practice which, in individual cases, can be proven to have continued until the mid-20th century. The reasons for this are, on the one hand, that the required agents were not available on the medical marketplace. On the other hand, the homoeopathic doctors had a certain amount of scepticism about medicaments manufactured by apothecaries. In any case, the demand on the part of the lay public for homoeopathic medicines was greater than that for medicaments prescribed by doctors. Amongst the major manufacturers of homoeopathic remedies, it was Schwabe from Leipzig that first made a name for themselves in Switzerland. The companies known today - such as Schmidt-Nagel, Boiron or Dolissos - were only founded in the second half of the 20th century.

With regard to lay homoeopathy in Switzerland, Erlach states that, in comparison to Germany, there was no comparable successful development. However, the demand outstripped the supply of physicians. Lay homoeopathy only receives little mention in medical and homoeopathic literature. However, in the periodical "Schweizer Volksarzt", which appeared between 1868 and 1900, there was a wealth of material on this era. At that time, lay homoeopaths were organised in, amongst other associations, the "Schweizer Verein für volksthümliche Heilkunde". With regard to the practice of this method of treatment by non-doctors, it can be seen that, for a long time, this was practised as a sideline, for example by the vicar or village teacher, and seldom represented a full-time job. However, this has changed massively in recent decades through an increasing professionalisation of lay homoeopaths. Through the increasing demand and increased willingness on the part of health insurers to accept homoeopathic treatments by lay therapists in the form of supplementary insurance, non-medical homoeopathy has enjoyed an enormous upsurge.

To complete his work, Erlach presents the biographies of three doctors, who played a central role in the propagation and development of homoeopathy in Switzerland. Among the major names of Swiss homoeopathic history, besides Rudolf Karl Flury (1903-1977), Erlach also names Antoine Nebel sen. (1870-1954) and Pierre Schmidt (1894-1987).