

# Critics and Converts of Homeopathy: the Dutch Debate in the Nineteenth Century<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction

ON SEPTEMBER 27, 1832 J.F.P. Schönfeld (1792–1861), a doctor of medicine who practised at Winschoten in the province of Groningen, in the north-east of the Netherlands, wrote a letter to Samuel Hahnemann and asked his advice. Schönfeld began his letter by explaining that he had become convinced of the validity of Hahnemann's theory after reading his books. Unfortunately, he claimed, none of his colleagues shared his conviction and he could not therefore turn to them for advice.<sup>2</sup> As far as is known this may have been Schönfeld's only letter to the founder of homeopathy. Nor does Hahnemann's archive contain letters of other Dutch doctors of medicine who, like Schönfeld, published on homeopathy at the time, whether as converts or as critics. Of course, correspondence may have been lost or Dutch doctors may have preferred to visit Hahnemann personally, rather than corresponding with him. Yet, Schönfeld's complaint about the lack of homeopathic colleagues in his part of the country could have been extended easily to other parts of the Netherlands, for elsewhere he would have been no better off. Schönfeld and, from 1836 onwards, also his younger colleague S.A. Bleekrode (1814–1862) may well have remained the only Dutch homeopathic doctors of medicine in the 1830s and 1840s.<sup>3</sup>

Although the first Dutch publications on Hahnemann's therapy date from 1827, it is clear from the publications up to 1836 that homeopathy's converts remained few, both among doctors and patients. Homeopathy did not become nearly as popular in the Netherlands as it did in many other European countries or, even more so, in parts of America. Dutch homeopaths only organised themselves nationally in the 1880s, at a time when homeopathy's popularity in other countries was already declining. Nevertheless, even then, homeopathy's share of the Dutch medical market remained modest. The main question, therefore, is why this happened: why did homeopathy not meet with a warmer welcome in the Netherlands?

The history of homeopathy in the Netherlands is still largely undisclosed.<sup>4</sup> The source material used here consists mainly of pamphlets, books and other publications on homeopathy, most written by doctors of medicine for their colleagues or for the general public. This type of source material has an obvious bias. It provides more information on doctors than patients, and more on university educated physicians than on other healers, 'regular' or 'irregular'. However, the information it offers is of strategic importance. The introduction of homeopathy, to a large extent, depended on the co-operation and zeal of physicians. The reconstruction of the debate between converts and critics of homeopathy shows which arguments were used, how tolerant or intolerant the two parties were towards each other, the barriers homeopathic practitioners saw themselves confronted with, and the strategies they chose. The source material contains also some valuable clues to the responses of patients to homeopathy. One of these clues will be recounted, namely the Dutch clientele of the homeopathic practitioner Clemens von Bönninghausen of Münster in the 1840s and 1850s.<sup>5</sup> The availability of well-known homeopathic practitioners just over the border, which considering the smallness of the Netherlands also implied their proximity, may help to explain why the number of Dutch homeopathic practitioners did not keep pace with the growing demand for homeopathic services from the 1850s onwards. Until the end of the nineteenth century many Dutch patients had to turn to foreign homeopaths, whether in Belgium, Germany or in the Netherlands, if they did not want to remain deprived of homeopathic treatment.

### **The First Phase of the Dutch Debate on Homeopathy 1827–1836**

**A**S IN OTHER COUNTRIES Hahnemann's therapy found its way to the Netherlands in the 1820s. A few medical practitioners could be pinpointed in areas of the Netherlands bordering on Germany, by that time,

who used homeopathic therapy. The first two Dutch publications date from 1827. One was a translation of Hahnemann's *Organon*.<sup>6</sup> The other was a discussion of homeopathy's merits and shortcomings by a young doctor of medicine at Leiden, the future professor G.C.B. Suringar (1802–1874).<sup>7</sup> Apparently a critical interest in homeopathy formed no barrier to promotion! Suringar's discussion of Hahnemann's therapy concluded that homeopathic theory was not confirmed by facts and that most of its propositions were untenable. According to Suringar, homeopathy's basic principle, the *similia similibus curentur*, likes treated by likes, patients could be cured by drugs that would produce symptoms of the disease in a healthy person, conflicted with both the rules of the art and common sense. Only homeopathic diet and highly diluted medicines were to be considered beneficial as all too often medical practitioners prescribed too many medicines when the healing power of nature would be of greater advantage to the patient. For the time being, the only one who published on homeopathy in the Netherlands was the sober-minded young Suringar of Leiden. Unlike several other countries, the Netherlands had no active, influential and charismatic medical practitioner like Quin in England and Belgium, Des Guidi in France, or Hering in America who initiated the introduction and promotion of Hahnemann's therapy, and who mobilised upper-class support for homeopathy.

In 1831 another translation of Hahnemann's work, his brochure on the best treatment of cholera, was published.<sup>8</sup> A second critical, though not strongly so, discussion on homeopathy by an anonymous author in The Hague appeared in 1833.<sup>9</sup> He pleaded for a thorough, unbiased investigation into the validity or invalidity of homeopathy. However, as had been the case with Suringar, no reaction came from the homeopathic side. In the same year the *Hollandsche Maatschappij der Wetenschappen* (the Holland Society of Sciences) held an essay competition on the subject of homeopathy. The only Dutch contribution – there were also six contributions in German – was the winner in 1835, but was never published. The author was S.P. Scheltema (1801–1873), an Arnhem doctor. Striving for impartiality, calling for the tolerance of his colleagues, and weighing carefully the advantages and disadvantages of homeopathy, Scheltema acknowledged that homeopathy had its merits, but, at the same time, advised against the rejection of the older therapies in favour of Hahnemann's therapy.

The first Dutch convert to homeopathy who made a more determined effort to convince his colleagues and the general public of the correctness and wholesomeness of Hahnemann's principles was Schönfeld. In 1834 he translated Hahnemann's *Geist der Homöopathischen Heil-Lehre*<sup>10</sup>, and a year

later an eulogy on homeopathy by Caspari.<sup>11</sup> In 1836 Schönfeld and Bleekrode, who in 1835 had defended his doctoral thesis on homeopathy at the University of Groningen, began to compile a series of essays on homeopathy.<sup>12</sup> However, this series ended abruptly after the publication of the first number, possibly due to Bleekrode's move to another region. In the meantime, Schönfeld's pleas for homeopathy were noted. Three of his Groningen colleagues promptly published their objections to homeopathy in general and to Schönfeld's conversion in particular.<sup>13</sup> One of them equated homeopathy with quackery, and even tried to persuade his friend Schönfeld to give up homeopathy and to come back to the 'old school'. For, as he wrote: 'Today you are still being worshipped because of some so-called miracle cures, but tomorrow you may well be misunderstood, cursed and placed on the same level as the quacks of former and later times.'<sup>14</sup> Perhaps because of these attacks or because of a general lack of response, Schönfeld did not continue to publish on homeopathy and restricted himself to putting Hahnemann's ideas into practice after 1836. Until a second series of publications appeared in the 1850s, no further pamphlets or books on homeopathy were published in the Netherlands. The first phase of the Dutch debate on homeopathy produced six translations of German homeopathic publications, one translation of a German criticism of homeopathy, and eight original Dutch titles, three of them completely negative. Three others were, more or less, neutral though pointing to some positive aspects of the system, such as the homeopathic diet, the highly diluted medicines, and, as a consequence, the ample room for the healing power of nature. Only two publications, by Schönfeld and by Bleekrode and Schönfeld, were absolutely positive. These pamphlets and books were published before the conquest of scientific medicine, at a time when Dutch doctors of medicine were more inclined to eclecticism and a practical orientation than to romanticism and natural philosophy. They were no more prepared to give homeopathy a warm welcome than they had been when Mesmer's and Puysegur's animal magnetism had been introduced a decade previously.

The only two Dutch homeopathic authors of this period had been educated at the University of Groningen, where research had been undertaken on animal magnetism since 1813 and where vitalist ideas were viewed with favour by at least some of the medical staff. How exactly Schönfeld, Bleekrode and their colleagues came into contact with homeopathy is, as yet, unknown. Apart from the publications of Hahnemann and other homeopathic literature, personal contacts between German homeopaths and Dutch practitioners may have been instrumental in initially promoting homeopathy. Once a positive interest in homeopathy

had been raised, it was left to the individual practitioner to further explore the possibilities of this therapy and, perhaps, correspond with the master himself, as Schönfeld had done. Schönfeld and Bleekrode seem to have been the only homeopathic physicians in the Netherlands until the mid-1850s, when several German homeopathic practitioners were invited to come and practise in Utrecht and Rotterdam. By that time a younger generation of Schönfelds had also entered the medical market as homeopathic doctors, three of them practising in the same part of the Netherlands as Schönfeld senior.<sup>15</sup> The number of converts to homeopathy among other categories of qualified practitioners and amongst unqualified, irregular healers, some of whom are known to have advertised themselves as homeopaths, remains to be investigated.

The lack of enthusiasm for homeopathy on the part of Dutch medical practitioners calls for explanation. The following interpretation can be offered. The medical act of 1818 did not create a barrier to the introduction of homeopathy as qualified practitioners were free to choose the therapy they deemed best, and to make and sell their own medicines. However, the intellectual climate at the universities was less favourable to homeopathy, and practitioners had to rely on their own initiatives if they wanted to learn about the new therapy, or to get in touch with German colleagues, which was not unusual at the time. Schönfeld did not develop into an inspiring leader and failed to convert substantial numbers of colleagues except for his kin. The impact of the presumed surplus of qualified practitioners from the 1830s onwards could have been twofold. It may have deterred practitioners from striking out along new paths, thereby risking the scorn of their colleagues. Alternatively, it could have provided a stimulus to do just that, especially if they anticipated a demand for homeopathic treatment.

Little is known about patients' familiarity with and their demand for homeopathy and the publications of the period offer little information, only giving some general material on the demand for homeopathic treatment.<sup>16</sup> According to the anonymous author based in The Hague it was not the uneducated who usually felt attracted by the miraculous and the new, but the 'cultured' (*'beschaafden'*), who took an interest in homeopathy. Another, extremely negative, anonymous author believed that homeopathy's following consisted of the 'over-civilised, spoilt and effeminate class'.<sup>17</sup> One of Schönfeld's opponents, Eekma, noted that homeopathy had for some time been the talk of the town, and that one quack after another was being sent for from Germany. Thus, it would be reasonable to suggest that, as in other countries, homeopathy's early support in the Netherlands was concentrated amongst the upper classes. However, this support is likely to have been much

less than elsewhere, if not in relative numbers then in weight. While royal or aristocratic circles figured prominently among homeopathy's clientele in Germany, Italy, England, France, Belgium and Russia, this was much less the case in the Netherlands. Here, homeopathy lacked the backing of a leading doctor and the example of upper-class support. Those of them who felt attracted to homeopathy will have consulted mostly foreign homeopathic doctors. As for the Dutch royal family, King William I is known to have engaged a homeopathic personal physician in Brussels, L.J. Varlez.<sup>18</sup> Later, King William III apparently also had a homeopathic personal physician, a Professor Everhard.<sup>19</sup> Only from the 1850s, did some members of the aristocracy become intent on promoting homeopathy. At this stage, a tentative conclusion may be offered that, during the 1820s and 1830s, the demand for homeopathic treatment was relatively modest, and the practitioners could hardly have been expected to switch to homeopathy for economic motives.

### The Second Phase: Homeopathy for and by Lay People in the 1850s and early 1860s

AFTER 1836 THE PUBLICATION of pamphlets and books on homeopathy ceased for almost twenty years, nor were there other achievements to be shown by homeopathy during this period. While in other countries homeopathy gained further ground as its supporters organised themselves, the Netherlands lagged behind. Homeopathic societies were set up in Germany, France, Belgium, the United States and England in the 1830s and 1840s. It was not until the 1850s that the silence broken, and then it was mostly homeopaths, laymen included, who let their voices be heard as the centre of homeopathy moved from the province of Groningen to Rotterdam. In 1857 a Society of Champions of Homeopathy (*Vereeniging van Voorstanders der Homoeopathie*), initially a lay society, had been founded in Rotterdam.<sup>20</sup> The Society exerted itself for the homeopathic cause by attracting three homeopathic practitioners to this industrial harbour town – two Germans in 1857 and a Dutch doctor in 1859 – and by establishing dispensaries where the poor could receive free homeopathic treatment. There were also active supporters of homeopathy in Utrecht, witnessed by their opposition to the new bills on the practice of medicine and the preparation of medicines in the late 1850s. Additionally, in 1856 the German homeopathic practitioner, C.G. Kallenbach, had set up practice in Utrecht at the request of 'many highly placed' individuals.<sup>21</sup>

Dutch support for homeopathy had evidently started to grow.

However, except for Rotterdam, it is still unclear when, where, in which circles, to what extent and why this happened? There are indications that the early 1850s formed a turning point. An anonymous pamphlet, published in 1857 in Utrecht, states that in the previous decade homeopathy had become more popular in the Netherlands, and now enjoyed the 'liveliest interest' in most provinces.<sup>22</sup> The Society of Champions of Homeopathy of Rotterdam, on the other hand, gave a less positive picture, reporting that homeopathy was still little practised.<sup>23</sup> It is unfortunate that other pamphlets and books of this period offer little further insight. However, the patient's journals of Hahnemann's favourite disciple Clemens von Bönninghausen (1785–1864), who had been raised in the Netherlands and who practised at Münster near the eastern border, offer much useful information. These journals reveal a remarkable increase in patients from Rotterdam and to a lesser extent from other Dutch towns from 1851 onwards. Prior to this, from 1835 onwards, there had been a steady trickle of new patients from the Netherlands, at most five a year. Their numbers rose to over twenty in 1851, more than thirty in 1852, to almost eighty in 1853, then dropped back to under thirty in 1854, rose again to forty in 1855, after which a definite fall set in, with seventeen new patients in 1856, eight in 1857 and, thereafter, until Bönninghausen's death in 1864, no more than six new patients a year consulted him from the Netherlands.<sup>24</sup> Evidently, Rotterdam was a special case as far as homeopathy and its relation to Bönninghausen is concerned. Nearly two-thirds of Bönninghausen's 288 patients living in the Netherlands were to be found in Rotterdam, namely 181. Amsterdam scored second, but with only eighteen patients. Bönninghausen's Rotterdam clientele were not primarily German immigrants or people with German relatives who were the first to turn to homeopathy. However, this does not preclude the possibility that trade contacts with Germany, especially via the Rhine shipping traffic, may also have been instrumental in propagating homeopathy.

Bönninghausen's first Rotterdam patient, a reasonably well-to-do baker, got to know about him quite accidentally. In early 1843 this baker had become related to a country doctor at Overschie, who, when hearing about the baker's lung disease, advised him to consult Bönninghausen. The baker, who would become secretary of the committee of the newly founded Rotterdam Society of Champions of Homeopathy in 1857, may have spread the news, in his turn, of his successful treatment. Interestingly, Bönninghausen's eleventh Rotterdam patient, in 1850, was a corn commission merchant who might have known the baker, and who certainly did so at a later stage, for in 1857 he became chairman of the committee! However, why it was Rotterdam in particular which came under the spell of

Bönninghausen and homeopathy is difficult to discover. Coincidence certainly played a part, with the baker becoming related to the Schiedam country doctor, and the other patients following, many of them influential in their own way. Family, neighbourly, and occupational ties all combined to make Bönninghausen and homeopathy quite popular in Rotterdam. Bönninghausen's Rotterdam patients belonged mostly to the middle and upper classes. Among them were craftsmen, office clerks, shopkeepers, bakers, businessmen, teachers, civil servants, ship's captains, doctors, lawyers, a publisher and director of a newspaper, the superintendent of police, commission merchants and ship owners. Religiously speaking they formed a cross section from the Rotterdam population as a whole, more than half of them being Dutch Reformed and about a quarter Roman Catholic. The majority of them were male (106 males versus 75 females) and older than twenty (four-fifths of the total). About two-thirds of the adult male patients and nearly all the adult female patients were married or widowed. Half of the Rotterdam patients were related to one or more of the group, not surprisingly, husbands and wives, parents and children were most prominent among them.

These patients consulted Bönninghausen either personally at Münster (or sometimes elsewhere) or by correspondence, especially after a first personal consultation. In 1851 Bönninghausen visited the Netherlands, including Rotterdam where he was consulted by several patients. However, this may have remained Bönninghausen's only consulting trip, for in 1852 and 1853 he advertised in the *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant* that he would be staying at Emmerich on the Rhine near the Dutch border for a day or two and could be consulted there by his Dutch patients. Obviously, Bönninghausen had been told that he was not allowed to practise in the Netherlands, unless he had dispensation, which had been asked for without success, by some of his Rotterdam supporters in 1854.

Bönninghausen's Rotterdam clientele, therefore, had to make a further effort to secure a more permanent place for homeopathy. Here again the German connection proved to be useful with the example of the German lay societies for the advancement of homeopathy.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, Bönninghausen did much to help the Rotterdam Society of Champions of Homeopathy in their search for a homeopathic practitioner. An income of at least 2000 Dutch florins would be guaranteed during the first year. The committee of the Rotterdam Society was able to attract a young German doctor, F.W.O. Kallenbach (1829–1917), the son of the Utrecht homeopathic practitioner, after earlier attempts to persuade one of the young Schönfeld doctors had failed.<sup>26</sup> Before the year was over Kallenbach was



joined by another German homeopathic doctor A.J. Gruber (1820–1896). These two Berlin doctors of medicine became licensed to practice in the Netherlands after they had taken a second medical degree at the University of Utrecht. In 1859 the Dutch homeopathic practitioner S.J. van Roijen (1828–1909) also set up practice in Rotterdam, but he would leave for Groningen just two years later as he was unable to secure sufficient patients. Van Roijen had published a pamphlet, on arriving in Rotterdam, in which he explained to his non-homeopathic colleagues why he had become a homeopath.<sup>27</sup> In 1859 he and his German colleagues had begun also to publish a series on homeopathy intended for both laymen and practitioners.<sup>28</sup> They exhorted, in their foreword, every adherent of homeopathy to report on the history of his or her conversion to homeopathy. This call proved successful, though the series did not survive Van Roijen's departure from Rotterdam, coming to an end in 1861. Six original Dutch pamphlets and books were published by homeopaths in this period, most of them intended for a lay audience. The previously expressed homeopathic truth was praised as being grounded in common sense and nature and, in addition, a new genre appeared, namely the 'homeopathic family doctor' handbook, which contained advice on self-diagnosis and, to a certain extent, on self-healing. In 1853 a Dutch translation of Bönninghausen's *Homöopathische Hausarzt* was published, while an original 'homeopathic family doctor' handbook by Van Roijen appeared in 1861.<sup>29</sup> Pleas for a free distribution of homeopathic medicines by homeopathic practitioners were in vain, however, for the Medical Act of 1865 prevented them from doing so.

Compared to the first period of publicity, the second period was relatively quiet. Only one extremely negative pamphlet was published by an opponent of homeopathy, where homeopathy was denounced as a sect and its followers as charlatans.<sup>30</sup> Surprisingly, Van Roijen's rejection of orthodox medicine in favour of homeopathy does not appear to have raised protests. On the contrary, there was less interest on the part of allopathic practitioners than before. Homeopathy was no longer new, competition from homeopaths was still negligible, and scientific medicine was gaining ground. In 1849 Dutch practitioners had organised themselves in the Dutch Society for the Advancement of Medicine (*Nederlandsche Maatschappij ter bevordering der Geneeskunst*). Their own journal, first published in 1857, kept silent on the subject of homeopathy until the 1880s. The members ensured that their professional interests were safeguarded by the Medical Act, which, following many years of discussion, was passed finally in 1865. The 1850s and early 1860s marked an increase in support, in some ways, for homeopathy. The demand for homeopathic treatment was growing, the Champions of

Homeopathy had organised themselves in Rotterdam, and homeopathic self-medication was stimulated by the 'homeopathic family doctor'. The German connection was still prominent and vital. Bönninghausen developed into the leading inspiration behind Dutch homeopathy, and other German homeopathic practitioners were invited to establish themselves, a process which involved taking a Dutch medical degree. On the other hand, there was clearly a shortage of Dutch homeopathic practitioners as the young Schönfelds and Van Roijen may well have been the only ones. A physicist by origin, Van Roijen was converted to homeopathy in 1855 when his dangerously ill brother was cured by a German homeopathic practitioner. Van Roijen then took his medical degree at Leiden University, thereafter studying homeopathy at Leipzig. This was to become the standard route to homeopathic practice. First, by taking a medical degree at a Dutch university,<sup>31</sup> followed by homeopathic training in Leipzig or Prague, or, from the 1870s, in Budapest with Professor Theodor von Bakody (1825–1911), the son of the founder of homeopathy in Hungary, Joseph von Bakody (1795–1845).<sup>32</sup> There was no chair of homeopathy at a Dutch university until the early 1960s and the first Dutch homeopathic hospital was opened only in 1914. While no homeopathic training was available in the Netherlands, and scientific medicine was gaining ground within the universities, medical students could hardly be expected to make great efforts to become homeopathic practitioners and, thereby, by implication, medical outsiders.

### The Third Phase: the Breakthrough of Homeopathy in the 1880s and 1890s

AFTER NEARLY TWO DECADES OF SILENCE, when only a few more homeopathic 'family doctors' were produced in translation, the debate on homeopathy was reopened in 1880 by a critic, the physician G.J. Teljer (1798–1880), shortly before his death.<sup>33</sup> However, no homeopath took the trouble to refute his criticism. In 1885 a twin attack on homeopathy was launched by the professor of pathology at Utrecht, C.A. Pekelharing (1848–1922), and the *Monthly Journal of the Anti-Quackery Society*, a society founded in 1880, its journal in 1881.<sup>34</sup> Both criticised homeopathy, although neither of them went so far as denouncing it as quackery.<sup>35</sup> *The Monthly Journal of the Anti-Quackery Society* labelled homeopathy a grave scientific error. Pekelharing shared this conclusion and offered also an explanation for homeopathy's support amongst laymen. This attraction, he believed, was due to the manner in which homeopathic practitioners initiated their patients

into homeopathic therapy, which gave them the role of assistant and, thereby, built up their confidence. The reason behind the lack of support for homeopathy amongst experts, according to Pekelharing, should be sought in the faulty principles of homeopathy and its worthlessness as a therapy.

This time the homeopaths did not remain silent. Reactions were forthcoming from both the schoolteacher and advocate of homeopathy H. Merckens and the doctor of medicine and homeopathic practitioner N.A.J. Voorhoeve (1855–1922) of The Hague, chairman of the Society for the Advancement of Homeopathy in the Netherlands (*Vereeniging tot Bevordering van de Homoeopathie in Nederland*), founded in 1886. Merckens reported that homeopathy's support in the Netherlands now consisted of thousands of people from all social classes, but that there were still many barriers to homeopathic practice.<sup>36</sup> Voorhoeve emphasised homeopathy's scientific basis, and pleaded for its recognition.<sup>37</sup> These defences of homeopathy elicited a very negative reaction from H.H. Prins Wielandt (1841–1898), a medical practitioner also based in The Hague. Homeopathy, he claimed, was a gross scientific error and a form of quackery.<sup>38</sup> The Amsterdam professor of medicine B.J. Stokvis (1834–1902) was more moderate in his criticism, although he too rejected homeopathy as a scientific error.<sup>39</sup> Indeed, he wrote, the homeopaths of our time also have seen the light of scientific medicine, and they separate themselves only from their 'allopathic' colleagues at the moment when they prescribe medicines at the sickbed. The *similia* principle, however, was untrustworthy and proof of the effectiveness of the endlessly diluted medicines still had to be provided. In fact, Stokvis claimed, the homeopath adopted a passive attitude, except in his prescription of a diet, and in his inspiration of the patient with confidence and belief in his recovery. This criticism was refuted by three homeopathic practitioners, F.W.O. Kallenbach, S.J. van Roijen and, three years later, D.K. Munting (1862–1932) of Amsterdam.<sup>40</sup> Kallenbach went so far as to claim that homeopathy was part of general medicine, and that the new generation of medical practitioners should be acquainted with all forms of therapy. He even admitted that scientific proof of the truth of the *similia* principle was still lacking. Both Van Roijen and Munting were less inclined to such conciliatory gestures. After 1888 the opponents of homeopathy were silent for some time, while the homeopaths published steadily. In 1890 the Society for the Advancement of Homeopathy launched its monthly journal, the *Homoeopathisch Maandblad*. One year later the editors could state with satisfaction that many people had taken out a subscription to the *Maandblad*, and that public opinion was changing in favour of homeopathy.

The number of homeopathic practitioners was now rising. There were

four in 1887, one year after the founding of the Society for the Advancement of Homeopathy. In 1890 there were five, in 1898 ten and in 1900 fourteen. In 1898 this group founded the Society of Homeopathic Practitioners in the Netherlands (*Vereeniging van Homoeopathische Geneesheren in Nederland*), and in 1900 they started to publish their proceedings (*Handelingen*). Since the Dutch universities did not offer homeopathic training the first society had started to finance, in the meantime, homeopathic training abroad for young Dutch practitioners, some seven in 1896. It was thought imperative that a homeopathic chair be instituted, so both the society and its members of parliament campaigned for this in the 1890s, but even the anti-revolutionary member of parliament and founder of the Calvinist Free University, Abraham Kuyper, saw his proposal for a homeopathic chair rejected in 1896. This was much to the satisfaction of the editors of the Dutch Journal of Medicine (*Nederlandsch Tijdschrift voor Geneeskunde*), the mouthpiece of the Dutch Society for the Advancement of Medicine, who described homeopathy as dogmatic and unscientific, which solicited letters of protest from both Van Roijen and Kallenbach.<sup>41</sup>

In late 1896 a fierce conflict broke out between opponents and advocates of homeopathy. This was centred in Rotterdam, where J.I.A.B. van Roijen (1870–1925), son of S.J. van Roijen, had just established himself as a homeopathic practitioner with financial help from the recently founded Rotterdam branch of the Society for the Advancement of Homeopathy. Young Van Roijen's membership of the Dutch Society for the Advancement of Medicine led the Rotterdam branch to propose a motion in which homeopathy was condemned as an irrational therapy. The motion was accepted by a large majority. Beforehand Van Roijen's expulsion had been discussed, but this proposal had been rejected. Van Roijen thereupon resigned with an open letter.<sup>42</sup> The Rotterdam branch was not satisfied, for in 1897 it pressed the general meeting of the Dutch Society for the Advancement of Medicine to refuse membership to homeopaths. The general meeting, however, opposed such an exclusion. The editors of the *Homoeopathisch Maandblad* were satisfied with this decision by stating that Dutch physicians could hardly have provided a stronger proof of their intolerance had they accepted the Rotterdam proposal.<sup>43</sup>

More, but milder criticism on homeopathy was published in 1899. P.H. van Eden (1862–1933), a Leeuwarden practitioner, reported that homeopathy and allopathy had undergone changes since the times of Hahnemann and that they now had many points in common.<sup>44</sup> He added that the public made liberal use of homeopathic therapy, and that there were many laymen with a homeopathic 'family doctor' and medicine chest,

especially among the religiously orthodox. In his reaction Kallenbach wrote that he was pleased with Van Eden's mild tone, but that Van Eden underestimated the opposition which homeopathy still had to endure.<sup>45</sup> Yet, after 1900 the flow of homeopathic publications did not cease. Many of them were published by La Rivière and Voorhoeve at Zwolle, since 1890 the homeopathic publishing house. Only in 1906 did critical books and pamphlets make an appearance, after which homeopathy's critics again kept silent for the time being.

As support for homeopathy grew and the homeopaths became organised and let their voices be heard, and above all, requested scientific and legal recognition, criticism from the 'allopaths', in turn, became more severe. A balanced judgement of the arguments of the opposition was seldom to be found on either side. The homeopathic practitioners believed that they had a monopoly of the truth, and said so frequently. This caused irritation on the part of their non-homeopathic colleagues, who were often no less convinced of their correctness, supported by scientific truth. Common sense and experience – and for the homeopaths also the term 'nature' – had become obsolete for both parties as legitimating terms, while the term 'scientific' came to reign supreme. Some attempts were made at conciliation by both groups, but more often homeopathic practitioners were treated as outsiders, the Rotterdam affair providing the most extreme example of intolerance.

Although the demand for homeopathic treatment had increased further during the 1880s and 1890s, relatively few practitioners had been converted to homeopathy. The modest increase in the number of homeopathic practitioners was partly self-generated for example, by the Van Roijens and the Voorhoeves, and was supported financially by the Society for the Advancement of Homeopathy. The fact that there were still few homeopathic practitioners by the 1880s and 1890s could have been influenced no longer by fierce competition in the Dutch medical market. On the contrary, by this time the supply of qualified practitioners had fallen substantially compared to the size of the population,<sup>46</sup> while, according to the *Homoeopathisch Maandblad*, the demand for homeopathic practitioners was growing. An explanation should be sought, therefore, in the predominantly scientific orientation of the Dutch medical faculties and in the absence of homeopathic training in the Netherlands. The Medical Act of 1865 became another barrier, not so much to becoming a homeopathic practitioner but to practising as one, since medicines could no longer be freely distributed. A solution to this problem was to interest pharmacists in selling homeopathic medicines which had been purchased in Germany. By

1890 this had been organised in a few Dutch cities, the medicines being provided by the Leipzig pharmacist Wilmar Schwabe. An additional reason why the number of homeopathic practitioners did not keep pace with the growing demand, may have been that at least the better-off patients had a relatively easy solution as they could consult also foreign homeopaths in Belgium, Germany and even in the Netherlands themselves.

The reasons for the growth in lay support for homeopathy during the last decades of the nineteenth century, as well as during the preceding decades, remain uncertain. Apart from the Bönninghausen clientele of the 1850s, which consisted mainly of members of the middle and upper classes, there are only rather vague indications concerning the later decades of the nineteenth century. According to some authors the main homeopathic support at the time was concentrated in 'cultured', if not higher circles. Van Eden pointed also to the interest in homeopathy on the part of religiously orthodox circles such as the example of Abraham Kuyper. He was opposed to vaccination, like Hahnemann, or rather in Kuyper's case compulsory vaccination, although their arguments were very different. Probably both homeopathic therapy and the way homeopathic practitioners dealt with their patients influenced those attracted to homeopathy. Even if the *similia* principle and the rest of Hahnemann's system was not always fully understood, homeopathy must still have been viewed as a welcome alternative to orthodox medicine, not least because of its limited use of medicines. Homeopathy by this time was not unique as, for example, naturopathy also gained ground during this period. The question of what made homeopathy attractive to its supporters could be extended, therefore, to pose the question as to what 'alternative' movements had in common and why they became popular at this time? For some, like the religiously orthodox, this popularity might have been connected with their aversion to 'intellectualism' and their idea of a God-given and as such respected nature. More generally, the popularity of these 'alternative' movements may be interpreted in terms of resistance towards the authority of orthodox medicine, of a romantic counter-movement.

What also made homeopathy attractive to many patients was the homeopathic practitioner's manner, he treated his patients as responsible people and encouraged them to practise self-medication. In addition, many supporters of homeopathy showed initiative, founding the local homeopathic society in Rotterdam in the 1850s, and some thirty years later the Society for the Advancement of Homeopathy, this involving close co-operation with leading homeopathic practitioners, N.A.J. Voorhoeve, S.J. van Roijen and F.W.O. Kallenbach, the fathers of Dutch homeopathy. It was

largely thanks to the efforts of laymen that these societies could function and that homeopathy could gain further ground.

### **The Puzzle of Homeopathy's Varying Popularity**

**E**XPLANATIONS OF HOMEOPATHY'S POPULARITY in the nineteenth century have concentrated so far on the early successes and the later failures of homeopathy to win or to keep professional and/or lay support in a particular country. Comparative research between countries or regions has been largely lacking.<sup>47</sup> The early popularity of homeopathy has been ascribed to the poor state of orthodox medicine and to the dislike of 'heroic therapy' (bloodletting, purging, and strong doses of medicine) on the part of upper- and middle-class patients.<sup>48</sup> Especially if royalty were attracted to it, homeopathy could become respectable and fashionable. It has also been suggested that a tradition of self-help could result in a warm welcome for homeopathy.<sup>49</sup> The need for active, influential and charismatic homeopathic practitioners, indispensable for the successful introduction and promotion of Hahnemann's therapy should be added to the list of requirements. Hahnemann's therapy for cholera during the early 1830s, a dilution of camphor, might well have been instrumental, additionally, in building up support. After its first introduction, homeopathy's fate, to a large extent, depended on local, regional and national institutionalisation i.e. the establishment of homeopathic societies with medical and/or lay members, journals and other publications, publishers, training opportunities, pharmacies and hospitals. Moreover, it was highly important whether or not internal controversies were avoided.

However, early popularity of homeopathy cannot be explained purely in terms of what influenced its followers and how they responded. Circumstances for homeopathy's reception varied from country to country and over time. Legislation defined the margins of homeopathic practice, the distribution of homeopathic medicines and homeopathic training, while the homeopaths also had to cope with differing degrees of opposition on the part of orthodox practitioners. The saturation of the medical market with medical services could form another barrier to homeopathy's acceptance, at least as far as medical practitioners were concerned. Various explanations have been offered for the declining popularity of homeopathy in Germany after 1850, in England and France after 1870, and in the United States towards the end of the nineteenth century. They are based mainly on two elements. Firstly, the internal homeopathic conflicts between 'pure' and more liberal homeopaths, and secondly, developments which moved

orthodox medicine away from 'heroic' medicine, thereby lessening the differences between orthodox and homeopathic therapies. The combination of these elements, it has been argued, worked against homeopathy.<sup>50</sup>

From a comparative point of view, the Netherlands presents an interesting, and, to a certain degree, atypical case. Although 'heroic' medicine might be considered as a constant at the time of the introduction of homeopathy in various countries, few Dutch patients and practitioners came to support Hahnemann's therapy. There is no evidence that the Dutch aversion towards 'heroic' medicine was significantly smaller than elsewhere which indicates that discontent with 'heroic' medicine did not lead automatically to a warm reception for homeopathy. The introduction of homeopathy, it could be argued, given this discontent and thus a potential reservoir of clients, stood or fell with the presence or absence of a Quin, a Des Guidi or a Hering. Schönfeld failed to become such an outstanding figure in the Netherlands. If this had been otherwise, and Schönfeld had been able to convert colleagues and to recruit a high-status clientele, then the course of homeopathy in the Netherlands could have been different. Traditions of self-medication are not sufficiently well known to assess whether they paved the way for homeopathy. Only from the 1850s are there indications that homeopathy's acceptance may have been connected with habits of self-medication, for example, amongst those working in shipping and members of orthodox religious circles. The relations between patients and practitioners need further investigation, especially the manner in which both homeopathic and allopathic practitioners dealt with their patients. Was there as much difference between the homeopathic and the non-homeopathic manner as has been suggested? And were homeopathic medicines cheaper, and how important was this to middle-class patients?

Despite variations in the imposition of medical legislation in most countries, including the Netherlands, qualified practitioners were free to choose the therapy they thought most appropriate. Homeopathic practice, as all medical practice, was only prohibited to unqualified healers. The United States was by far the most liberal nation with respect to control, which explains partly the large number and variety of homeopathic practitioners established there, at least in some States. Legislation could influence also the production and distribution of medicines, and medical training, though what this meant for homeopathy in different countries remains to be analysed. The Dutch situation was not unfavourable at first to homeopathy, but in 1865 the Medical Act prohibited the free distribution of medicines. Later Parliament rejected the proposal for the institution of a homeopathic chair, nor would other forms of homeopathic training become available. While



early medical opposition was mild, this increased in the 1880s and 1890s at a time when Dutch homeopaths organised themselves finally at a national level. Homeopathy's lack of support in the Netherlands before 1865 could then hardly have been due to legal barriers or to fierce medical opposition. It may have been the other way round for as homeopathy never acquired a distinctive character, it failed to become popular. The 1850s brought a rise in homeopathy's popularity, but mainly among patients who consulted German homeopathic practitioners, even inviting them to establish themselves in the Netherlands. Clemens von Bönninghausen at Münster was highly instrumental in furthering the homeopathic cause, especially in Rotterdam. The German homeopathic patient's societies may well have inspired the Rotterdam Champions to follow their example. However, it was only in 1886 that a national homeopathic society was founded and then the number of homeopathic practitioners started growing, albeit slowly. The Society for the Advancement of Homeopathy in the Netherlands was active on many fronts, raising funds for homeopathic training abroad, for a homeopathic hospital, and, at a local level, for a homeopathic practitioner's salary, persuading pharmacists to sell homeopathic medicines, and publicising homeopathy. They failed, however, to have a homeopathic chair instituted, a proposal opposed by both parliament and the medical faculties.

The very weakness of Dutch homeopathy might have been that it never stood apart as a clear alternative. It was permeated by a spirit of compromise, of fitting in, rather than of conflict with orthodox medicine. This might help to explain the weak response both on the part of those who practised it, and those it sought to reach as patients. It never became completely distinct from orthodox medicine and, indeed, even sought inroads into the universities and therapies of the 'allopaths'. Dutch homeopathy was neither 'radical', a real alternative, which incorporated self-help and a spirit of opposition to the old order of medicine; nor did homeopathy ever become fashionable and thus appeal to the wealthy. There were no uniting conflicts, no banner to stand behind. Dutch homeopathy was weakly opposed and weakly supported. Indeed, this seems to have been the fate of other medical newcomers as well, for sectarianism itself did not become an important factor in Dutch medicine.

## Notes

- 1 This paper is based partly on my earlier articles: 'Homeopathie in de negentiende eeuw: het Nederlandse debat,' in Willem de Blécourt, Willem Frijhoff, Marijke Gijswijt-Hofstra (eds.), *Grenzen van geneezing. Gezondheid, ziekte en genezen in Nederland, zestiende tot begin twintigste eeuw* (Hilversum, 1993), 273–310; 'Compromise, not Conflict. The Introduction of Homoeopathy into the Netherlands in the Nineteenth Century' in *Tractrix. Yearbook for the history of science, medicine, technology and mathematics* 5 (1993), 121–138.
- 2 Homöopathie-Archiv, A 367, Institut für Geschichte der Medizin der Robert Bosch Stiftung, Stuttgart.
- 3 At least, Schönfeld and Bleekrode were the only two homeopathic doctors of medicine who published on homeopathy in the 1830s.
- 4 H.E.M. de Lange is preparing a doctoral thesis on the history of homeopathy in the Netherlands, but his findings are not yet available.
- 5 Future research will be directed to the Dutch clientele of Belgian homeopathic practitioners who attracted also part of the Dutch demand for homeopathic treatment during the latter part of the nineteenth century. For example, the Belgian homeopathic practitioner Dr. Gustave van den Bergh (1837–1902) at Gent.
- 6 Samuel Hahnemann, *Organon der heilskunst* (Amsterdam, 1827). This was a translation of the third edition, from 1824, from Hahnemann's *Organon*. The first edition dates from 1810 and was called: *Organon der rationellen Heilkunde nach homöopathische Gesetze* (Dresden, 1810). The later editions, published after 1819, were called *Organon der Heilkunst*.
- 7 G.C.B. Suringar, *Bijdrage tot de kennis en de beoordeling van het homöopathische leerstelsel van Samuel Hahnemann* (Delft, 1827).
- 8 Samuel Hahnemann, *Zekerste geneeswijze en uitroeiing der Asiatische cholera* (Amsterdam, 1831).
- 9 Anon., *De homoeopathie, of Dr. Samuel Hahnemann's geneeswijze* (Dordrecht, 1833).
- 10 Samuel Hahnemann, *Geest der homöopathische genees-ler* (Winschoten, 1834).
- 11 C. Caspari, *De waarheid en voortreffelijkheid der homöopathische genees-ler* (Winschoten, 1835).
- 12 S. Bleekrode & J.F.P. Schönfeld, *Bijdragen tot de homoeopathie*, 1e stuk (Groningen, 1836).
- 13 A. Smith, *Bedenkingen tegen de homöopathie, beneevens eene beknopte schets dier leer* (Winschoten, 1834); B. Eekma, *De rationeel-empirische geneeswijze in de geneeskunst verdedigd tegen Dr.J.F.P. Schönfeld en De geest der homöopathische geneesleer van Dr.S. Hahnemann, getoetst naar rede en ervaring* (Groningen, 1836); and Friedrich Alexander Simon, *De geest der homoeopathie. Een woord van waarschuwing aan ieder, die op gezondheid en leven prijs stelt*; translation by J. Bosman Tresling (Groningen, 1836).

- 14 Eekma, *De rationeel-empirische geneeswijze*, 14.
- 15 *Homeopathisch maandblad* 37 (1926) bijblad 15-1, II-III; 15-2, VI. They were two sons of Schönfeld's, namely J.F.P. Schönfeld at Leek and K.D. Schönfeld at Bellingwolde, and his brother's sons, namely S. Schönfeld at Bentheim and J.C. Schönfeld at Finsterwolde.
- 16 This would be an area of fruitful research.
- 17 Anon., *Anti-homoeopathisch nieskruid bevattende: twee Aschdagpredikatiën van het gezond verstand en homoeopathisch allerlei* (Amsterdam, 1835).
- 18 K.H. Velle, 'De homeopathie in België in de 19de eeuw', *Geschiedenis der geneeskunde* (August 1994) 18-27, esp.19.
- 19 See H. Merckens, *Hahnemann en de homoeopathie* (The Hague, 1887), p. 34.
- 20 See their brochure Vereeniging van Voorstanders der Homoeopathie, *De homoeopathische geneeskunst. Populaire schets voor het niet geneeskundig publiek* (Rotterdam, 1858).
- 21 *De homoeopathie in de Nederlanden, en de nieuwe wetsontwerpen, regelende de uitoefening der geneeskunst en der artseneibereidkunst* (Utrecht, 1857).
- 22 See note 20.
- 23 See note 19.
- 24 See the *Krankenjournal* von Clemens von Bönninghausen, P1 - P116 (1835-1864), Institut für Geschichte der Medizin der Robert Bosch Stiftung, Stuttgart. See also Friedrich Kottwitz, *Bönninghausens Leben. Hahnemanns Liebblingsschüler* (Berg am Starnberger See, 1985). And further my 'Homoeopathy's early Dutch conquests: the Rotterdam clientele of Clemens von Bönninghausen in the 1840s and 1850s', *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences*, 51 (1996), 155-83.
- 25 See Eberhard Wolff, 'Le rôle du mouvement des non-médecins dans le développement de l'homéopathie en Allemagne' in Olivier Faure (ed.), *Praticiens, patients et militants de l'homéopathie aux XIXe et XXe siècles (1800-1940)* (Lyon, 1992), 197-230.
- 26 See note 15.
- 27 S.J. van Roijen, *Waarom ben ik homoiopaath geworden* (Rotterdam, 1858).
- 28 A.J. Gruber, F.W.O. Kallenbach and S.J. van Roijen, *De homoiopathische geneeswijze. Mededeelingen tot verspreiding van de kennis dezer methode* (Rotterdam, 1859-1861).
- 29 S.J. van Roijen, *Handboek voor den beschaafden stand en voor gezagvoerders van schepen tot behandeling der meest voorkomende ziekten volgens de homiopathische geneeswijze* (Rotterdam, 1861).
- 30 D. Soeterik, *Iets over de homoöpathie en hare uitoefenaren, voor niet geneeskundigen* (Dordrecht, 1858).
- 31 Before the Medical Act of 1865 the doctorate of medicine, thereafter the general practitioner (arts) examination.

- 32 See Melitta Schmideberg, *Geschichte der homöopathischen Bewegung in Ungarn* (Leipzig, 1929).
- 33 G.J. Teljer, *Experientia docet of ondervinding is de beste leermeester* (Utrecht, 1880).
- 34 See Gerrit van Vegchel, *Medici contra kwakzalvers. De strijd tegen niet-orthodoxe geneeswijzen in Nederland in de 19e en 20e eeuw* (Amsterdam, 1991).
- 35 C.A. Pekelharing, 'Homoeopathie', *Vragen des Tijds* 1 (1885), 145–178; 'Homoeopathie', *Maandblad tegen de Kwakzalverij* 5/2 (1885) [1–2].
- 36 H. Merckens, *Hahnemann en de homoeopathie* (The Hague, 1887).
- 37 N.A.J. Voorhoeve, *Is de homoeopathie kwakzalverij?* (The Hague, 1887).
- 38 H.H. Prins Wielandt, *De homoeopathie is wetenschappelijke dwaling en kwakzalverij* (The Hague, 1888).
- 39 B.J. Stokvis, *Voordrachten over homoeopathie* (Haarlem, 1888).
- 40 F.W.O. Kallenbach, *De aanval afgeslagen. Antwoord op de door H.H. Prins Wielandt en Dr. B.J. Stokvis tegen de homoeopathie gerichte brochures* (The Hague, 1888); [S.J. van Roijen], *Prof. B.J. Stokvis' voordrachten over homoeopathie beoordeeld* (The Hague, 1888); D.K. Munting Jr., *De vertegenwoordiging der homoeopathie in de Medische Faculteit te Budapest, en de 'Voordrachten Homoeopathie' van Professor Stokvis* (Zwolle, 1891).
- 41 *Nederlandsch Tijdschrift voor Geneeskunde* 32/II (1896), 949–950; 33/I (1897), 191–193 and 512–519.
- 42 J.I.A.B. van Roijen, *Waarom ik bedankt heb voor het Lidmaatschap van de Nederlandsche Maatschappij tot Bevordering der Geneeskunst* (Rotterdam, 1897).
- 43 'Een verblijdende beslissing', *Homoeopathisch Maandblad* 8 (1897), 153–154.
- 44 P.H. van Eden, *Homoeopathie en praktijk* (Groningen, 1899).
- 45 F.W.O. Kallenbach, *De brochure van P.H. van Eden 'homoeopathie en praktijk' besproken* (Zwolle, 1899).
- 46 In 1849 the number of inhabitants per qualified practitioner was 1256, in 1892 this number had risen to 2429. See: J.K. van der Korst, *Om lijf en leven. Gezondheidszorg en geneeskunst in Nederland circa 1200–1960* (Utrecht, 1988), p. 281.
- 47 However, since this paper was completed important work has been undertaken. See Martin Dinges (ed.), *Weltgeschichte der Homöopathie: Länder, Schulen, Heilkundige* (Munich, 1996).
- 48 See, for example, Harris L. Coulter, *Divided Legacy. The Conflict between Homoeopathy and the American Medical Association*, second edition (Richmond, California, 1982), p. 101; Olivier Faure, *Le débat autour de l'homéopathie en France 1830–1870. Evidences et arrière-plans* (Lyon, 1990), pp. 23–26; Phillip A. Nicholls, *Homoeopathy and the Medical Profession* (London, New York, Sydney, 1988), pp. 80–99; William G. Rothstein, *American Physicians in the Nineteenth Century. From Sects to Science* (Baltimore, London, 1972), pp. 158–159; Renate Wittern, 'Le

développement de l'homéopathie en Allemagne au XIXe siècle' in Olivier Faure (ed.), *Praticiens, patients et militants de l'homéopathie*, 33–58, esp. 38.

- 49 For example Schmideberg (n.30), *Geschichte der homöopathischen Bewegung in Ungarn*, X; see also: Ursula Miley and John V. Pickstone, 'Medical Botany Around 1850: American Medicine in Industrial Britain' in Roger Cooter (ed.), *Studies in the History of Alternative Medicine* (Houndmills, London, 1988), 139–154, esp. 148.
- 50 See for example Nicholls, *Homoeopathy and the Medical Profession*, pp. 165–192; Maurice Garden, 'L'histoire de l'homéopathie en France – 1830–1940' in Olivier Faure (ed.), *Praticiens, patients et militants de l'homéopathie*, 59–82, esp. 74–77.

