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Homeopathy in Colonial Australia: Homoeopathic Hospitals and the Battle with Allopathy

In colonial Australia, as in many parts of the nineteenth century Western world, devotees of the therapies promulgated by Samuel Hahnemann plied their trade. Hahnemann's thesis was that substances (often botanicals or conventional drugs) that produced side-effects similar to the symptoms of a particular disease (*similia similibus curentur*) would be therapeutic for that disease if administered after extreme dilution – sometimes more than a billionfold. Jacqueline Templeton likened this to treating a dog bite with a 'hair of the dog that bit you', though since only water would normally remain after such extreme dilutions, a better analogy might be treatment by the thought of the hair of the dog that bit you. This paper focuses primarily on the practice of homeopathy in the colony of Victoria via the Melbourne Homoeopathic Dispensary and Homoeopathic Hospital, and the role of its founder, Dr JW Günt. It is set in the context of the development of homeopathy in the other colonies during that period. The homeopaths and allopaths engaged in lively confrontation. This played out also in the colonial legislatures, where some of the parliamentarians who were 'regular' doctors lobbied their colleagues with variable success to provide greater protection to the profession via amendments to the Medical Acts. The Melbourne Homoeopathic Hospital gradually went more and more 'mainstream', becoming Prince Henry's Hospital — one of the University of Melbourne's core teaching hospitals — thirty years into the twentieth century.