

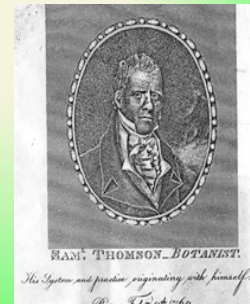
Samuel Thomson: Lessons from a Pioneer Herbalist

With Steven Horne, RH(AHG)

Part One: A Little History Lesson

"Samuel Thomson has probably contributed more to the science of herbology than any other individual in the history of the United States."

—Stan Malstrom, ND



The Thomsonian Movement

- Without any formal medical training, Samuel Thomson devised a system of healing in the early 1800s that swept frontier America like a storm
- It crossed the oceans to kindle a new botanical movement in England and other parts of Europe.
- It is estimated that by 1840 three to five million Americans had adopted the Thomsonian method of treating illness.
- The influence of Thomson can be seen in the works of Jethro Kloss, John Christopher and other herbalists who started the modern herbal movement

About Thomson

- Born in 1796
- Raised in the back country of New Hampshire
- Little chance for formal schooling, had a natural curiosity concerning plants
- Was taught by a local "wise woman," the widow Benton
- After a number of bad experiences with the "regular" doctors, Thomson began to treat his family with herbs and his own common sense
- His success attracted attention and soon friends and neighbors were asking him to assist them

Legal Troubles

- As his fame spread, he upset a local physician, Dr. French, who had Thomson arrested in 1809, by charging him with murdering one of his patients with lobelia
- Although Thomson was acquitted after a brief trial, he was forced to spend a month in a cold, filthy dungeon with a man convicted of assaulting a six-year old girl
- Legal actions like caused Thomson to consider his future carefully
- He settled upon an ingenious answer to his problems by visiting the patent office in 1813 and securing a patent on "Thomson's Improved System of Botanic Practice of Medicine"

Becoming a Thomsonian "Doctor"

- Armed with this patent on his herb formulas and methods, he appointed agents to publicize and promote his work
- "Family Rights" to use the Thomsonian medicines and system were sold for \$20
- Right-holders were able to purchase Thomson's herbs and formulas, which he distributed from a central warehouse, and received a copy of Thomson's book, *New Guide to Health or Botanic Family Physician*
- They were also organized into Friendly Botanical Societies

Thomson's Message

- Thomson believed that "every man could and ought to be his own doctor- intelligently responsible for his own health."
- By 1840 a hundred thousand patent rights had been sold throughout the nation
- Thomsonian medicine was also introduced to England by Albert Isaiah Coffin, where it enjoyed similar success
- Thomson's followers aligned with Jeffersonian democrats who felt that the four evils of society were: "king-craft, or priest-craft, lawyer-craft and doctor-craft"

Popular Health Movement

- Thomson inspired the Popular Health Movement, which by 1850, succeeded in wiping the medical licensing laws off the books in every state.
- As the *Story of Medicine in America* noted, Thomson "demonstrated to the satisfaction of many that the capacity of Americans to survive between 1630 and 1760 without a medical profession had not been an accident, that a separate class of medical men was a luxury incompatible with sound reasoning or democratic practice."
- This ushered in the era of "patent medicine"

Dr. Andrew Weil

It was a time of great experimentation in matters of health. There was a trend toward self-responsibility, summed up in the slogan "Every man his own doctor."...Resentment of regular doctors ran high, and with justification. Not only did they bleed and purge people to death, they tried to put out of business competitors who attempted to heal the sick with gentler methods.

[Health & Healing, p. 20-21](#)

Thomson's Legacy

- Thomson died in 1843
- He had resisted creating physicians, preferring the idea that every family would have its own doctor
- But after his death his followers created a class of physicians known as the neo-Thomsonians or Physio-Medical doctors
- This also had an influence on the Eclectic movement
- The influence of Thomson can still be seen in the writings of Jethro Koss (Back to Eden), John Christopher and many others

Thomson and Utah Herbalism

- The Mormon founder Joseph Smith believed in Thomson's system of herbal medicine and distrusted orthodox medicine, as did his successor Brigham Young
- Joseph's older brother Alvin had been killed by a dose of calomel
- Mormon pioneers brought Thomsonian botanical medicine to Utah and the Western states and relied on it as their primary method of healing (besides faith)
- Priddy Meeks was one of those early Mormon Thomsonian "doctors"

Joseph Smith's Teachings

- "And whosoever among you are sick, and have not faith to be healed, but believe, shall be nourished with all tenderness, with herbs and mild food..." (D&C 42:43)
- "It was according to the revelation that the sick should be nursed with herbs and mild food, and not by the hand of an enemy." (Alma A. Burton, *Discourses of the Prophet Joseph Smith*)
- "I preached to a large congregation at the stand, on the science and practice of medicine, desiring to persuade the saints to trust in God when sick, and not in an arm of flesh, and live by faith and not by medicine, or poison; and when they were sick, and had called for the Elders to pray for them, and they were not healed, to use herbs and mild food." (*History of the Church* 4:414)

Brigham Young's Teachings

- "Would you want doctors? Yes, to set bones. We should want a good surgeon for that, or to cut off a limb. Do you want doctors? For not much of anything else, let me tell you, only the traditions of the people lead them to think so, and here it is a growing evil in our midst. It will be so in a little time that not a woman in all Israel will dare to have a baby unless she can have a doctor by her..."
- "Let the sick do without eating; take a little something to cleanse the stomach, blood, bowels, and wait patiently, and let Nature have time to gain advantage over the disease."

Priddy Meeks

"It is stated that Joseph Smith said that Thomson was as much inspired to bring [forth] his principle of practice according to the dignity and importance of it, as he was to introduce the Gospel. Then we should look on [these] principles as an appendix to the gospel—as a temporal salvation. It was introduced nearly contemporary with the Gospel, even the Word of Wisdom and Thomsonianism [run] together and [strengthen] each other, instead of coming in collision with each other."

From the Journal of Priddy Meeks

Note: Priddy Meeks journal helped inspire John Christopher and the Utah herb movement

Part Two: Thomson's Ideas

Heat [Energy] is Life

"Possessing a body like other men, I was led to inquire into the nature of the component parts of what man is made. I found him composed of the four elements -- earth, water, air and fire. The earth and water, I found were the solids; the air and fire the fluids. The first two I found to be the component parts; the last two kept him in motion. Heat [energy], I found, was life; and cold [loss of energy], death."

—Samuel Thomson in *New Guide to Health*



The Energy Source

"I shall now describe the fuel which continues the fire, or life of man. This is contained in two things, food and medicines, which are in harmony with each other, often grow in the same field, to be used by the same people. People who are capable of raising their food, and preparing the same, may as easily learn to collect and prepare all their medicines and administer the same when it is needed. Our life depends on heat; food is the fuel that kindles and continues that heat. The digestive powers being correct, causes the food to consume; this continues the warmth of the body, by continually supporting the fire."

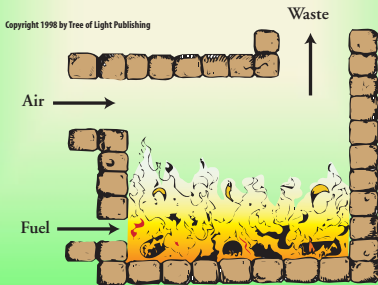
—Samuel Thomson in *New Guide to Health*

The Digestive "Fireplace"

"The stomach is the depository from which the whole body is supported. The heat is maintained in the stomach by consuming the food; and all the body and limbs receive their proportion of nourishment and heat from that source, as the whole room is warmed by the fuel which is consumed in the fireplace. The greater the quantity of wood consumed in the fireplace, the greater the heat in the room. So in the body; the more food, well digested, the more heat and support through the whole man."

—Samuel Thomson in *New Guide to Health*

The Body Furnace



Light is Life

- Edward Milo Millet, my first herb teacher, taught me that light is life
- All life energy comes from the light of the sun
- All disease is a lack of “light” on some level
- Light or energy (chi, prana, vital force, etc.) is the ultimate healer



The Beginnings of Illness

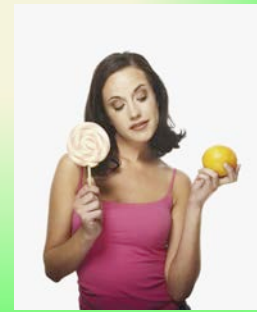
“By constantly receiving food into the stomach, which is sometimes not suitable for the best nourishment, the stomach becomes foul, so that the food is not well digested. This causes the body to lose its heat; then the appetite fails, the bones ache, and the man is sick in every part of the whole frame.”

—Samuel Thomson in *New Guide to Health*



Devitalized Food (and Herbs)

- Are foods (and herbal medicines) just suppliers of chemicals to the body or do they contain something more?
- As we refine and process foods and herbs do we lose something, thus making them denatured and devitalized?



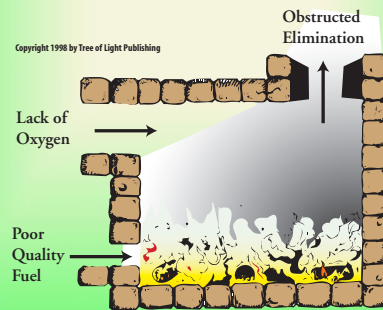
Disease Reduces Energy Production

“When disease invades the frame, it resists [the heat] in proportion to its force, till [the heat is] overpowered into submission, and when extinguished, death follows, and it ceases to operate alike in all. If then, heat is life and its extinction death, a diminution of this vital flame in every instance constitutes disease, and is an approximation to death.”

—Samuel Thomson in *New Guide to Health*



The Disease State



The Medicine We Need

- “This situation of the body shows the need of medicine, and the kind needed; which is such as will clear the stomach and bowels, and restore the digestive powers. When this is done, the food will raise the heat again, and nourish the whole man. All the art required to do this is, to know what medicine will do it, and how to administer it, as a person knows how to clear a stove and the pipe when clogged with soot, that the fire may burn free, and the whole room be warm as before.”

— Samuel Thomson in *New Guide to Health*

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— Samuel Thomson in *New Guide to Health*

Disease and Energy

“All...that medicine, can do in the expulsion of disorder, is to kindle up the decaying spark, and restore its energy till it glows in all its wonted vigor. If a direct administration can be made to produce this effect, and it can, it is evidently immaterial what is the name, or color of the disease... Names, are arbitrary things, the knowledge of a name is the cummin and annis, but in the knowledge of the origin of a malady, and its antidote, lies the weightier matters of this science. This knowledge makes the genuine physician; all without it is real quackery.”

— Samuel Thomson in *New Guide to Health*

Fever and Disease Symptoms

“I have found by experience, that the learned doctors are wrong in considering fever a disease or enemy; the fever is a friend, and cold the enemy. This I found by their practice in my family, until they had five times given them over to die.”

— Samuel Thomson in *New Guide to Health*



Cleansing and Disease

“Disease is nothing else but an attempt on the part of the body to rid itself of morbid matter.”

Thomas Sydenham, the English Hippocrates as quoted by Henry Bieler in *Food is Your Best Medicine*



Names of Disease

- “Following this line of thinking, the name of a disease is based upon a description...of the changes in the organs being used as emergency avenues of elimination.”

— Henry Bieler in *Food is Your Best Medicine*



Why?

- ...the people are kept ignorant of everything of importance in medicine, by its being kept in a dead language [Latin]

– From *New Guide to Health*



Diagnosis is Labeling

... “Diagnosis” has reference to the classification of disease according to received nosology [the classification of diseases]; that it means naming the affliction...[the doctors] travail in diagnosis until a suitable name is delivered. And then they consult their memory and books for recipes to throw at this name, which to them seems almost an entity.

It looks absurd when thus plainly stated, yet it is true to a far greater extent than the majority suppose...

From *Specific Diagnosis* by John M. Scutter, 1874

Prescribing at Names

The student would certainly think, from this teaching, that getting a name for a disease, was the first and principle object in medical practice...men pride themselves on their skill in naming diseases—calling it diagnosis.

What can be more natural than that medicines should be *prescribed at names*, when so much trouble is taken to affix them?

From *Specific Diagnosis* by Scutter

More on Diagnosis

Some go a little further than this...they also make their diagnosis extend far enough to guide their therapeutics. Thus they determine a condition of the stomach that indicates an emetic, constipated bowels a cathartic, dry skin a diaphoretic and scanty urine a diuretic.

...this is also crude at times...impaired secretion of the skin does not mean diaphoretics; for when most indicated they will not cause secretion...scanty urine does not mean diuretics, for they will frequently fail to influence the kidneys when they seem indicated...

From *Specific Diagnosis* by Scutter

Observing Health

Man has but one life, and it is the same in all parts. The normal manifestations of this life we call health; the abnormal manifestations of it disease. If we can always think of disease as a method of life, in a living body, we will have gotten rid of an old error...

Disease, then, is not an entity—something to be forcibly expelled from a living body—but is actually a method of life.

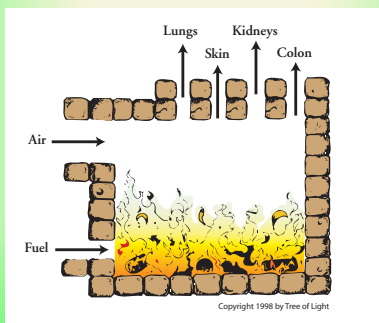
From *Specific Diagnosis* by Scutter

Most Diagnosis is Worthless

“Do you mean to say,” asks the reader, “that the present system of nosology is useless?” Yes, so far as curing the sick is concerned...Not only useless, but worthless—a curse to physician and patient—preventing the one from learning the healing art, and the other from getting well.

– From *Specific Diagnosis* by Scutter

A "Course" of Thomsonian Medicine



Thomson's #1: Lobelia

Th'Emetic number ONE's [lobelia] design'd
A gen'ral med'cine for mankind,
Of every country, clime, or place,
Wide as the circle of our race.

In every case, and state, and stage,
Whatever malady may rage;
For male or female, young or old,
Nor can its value half be told.

To use this med'cine do not cease,
Till you are helped of your disease;
For NATURE'S FRIEND, this sure will be,
When you are taken sick at sea.



Lobelia: Interesting Facts

- Lobelia was known to the Penobscot Indians and was widely used in New England long before the time of Samuel Thomson, who is credited with its discovery
- Thomson chewed on the lobelia plant as a young boy and it made him throw up. He gave it to his friends to make them throw up. One day after making a co-worker throw up the man felt much better, which gave Thomson the idea to use it as medicine
- Lobelia been called "the intelligent herb" because it seems to benefit many conditions

Actions of Lobelia

- Lobelia is a power antispasmodic (relaxes the muscles) that acts on the heart, lungs, digestive tract and skeletal muscles
- Large doses cause intense relaxation, nausea and profuse perspiration, and eventually induce vomiting
- Small doses are stimulating and allay nausea and vomiting

Lobelia Uses

- Respiratory effects: Relaxes bronchial spasms, eases spasmodic coughing and whooping cough, helps expel mucus from the lungs, can ease asthma attacks and ease pain in pleurisy
- Cardiovascular: Slows and strengthens the heartbeat, reducing tachycardia and blood pressure, eases angina, aids blood flow when used with capsicum
- Structural: Used topically and internally for muscle spasms, sore muscles and pain (especially when combined with capsicum)
- Also applied topically for insect bites, bruises, sprains

Alternatives for #1

- Blue vervain
 - A weaker action than lobelia, but a milder effect more suitable for children
- Boneset
 - Weaker than lobelia, but another good herb for colds and flu
- Chamomile
 - A mild relaxing nervine for young children



Thomson's #2 and #3

Let number TWO [capsicum or cayenne]
be used as bold,
To clear the stomach of the cold;
Next steep the coffee, number THREE
[herbal composition],
And keep as warm as you can be.

A hot stone at the feet now keep,
As well as inward warmth [capsicum] repeat,
The fountain 'bove the stream keep clear,
And perspiration will appear.

When sweat enough, as you suppose,
In spirit wash, and change your clothes;
Again to bed, both clean and white,
And sleep in comfort all the night.



Capsicum: Interesting Facts

- Introduced into U.S. herbalism by Samuel Thompson in about 1806 as an agent to move the blood (was Thomson's #2 medicine)
- Well used in all schools of medicine; great deal of documented clinical experience (much more reliable than clinical research).
- A favorite of Dr. John R. Christopher (1909-1983) who used capsicum and lobelia as catalysts in most of his formulas

Actions of Capsicum

- Stimulates blood flow throughout the body, helping to balance (normalize) blood flow to all parts of the body, has a beneficial effect on cardiovascular function
- Helps to induce perspiration by moving blood to the periphery of the body
- Helps to stop bleeding both internally and externally
- Can be useful for treating shock and stabilizing someone who is having a heart attack when applied to the tongue (while calling 911)
- Has an anti-inflammatory and analgesic effect

Alternatives to #2

- Ginger
 - A useful substitute for capsicum with beneficial effects on circulation, that also aids colds and flu
- Other Pungent (Spicy) Remedies
 - Mustard Powder
 - Horseradish
 - Garlic



#3 Herbal Composition

- Ingredients:
 - 4 parts bayberry root bark
 - 2 parts hemlock spruce bark or white pine bark
 - 1 part ginger
 - 1/2 part clove
 - 1/2 part capsicum (cayenne)
- Blend the above and make into a hot tea.
- Sip regularly when feeling ill until one feels better

Sweating

- One of Thomson's major goals was to raise a sweat
- He did this by placing a hot stone in a container under a person's chair
- The person was then wrapped in blankets to their neck
- Water was placed on the stone to create steam to sweat the person
- The therapy was continued until perspiration was flowing freely from the person's face

Traditional Approaches to Disease

“Traditional medicine treats fever and other diseases by opening and closing the peripheral ‘vents’ of the body—the sweat pores, sebaceous glands, and capillaries. It does not attempt to ‘kill microorganisms’ directly. Instead, it dooms these critters by changing the environment in which they live.”

“...the medical knowledge of traditional healers is treated with disdain, as if they had no capacity for dealing with acute viral or bacterial fevers before the advent of antibiotics.”

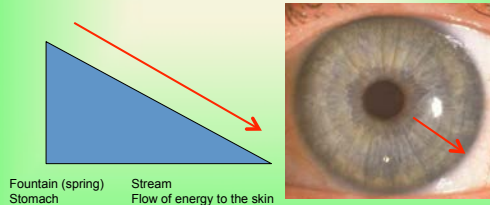
—Matthew Wood, RH (AHG)

Modern Alternatives

- Thomas Easley duplicated Thomson’s technique by using a hot plate with a pan of water on it under the chair
- One can also use a sauna or steam room
- The easiest way to do this, however, is with a sweat bath
 - While taking your herbs, get into a bath as hot as can be comfortably tolerated
 - Sit in the bath for 15-20 minutes adding hot water as necessary
 - Go to bed, pile on the blankets and raise a sweat

The Fountain and the Stream

- “The fountain above the stream keep clear...”
- Keep the internal heat (heat in the stomach) higher than the external heat (at the skin)



The Rectal “Injection”

- Thomson also used rectal “injections” or enemas using composition
- Alternatives to composition include:
 - Garlic
 - Catnip and Fennel
 - Herbal Crisis
 - Children’s Composition



Digestive Bitters

Should the disorder reinforce,
Then follow up the former course;
The second time I think will do,
The third to fail I seldom knew.

Now take your bitters by the way,
Two, three, or four times in a day;
Your appetite, if it be good,
You may eat any kind of food.

Physic [laxatives], I would by no means
choose

To have you first or last to use;
For if you take it much in course,
It will disorder reinforce.



Work on the Root Cause

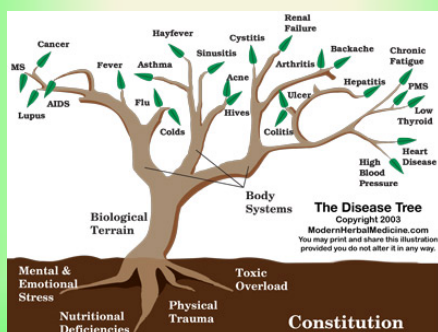
Let names of all disorders be
Like to the limbs, join'd on a tree;
Work on the root, and that subdued,
Then all the limbs will bow to you.

So as the body is the tree,
The limbs are colic, pleurisy,
Worms and gravel, gout and stone,
Remove the cause, and they are gone.

My system's founded on this truth,
Man's Air and Water, Fire and Earth,
And death is cold, and life is heat,
These temper'd well, your health's
complete.



The Disease Tree™



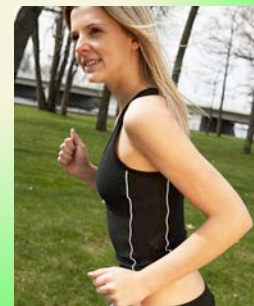
Treatment by Prevention

“That same thing that will prevent disease will cure it.”

– Samuel Thomson

“Remove the cause and the effect will cease.”

– Samuel Thomson



Other Ideas from Thomson



Tasting Herbs

“This practice of tasting herbs and roots has been of great advantage to me, as I have always been able to ascertain what is useful for any particular disease, by that means.”

“I was often told that I should poison myself by tasting every thing I saw; but I thought I ought to have as much knowledge as a beast, for they possess an instinct to discover what is good for food, and what is necessary for medicine.”

– Samuel Thomson



The Body's Sentinels

The sentinels of the internal structure, or those which are to judge of what is to be swallowed, begin with the eye; and if it be pleasant to the eye, it passes to the nose, the next sentinel; if the pass be right, that is, if the flavor be agreeable, it goes to the taste; where, if nothing disagreeable is perceived, it is carried from the tongue to the swallow...When the food is received into the stomach, it undergoes a general inspection. If anything treasonous, that is, uncongential to health, is found in it, an uneasiness is almost the immediate consequence, perhaps pain and sickness, and it is often sent back without consulting any of the guards or sentinels for its general orders.

– Samuel Thomson

Ignoring our Sentinels

“Nature has placed all the guards and sentinels in the body, which are necessary for its safety and protection, and the mind is so constituted, that it is capable of judging of all the signals which those sentinels give; but the devil, which is only another name for imposture and fraud, that is, learned ignorance, falsehood and art, are always at variance with simple and natural principles.... Here the devil, or false learning...comes in and upsets the whole system of plain simple truth, and [has] introduced his learned falsehood. [He] tells the people that those sentinels which nature has set in the body are all false; learning is the only true guide; and urges them to throw off all their natural ideas, and hear to learning, popular customs and fashions...”

– Samuel Thomson

Two Principles

- “ there are but two great principles in the constitution of things, whether applied to the mind or body; the principle of life and the principle of death. That which contains the principle of life, may be perverted, by a misapplication, into an administration of death...but nothing that is wholesome in any case, unless abused, can be even tortured into an administration of death. If, then, a medicine is good in any case, it is because it is agreeable to nature, or this principle of life, the very opposite of disease. If it is agreeable in one case, it must be absolutely so in all.”

– Samuel Thomson in *New Guide to Health*

Poisons as Medicine

- “Stop, reader, and reflect for a moment; and say to thyself, can any being be so destitute of common sense, except a learned fool, as to believe that the same practice that will kill a well hog would cure a sick man; or that that practice which will cure a sick man would kill a well rat? For example; when the doctor comes to cure a sick man, he bleeds him. When a butcher comes to kill a well hog, he bleeds him. When a farmer wishes to kill a well rat, he poisons him. When the doctor comes to cure a sick man, he poisons him.”

– Samuel Thomson in *New Guide to Health*

Botanical Medicine is Best!

...it is evident that the doctors believe the botanic practice to be the best in the world, as the following particulars will show.

1. They do not allow that any patients ought to die under the botanic practice. This is proof that they believe it is far preferable to their mineral practice.
2. When the dealers in physic can get no relief from their own poison practice, they will flee for refuge to the botanic practice.

– Samuel Thomson

The Myth of Medicine

“Really, there is no special medicine which is a specific (or remedy) for any chronic disease.”

– Henry Bieler in *Food is Your Best Medicine*



Health

- “[Health] is achieved by following the laws of nature; when you break them, illness results. Health is not bestowed upon you by a beneficent nature at birth; it is achieved and maintained only by active participation in well-defined rules of healthful living—rules you may be disregarding every day.”

– Henry Bieler in *Food is Your Best Medicine*

Returning to Common “Sense”

- *Were it possible for mankind to be brought back to his proper grade, that of other animals, and at the same time to exercise all of their natural faculties, and have their sentinels which have been knocked down by the doctor restored, so as to be as good as those of the beasts, so that the sentinel of the eye and nose would regulate their food and medicine, and prevent any poison being taken either by themselves or their children, for four generations, the people, I think, would improve in stature and vigor, and become “mighty men of renown;” such as we read of in olden times, before the poison doctors had destroyed the natural senses of the race; or at least, so perverted them that they cease to be subservient to their natural use.*

– Samuel Thomson

Food for Thought

But, on the contrary, should the hood-winking system be continued, and the people continue to degenerate, in every sense of the word, so far as their health and bodily functions are concerned, for four generations to come, as they have for two generations past, they will become more like a race of monkeys than like human beings.

– Samuel Thomson

Health

“...today a search for pure air, pure raw milk, pure water, natural, unprocessed, unpreserved foods, unsprayed vegetables, nourishing whole grain bread is too simple, too unpretentious to be extolled as a ‘new’ therapy in treating disease.”

– Henry Bieler in *Food is Your Best Medicine*



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Question and Answer

