

NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICAN HEALTH REFORMERS AND THE EARLY NATURE CURE MOVEMENT IN BRITAIN

by

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Interest is currently focused on healing systems lying outside the territory of conventional scientific medicine, but the boundary of orthodoxy is not always clear and shifting attitudes are reflected in changing preferences for labelling unorthodox medicine as “alternative”, “fringe”, or “complementary”. Unorthodox therapies, being defined purely by exclusion from orthodoxy, show great diversity but most claim to heal by the use of “natural” remedies, relying largely on the healing power of nature.¹ The “purest” example is perhaps nature cure or naturopathy, which became sufficiently coherent in Britain early in the present century to allow the formation of several associations under its banner.²

The founders of these societies held many views in common, which might be summarized as follows. Man in his natural state is healthy: disease results from disobedience to nature’s laws. Disobedience may involve wrong eating by selecting unnatural (e.g., refined, preserved, or chemically contaminated) foods, including flesh, or simply by over-eating. Disobedience also involves wrong living, e.g., taking insufficient exercise or fresh air, or using stimulants and poisons such as alcohol, tea, coffee, and tobacco, or using allopathic drugs, sera, and vaccines. Correct mental attitudes are equally important, the idea of obedience to nature implying a moral, if not religious, obligation to strive towards perfect health. This perfection implies a wholeness of the individual achieved by harmony between the physical, mental, and spiritual being. Disease is not a foreign entity invading the body as an enemy that must be defeated and suppressed. Rather, the symptoms of an “illness” are the body’s attempts to throw off impurities and hence are to be encouraged. If symptoms are suppressed by allopathic medicines, the impurities seek another outlet and acute illness becomes chronic. Impurities may derive from unnatural food or drink, or failure of normal elimination by the skin, kidneys, or bowels, or the generation of impurities by wrong function such as fermentation or constipation in the bowel. Germs are commonly the result rather than the cause of illness, flourishing only in already damaged tissues. Disease can only be radically cured by “natural” remedies, which

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¹ A useful guide to this complex topic is Stephen Fulder, *The handbook of complementary medicine*, Sevenoaks, Hodder & Stoughton, 1984.

² British Nature Cure Association, founded 1906; Nature Cure Association of Great Britain and Ireland, 1920; Society of British Naturopaths, about 1928; British Association of Naturopaths, 1929; and others. For dates of founding see references quoted in note 3 below.

may include fasting, dieting, hydropathy, and perhaps manipulation, followed by a return to natural living to maintain health.³

Many influences impinging on the early nature cure movement in Britain helped to formulate or consolidate the principles outlined above, much being inherited from the beliefs and practices characterised in the mid-nineteenth century as “physical puritanism”.⁴ For example, the hydropathic tradition as it survived at the end of the nineteenth century, together with more recent input from the European nature cure movement, supplied many of the British naturopaths’ concepts. Ideas from America were also highly influential and the aim of the present paper is to discuss this influence, exerted both by the writings of Americans and by American health reformers who came to live in Britain. It will be suggested that, by the end of the century, contributions from these varied sources had built up a tradition of natural healing in Britain that laid the basis for the subsequent nature cure movement.

TRANS-ATLANTIC INTERCHANGE

Fringe medicine generally in Britain was greatly influenced throughout the nineteenth century by ideas and individuals arriving from America, where the intellectual climate around the 1840s allowed the “reforming” medical sects to flourish.⁵ Medical herbalism, for example, was totally reshaped in Britain under the influence of the Thomsonian system brought from America by A. I. Coffin.⁶ The natural healing tradition that was to produce the naturopathic movement in Britain was also invigorated by ideas crossing the Atlantic: the founders of the American health reform movement, such as Sylvester Graham and William Alcott,⁷ were influential through their writings, and a subsequent generation of reformers brought their ideas to Britain in person.

Interchange across the Atlantic of ideas concerning health and natural healing was, however, not simply a one-way flow towards Britain. America attracted those interested in social experiment and the search for Utopia; and the radical or frankly millenarian ideas that were exchanged frequently included equally radical and

³ This summary of views is based on publications such as the following: ‘Proclamation of the British Nature Cure Association’, *Nature Cure*, 1906, 1(4): 10–11; Edgar J. Saxon (Secretary, Nature Cure Assoc. of G. B.), ‘Nature cure: what it means’, *Food reformers’ year book and health seekers’ guide*, 1922: 7–10; James C. Thomson (Pres., Soc. British Naturopaths), *An introduction to nature cure*, London, C. W. Daniel, 1916; A. Johnson Dronsfield (Secr., Brit. Assoc. Naturopaths), ‘What is natural healing?’, *Health Practitioners’ Journal*, 1935, 1: 82–83 (and 39, for date of founding of society).

⁴ For stimulating discussion of the fringe medical activities understood as constituting “physical puritanism”, and particularly their association with radical social reformers, see J. F. C. Harrison, ‘Early Victorian radicals and the medical fringe’, in W. F. Bynum and Roy Porter (editors), *Medical fringe and medical orthodoxy, 1750–1850*, London, Croom Helm, 1987, pp. 198–215.

⁵ R. H. Shryock, *The development of modern medicine*, Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1936, reprinted 1979, pp. 261–262. John B. Blake, ‘Health reform’. in E. S. Gaustad (editor), *The rise of adventism*, New York, Harper & Row, 1974, pp. 30–49.

⁶ P. S. Brown, ‘The vicissitudes of herbalism in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Britain’, *Med. Hist.*, 1985, 29: 71–92. For discussion of “Coffinism” as an example of the American influence on popular medicine in Britain, see John V. Pickstone, ‘Medical botany’, *Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society Memoirs*, 1976–7, 119: 85–95.

⁷ See James C. Whorton, *Crusaders for fitness*, Princeton University Press, 1982.

optimistic concepts about health.⁸ The British contribution towards American health reform should therefore be considered briefly before concentrating exclusively on the American influence in Britain.

Vegetarianism and temperance were important ingredients of health reform, and an influential early vegetarian in America was the English-born Rev. William Metcalfe, who sailed for Philadelphia with fellow Bible Christians in 1817. He was subsequently involved with Sylvester Graham and William Alcott in forming the American Vegetarian Society, editing its first journal and succeeding Alcott as president.⁹ William Cowherd, who had founded the Bible Christian Church in Salford, preached total abstinence from intoxicating drink and animal food so that “the noble image of the Deity” would not be “shamefully defiled with brutalities”.¹⁰ Both Cowherd and James Scholefield, another Bible Christian pastor, also provided medical treatment for the poor,¹¹ an interest that typified those who carried their teaching to America. William Metcalfe studied homoeopathy and graduated MD in 1852, though medical practice never seems to have become a major part of his activities.¹² The Bible Christian most in sympathy with the ideas that came to be associated with naturopathy was, however, Henry Stephen Clubb who had been involved with the Concordium at Ham Common and at one time edited the *Vegetarian Messenger*. He settled in America in 1853 and founded a vegetarian settlement in conjunction with a water-cure physician.¹³

A rather different, but certainly influential, British visitor to America was George Combe, who arrived there in 1838 and stayed for nearly two years. Although his main platform was phrenology, his *Constitution of man* (1828) had much wider terms of reference and many of his ideas, which did not depend on the validity of phrenology, accorded well with fundamental attitudes of health reform. Combe had written optimistically that “No faculty is bad, but, on the contrary each, when properly gratified, is a fountain of pleasure”, and concluded that “the organised system of man, in itself, admits of a healthy existence from infancy to old age, provided its germ has been healthy, and its subsequent condition has been uniformly in harmony with the physical and organic laws . . .”.¹⁴ In America, his lectures were reported as well received, but he is more likely to have been influential through his widely circulated

⁸ See J. F. C. Harrison, *Robert Owen and the Owenites in Britain and America*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969; and W. H. G. Armytage, *Heavens below*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961.

⁹ Joseph Metcalfe, *A memoir of the author*, in William Metcalfe, *Out of the clouds: into the light*, Philadelphia, Lippincott, 1872, pp. 17, 33–34, 37–38.

¹⁰ William Cowherd, *Facts authentic, in science and religion*, Salford, Academy Press, 1818, pp. 9–17. See also Charles Higham, ‘The Bible Christian Church’, *New Church Magazine*, 1913, 32: 17–22, 71–76, 110–115; and Peter J. Lineham, *Restoring man’s creative power*, in W. J. Shiels (editor), *The Church and healing*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1982, pp. 249–270.

¹¹ Charles Hulbert, *Memoirs of seventy years of an eventful life*, Shrewsbury, [the author], 1852, p. 155. Mary D. Stocks, *Doctor Scholefield*, Manchester, Sherratt & Hughes, 1936, pp. 6–7.

¹² Joseph Metcalfe, op. cit., note 9 above, p. 36.

¹³ Higham, op. cit., note 10 above, pp. 110–115. Lineham, op. cit., note 10 above. Charles W. Forward, *Fifty years of food reform*, London, Ideal Publishing Co., 1898, pp. 56–57. Madeleine B. Stern, *Heads and headlines*, Norman, University of Oklahoma Press, 1971, pp. 173–175. Clubb also edited Sylvester Graham’s *The philosophy of sacred history*, London, Horsell & Caudwell, 1859.

¹⁴ George Combe, *The constitution of man considered in relation to external objects*, Edinburgh, John Anderson, 1828, pp. viii, 94, 125.

Constitution of man.¹⁵ Its relevance to health reform is attested by Sylvester Graham's admission that he had been accused of borrowing from this volume and, although Graham claimed never to have read it, he admitted that the book had "probably done more than any other one, to excite a popular interest on the subject of physical education".¹⁶

A British group concerned with nature and health, whose members exchanged visits with America and were receptive to the ideas of the American health reformers, was that which collected around James Pierrepont Greaves at Ham Common, Surrey, later forming the Concordium. Greaves had worked with Pestalozzi and was interested in the educational work of Bronson Alcott in America, the school at Ham being named Alcott House. Although attracting the attention of some Owenites, Greaves considered socialism as merely "physically useful" and saw man's needs also as spiritual and divine.¹⁷ He advocated daily cold showers and bathing preferably in spring water and sometimes in the open air; avoidance of alcohol and flesh foods in favour of uncooked fruit, vegetables, and nuts; discarding tight clothing, and avoiding both crowded cities and luxurious surroundings. These hygienic measures were much like those of many health reformers, but Greaves' explanation of their merits was couched in mystic language.¹⁸

Bronson Alcott, a cousin of William Alcott, with whom he shared views on temperate and healthy vegetarian living, visited the English Alcott House in 1842. Greaves had recently died, but he met Henry Gardner Wright who was responsible for the school, and Charles Lane, another leading disciple of Greaves.¹⁹ They edited the *Healthian*, a journal devoted to "human physiology, diet and regimen", which enthused over the work of Sylvester Graham and applauded hydropathy before Claridge's book was published in England.²⁰ The journal contained much material in the "lofty spiritual" language of Greaves, but a biographer of Alcott found this a ludicrous contrast with its thoroughly materialistic preoccupation with "food, viscera, teeth, drinks, drugs, and baths".²¹ But Alcott emphasized the physical as well as the spiritual in a talk given shortly before his return to America. While seeing disease as originating in the soul, he believed that a pure life could recover the original pure constitution and, on the physical side, claimed that "Fruit, pulse, and grain grown on

¹⁵ 'Notice of Mr. Combe's progress in America', *Phrenological Journal*, 1839, new series, 2: 317-331. Nahum Capen, *Reminiscences of Dr. Spurzheim and George Combe*, New York, Fowler & Wells, 1881, pp. 131-138. Harriett Martineau, *Biographical sketches, 1852-1868*, 2nd ed., London, Macmillan, 1869, pp. 265-277.

¹⁶ Sylvester Graham, *Lectures on the science of human life*, Boston, Marsh, Capen, Lyon & Webb, 1839, vol. 1, pp. viii-ix. Combe himself commented favourably on Mrs Gove's lectures and Dr John Bell's *Journal of Health*; see George Combe, *Notes on the United States of North America*, Edinburgh, Maclachlan & Stewart, 1841, vol. 2, pp. 56-57, 261; vol. 3, p. 206.

¹⁷ James Pierrepont Greaves, *Letters and extracts from MS writings*, Ham Common, The Concordium, 1843, vol. 1, p. 26; vol. 2, pp. 49-88; and memoir of Greaves by A. Campbell prefacing these letters. See also G. J. Holyoake, *The history of co-operation*, London, T. Fisher Unwin, revised 1908, pp. 152-153; Armytage, *op. cit.*, note 8 above, pp. 171-183; Harrison, *op. cit.*, note 8 above, pp. 127-130.

¹⁸ Greaves, *op. cit.*, note 17 above, vol. 1, p. 206; vol. 2, pp. 80-81.

¹⁹ F. B. Sanborn, *Bronson Alcott at Alcott House, England, and Fruitlands, New England (1842-1844)*, Cedar Rapids, Iowa, Torch Press, 1908.

²⁰ *Healthian*, 1842, 1: 23, 33, 53.

²¹ Odell Shepard, *Pedlar's progress*, London, Williams & Norgate, 1938, pp. 335-336.

the unadulterated soil, and water from the fountain, contain the elements for the physical restoration of man to the state of original purity".²²

Lane and Wright accompanied Alcott when he returned to America in 1842. After hours of earnest discussion, Lane purchased land for the community of Fruitlands, where he and Alcott decided that they would eat only food grown above ground by the work of their hands, no animals being exploited for their labour or their flesh, and that they would bathe in cold water only.²³ Wright was a member of the community at first but then went his own way and was associated with Mary Gove, later wife of T. L. Nichols and a prominent exponent of hydropathy and health reform. She acknowledged Wright as supplying her with practical details of the water-cure;²⁴ and Blake describes her association with Wright as also stimulating her radical views on sexual morality.²⁵ Lane came to differ from Alcott in believing that the individual family group should be submerged in the communal family and, disillusioned with Fruitlands, moved for some months to a Shaker community.²⁶

Wright returned to England but died soon afterwards: Lane returned later and, surprisingly, married.²⁷ He subsequently wrote a book on dietetics and health, which contained the familiar message that disease was not an arbitrary visitation but that man had a sacred duty to maintain health by reforming his physiological habits.²⁸ The *New Age* succeeded the *Healthian* as the journal of the Concordium, its scope including the "whole human physiology, especially the highly interesting subjects of Mesmerism and Phrenology", as well as the "employment of the people on the land".²⁹ It described the hardy life at the Concordium, with baths and exercise after rising at 5.30 am, the disciplined hours of labour, simple dress and strict vegetarian diet: a later entry amended the time of rising to 4.30 am and noted that it was hoped soon to dispense entirely with cooked food.³⁰ The Concordium lasted until 1848 and in many respects anticipated the attitudes later adopted by the British nature cure movement.³¹

While Anglo-American contact was made by these exchanges and visits, the works of the American health reformers could also be read in Britain. Bronson Alcott found books by Graham and William Alcott in the library at Alcott House, and material from the *Graham Journal* was reprinted in the *Healthian*, where a reviewer concluded that "There is, perhaps, no character more needed at present than the Graham of

²² *Healthian*, 1842, 1: 87–88.

²³ R. L. Rusk, (editor), *Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1939, vol. 3, pp. 96–97. R. L. Muncy, *Sex and marriage in Utopian communities*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1973, pp. 88–92.

²⁴ Mary S. Gove Nichols, *Experience in water-cure*, New York, Fowler & Wells, 1849, p. 29. T. L. Nichols, *Nichols' manual of health*, London, E. W. Allen, 1887, p. 28. Another English influence was James Gully's *Water cure in chronic disease*, identified as an early and important source for American hydropaths by H. B. Weiss and H. R. Kemble, *The great American water-cure craze*, Trenton N. J., Past Time Press, 1967, p. 20.

²⁵ John B. Blake, 'Mary Gove Nichols, Prophetess of health', *Proc. Amer. Philosoph. Soc.*, 1962, 106: 219–234.

²⁶ Charles Lane, 'Brook Farm', *Dial*, 1844, 4: 351–357. Armytage, op. cit., note 8 above, pp. 182–183.

²⁷ Muncy, op. cit., note 23 above.

²⁸ Charles Lane, *Dietetics*, London, Whittaker, 1849, pp. 5–6, 21–22.

²⁹ *New Age*, 1843/44, 1: 1.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 15–16, 253–254.

³¹ Armytage, op. cit., note 8 above, p. 183. For later parallels see, for example, *Nature Cure*, 1906, 1(4): 10–11.

England".³² The *New Age* also reprinted some of Graham's lectures and announced the English publication of his *Lectures to young men on chastity*, copies of which could be obtained from the Concordium. Long quotations from William Alcott's *Vegetable diet defended* also appeared, and the valedictory message in the final issue advised readers to continue their perusal of works by Graham and Alcott.³³ Other journals also kept these authors in view. The *Vegetarian Advocate* in 1848 advertised Graham's books and, in 1879, works by Graham and Alcott were still obtainable from the Vegetarian Society.³⁴ Further readers, including the hydropaths, would have been reached by the *Journal of Health*, published in England with Ralph Grindrod as editor in 1851: it contained articles on diet, sleep, tea, coffee, tight-lacing, and breadmaking by Graham or Alcott, and one on the value of judicious fasting by Joel Shew.³⁵

By the mid-nineteenth century, the pioneering American health reformers were known in Britain and their ideas were helping to build up the tradition that would eventually give rise to naturopathy. Then, in the 1860s, their message was brought in a more substantial form by a generation of health reformers who sailed from America to settle permanently in Britain.

MARY AND THOMAS NICHOLS

Thomas Low Nichols and Mary Gove Nichols, who had both been prominent in American health reform,³⁶ arrived in Britain in 1861. Mary, the daughter of a free-thinker, had suffered an unhappy marriage to a Quaker named Gove, subsequently becoming a champion of women's rights and, at one time, an advocate of "free love". While running a girls' school, she became interested by the ideas of Sylvester Graham and satisfied an increasing appetite for medical knowledge by borrowing textbooks. Self-taught, but aided by well-disposed medical men, she pleaded the rights of women to formal medical education, sure that they were peculiarly suitable and that women ought to be offered the choice of a woman doctor.³⁷ She was a pioneer lecturer on anatomy and physiology to women in Boston and, encouraged to use water treatment in fevers by reading John Mason Good, became increasingly interested in hydropathy.³⁸

Thomas Nichols, when a medical student, attended lectures by Sylvester Graham, whose influence he was subsequently keen to acknowledge.³⁹ Nichols deserted medicine for journalism, but later returned to marry the recently divorced Mary Gove and complete the qualification of MD (New York) in 1850. They opened a hydropathic

³² Sanborn, op. cit., note 19 above, p. 18. *Healthian*, 1843, 1: 53, 94.

³³ *New Age*, 1843/44, 1: 128, 150–151, 297–300, 332.

³⁴ *Vegetarian Advocate*, 1848, 1: advertisements. *Dietetic Reformer*, 1879, 3rd series, 6: cover advertisements; see also 178–179.

³⁵ *Journal of Health*, 1851, new series, 1: 170–172, 187–196, 206–213.

³⁶ Blake, op. cit., note 25 above. T. L. Nichols, op. cit., note 24 above. Stephen Nissenbaum, *Sex, diet, and debility in Jacksonian America*, Westport, Conn., Greenwood Press, 1980, pp.158–170. Some of the Nichols's activities in Britain have been discussed by Bernard Aspinwall, *Social Catholicism and health*, in Shiels, op. cit., note 10 above, pp. 249–270.

³⁷ Mary Nichols, op. cit., note 24 above, p. 17.

³⁸ Mary S. Gove, *Lectures to women on anatomy and physiology*, New York, Harper Bros., 1846, pp. iii–iv.

³⁹ [Nichols'] *Herald of Health*, 1875, 1: 25–26. T. L. Nichols, 'Sylvester Graham', *Food Reform Magazine*, 1883, 3: 1–5.

centre near New York, declaring themselves “philanthropists, earnestly devoted to the improvement of man; teaching the laws of health, as the basis of all reforms, and interested in Social Science”.⁴⁰ Subsequently, their search for Utopia led them first to Modern Times and then into forming their own short-lived community of Nemnonia.⁴¹ In 1856, they were attracted to spiritualism and, in 1858, became Roman Catholics. Finding difficulty in returning to the medical practice they had left for life in communities and appalled by the civil war, they sailed to Britain as “refugees from the North and the South”,⁴² and to some extent from their outspokenly radical past. Mary was already over fifty and Thomas five years younger.

Thomas was anxious to exchange medical practice for “the more congenial pursuit of education, literature, and social science”,⁴³ and on arrival in Britain, the Nicholsees needed to earn a living by their pens. Thomas became London correspondent for the *New York Times*, also writing for several periodicals and *Chambers' Encyclopedia*. He wrote *Forty years of American life* and an account of the psychical phenomena associated with the Davenportes.⁴⁴ Mary wrote articles for Dickens's *All the year round*, and the *Athenaeum*, and produced a new version of her *Experience in water cure*.⁴⁵ According to a biographical note, it was not until 1870 that Thomas “saw his way to recommence his work for health”.⁴⁶ By then settled in Malvern, he rewrote his *Esoteric anthropology*, which had been published in America. The English version suppressed much of the more radical views on sexual morality (which Thomas had shared with his wife) so that an author, referring to this edition, could quote Nichols as “a representative of the most extreme sort of Sexual Respectability”.⁴⁷ Nonetheless, the judge in the Pimlico case called it “a very unpleasant book”, and the new version still declared that “a true marriage may be what the law calls adultery, while the real adultery is an unloving marriage”.⁴⁸

Nichols also produced a journal: the first attempt⁴⁹ did not prosper but, with James Salisbury in 1875, he started the *Herald of Health*, which he edited until handing over to Charles Forward in 1886.⁵⁰ But Nichols' most important new work was his *Human physiology*, an expansion of his proposition that “the Law of Life for man is written in his organisation”. Its emphasis was on man in society, a theme that occupied both its opening and closing sections. In between were sections on physiology, the function of generation, sexual morality, and one on health and disease, with suitable emphasis on

⁴⁰ T. L. Nichols, op. cit., note 24 above, pp. 90, 97.

⁴¹ Weiss and Kemble, op. cit., note 24 above, pp. 76–78.

⁴² Thomas L. Nichols, *Forty years of American life*, London, J. Maxwell, 1864, p. 1.

⁴³ T. L. Nichols, *Esoteric anthropology*, rev. ed., London, [the author], 1873, p. iv.

⁴⁴ T. L. Nichols, op. cit., note 24 above, p. 104. Nichols, op. cit., note 42 above. T. L. Nichols, *A biography of the Brothers Davenport*, London, Saunders & Otley, 1864.

⁴⁵ Mary S. Gove Nichols, *A woman's work in water cure and sanitary education*, London, Longman, Green, 1868.

⁴⁶ ‘Dr Nichols’, *Food Reform Magazine*, 1884, 3: 65–68.

⁴⁷ P. T. Cominos, ‘Late Victorian sexual respectability and the social system’, *Int. Rev. soc. Hist.*, 1963, 8: 18–48.

⁴⁸ ‘A judge's libel’, *Herald of Health*, 1886 (May): 54–55. Nichols, op. cit., note 43 above, p. 96. See also T. L. Nichols, *Human physiology*, London, William Reeves, 1872, p. 300, for deprecatory remarks on “free love”.

⁴⁹ Nichols' *Journal of Sanitary and Social Science*, 1873, 1: 9–10.

⁵⁰ Forward, op. cit., note 13 above, pp. 45, 92. The *Herald of Health* also advertised Nichols' books, hydropathic apparatus, and a wheat-meal preparation called Food of Health, all of which were sold at his Hygienic Institute, near the British Museum.

the former. Nichols saw no discontinuity between the laws governing the harmonious integration of human physiological function and those governing the organization of a just and harmonious society. Still keenly interested by experiments in social reform, he accorded “some success” to Robert Owen but concluded that Josiah Warren’s liberty was “only the right to do right”: for full success, he now believed, a community required religious motivation. Deploring the exploitation of the working classes and the gross social disparities in Britain, he advocated state ownership of basic resources. But his formula for action was a paternalistic lead by the aristocracy and enlightened industrialists with the formation of communities similar to the phalansteries of Charles Fourier.⁵¹

In all his writings, Nichols expounded a well-formulated philosophy in which can be traced the elements subsequently identifiable in naturopathy. Health was enjoyed by the individual “perfect in his own nature, body and soul, perfect in their harmonious adaptations, and living in perfect harmony with nature, with his fellow-man, and with God”.⁵² Health was the natural condition, so that men living in a state of nature were strong and had few diseases.⁵³ But man was at war with nature and with himself, poisoning the air he breathed and the food he ate, corrupting himself by his vices and violating nature’s laws. Hence he suffered diseases. But most, being self-inflicted, were “clearly, readily, and easily preventable”; and life being “the talent committed to our care”, individual responsibility for preserving health became “a high moral and religious duty”.⁵⁴

The symptoms of an illness, for Nichols, represented the “efforts of nature to rid us of disease”, fever, for example, being “a general and somewhat violent effort of the system to free itself from the matter of disease”. And, he believed, whenever the vital force was sufficient, nature would succeed: but she could be aided by natural means such as hydropathy and, in acute illness, fasting.⁵⁵ Health could be maintained by hygienic measures, including the moderate intake of a vegetarian diet containing vegetable fibre and fruit juices, and avoidance of alcohol, tea, and coffee, and of any but the most modestly sugared or salted food. But physical measures alone were insufficient: man’s spiritual and social needs must be satisfied.⁵⁶ Allopathic medicines were mainly poisons, causing rather than curing disease; and the medical profession had “an unfortunate interest in the popular ignorance of sanitary laws”.⁵⁷

Human physiology expounded general principles, but Nichols also gave practical advice. An idealist and reformer, he could not retreat into purely literary work: social concern compelled him into “writing, editing, publishing, lecturing, inventing foods, baths, etc., and doing all I have been able to do to promote general and individual sanitary reform”.⁵⁸ The most practical of his aims was to advocate a simple vegetarian

⁵¹ Nichols (1872), op. cit., note 48 above, especially pp. 408–410, 414–418, 428–429.

⁵² Nichols, op. cit., note 43 above, pp. 142–146.

⁵³ *Herald of Health Almanac*, 1877: 3. *Herald of Health*, 1875 (Dec): 87.

⁵⁴ Nichols, op. cit., note 51 above, pp. 9–10, 321–327, 344.

⁵⁵ Nichols, op. cit., note 43 above, pp. 191, 193, 230. Nichols, op. cit., note 51 above, pp. 388–393.

⁵⁶ Nichols, op. cit., note 43 above, pp. 156–161. Nichols, op. cit., note 51 above, pp. 328–341.

⁵⁷ Nichols, op. cit., note 51 above, pp. III, 368, 370. The medical profession naturally disapproved of Nichols; see, for example, a splendidly patronizing review in *Lancet*, 1873, i: 134–135.

⁵⁸ T. L. Nichols, *The diet cure*, London, Nichols & Co., 1877, p. 86.

diet, which he outlined in *How to live on sixpence a-day*, and which he promised would ensure strength without any need of medicine: and advice on its preparation was contained in his *How to cook*.⁵⁹

Nichols also spread his ideas by lecturing around the country and speaking at meetings of societies with which he was involved, e.g., the newly-formed London Dietetic Reform Society in 1875, the Vegetarian Society, and the International Anti-vaccination Conference in Paris. And he lectured for the London (later National) Food Reform Society of which he was a vice-president.⁶⁰ Writing and lecturing were more to his taste than medical practice, and he greatly preferred “that people should study his books and be their own physicians”.⁶¹ But, not surprisingly, Nichols appeared as a consulting physician to James Ellis’s hydropathic establishment, founded for the benefit of the poor.⁶²

Charles Forward considered Nichols disappointing as a speaker but was sure that he had “done as much or more with his pen than any other man, for the cause of Food Reform”.⁶³ The accuracy of this assessment is supported by the terms in which Nichols was mentioned in British hygienic literature. In their booklet on drugless healing, E. and B. May included Nichols in a group of “heroes”, in company with Priessnitz, Kneipp, and Trall.⁶⁴ The phrenologist and hydropath, R. B. D. Wells, ranked Nichols as an author whose books had been “a blessing to many thousands”, as well as recommending his *Food of Health*.⁶⁵ David Younger, the mesmerist and herbalist, founder of the General Council of Safe Medicine, applauded Nichols as the foremost effective worker for food reform, while Jonathan Nicholson also quoted Nichols.⁶⁶ And, as a final example, Eustace Miles, tennis champion and influential health reformer, wrote approvingly both of his food preparations and his books.⁶⁷

Thomas Nichols seems to have added significantly to the tradition that underpinned the subsequent nature cure movement in Britain. Mary Nichols also contributed by her writings and, despite illness, continued to do so until near her death in 1884. The Nicholsons held spiritualist seances, and in her later years, Mary believed increasingly in the gift of healing by personal magnetism.⁶⁸ Their ideas and teachings

⁵⁹ T. L. Nichols, *How to live on sixpence a-day*, London, Longman, Green, Reader & Dyer, 1871, p. 37; and *How to cook*, London, Co-operative Sanitary Society, 1872. In 1879, Nichols was associated with James Salisbury in opening the Alpha Food Reform Restaurant, see *Herald of Health*, 1879 (Feb): 165; and *Food Reform Magazine*, 1884, 3: 65–68.

⁶⁰ See for example, *Dietetic Reformer*, 1879, 3rd series, 6: 82. *Herald of Health*, 1875, 1: 25–26; *ibid.*, 1879 (Feb): 166; *ibid.*, 1879 (Apr): 43. *Food Reform Magazine*, 1883, 1: 23–24, and cover advertisements. *Vaccination Inquirer*, 1881, 3: 11.

⁶¹ Nichols, *op. cit.*, note 43 above, end pages.

⁶² Richard Metcalfe, *The rise and progress of hydropathy in England and Scotland*, London, Simkin, Marshall, Hamilton & Kent, 1906, pp. 50–57.

⁶³ C. W. Forward, ‘On Dr. T. Nichols’, *Herald of Health*, 1886 (Nov): 124–125.

⁶⁴ E. and B. May, *Mays’ practical methods*, London, F. Pitman, 1897, p. 4.

⁶⁵ R. B. D. Wells, *Complete works on health and food*, London, H. Vickers, [n.d.], preface and p. 160. Nichols’ writings were also enthusiastically reviewed in *Human Nature*, 1873, 7: 49–57; and 1874, 8: 500–502.

⁶⁶ D. Younger, *The magnetic and botanic family physician*, London, E. W. Allen, 1887, pp. 520–521. *Vitality and Health Culture* (J. Nicholson), 1902, 1(2): 3–5.

⁶⁷ Eustace H. Miles, *Muscle, brain, and diet*, London, Swan Sonnenschein, 1901, pp. 107, 111, 113.

⁶⁸ T. L. Nichols, *op. cit.*, note 24 above, pp. 108–114. *Human Nature*, 1869, 3: 381–383. Forward, *op. cit.*, note 63 above.

had been largely formulated in America, the emphasis in Britain shifting away from hydropathy and towards food reform.

The next American missionaries to be considered, who arrived soon after the Nicholsons, were again a husband and wife team already well established in the American health reform movement. Their emphasis was on phrenology but they also contributed to the tradition that was to characterize the local nature cure movement.

LORENZO AND LYDIA FOWLER AND THE PRACTICAL PHRENOLOGISTS

Lorenzo Niles Fowler and Lydia Folger Fowler visited Britain to lecture in 1860, returning to settle here in 1863, he in his early fifties and she eleven years younger.⁶⁹ Lorenzo and his brother Orson had been training for the Christian ministry when they switched their interest to phrenology in mid-1830s. They were so active in publicizing this topic from their office in New York that it was said “their names came to be almost synonymous with phrenology”. But their sympathies with ideas of natural healing also allied them to numerous health reformers including Sylvester Graham. Lorenzo was a founding vice-president of the American Hydropathic Society and lectured at Russell Trall’s Hydropathic (later Hygieo-Therapeutic) School. Lydia accompanied her husband on lecture tours, giving afternoon talks to women on anatomy, physiology, and hygiene. She then obtained formal qualifications from the (Eclectic) Medical College in Syracuse, probably the second woman in America to receive the MD. She joined the College’s teaching staff for a year, and later taught at Trall’s Hygieo-Therapeutic School. In Britain, she continued to advocate hygienic medicine in lectures to women, and a biographer recorded Lydia as active for temperance and as a visitor for the City Temple Church until her death in 1879.⁷⁰ Lorenzo lived until 1896, coming to dominate phrenology in Britain and playing a major part in the appearance of a new body of “practical phrenologists” whose advocacy of hygienic principles was important in sustaining and disseminating ideas that later formed the basis of naturopathy.

The sympathy of the Fowler brothers with such ideas can be judged from Orson’s *Physiology, animal and mental*, which opened with the holistic advice that man “must be known not by sections, but as a UNIT”. Health, he claimed, could be obtained by obeying easily understood natural laws, and to obtain it was a moral duty. For this purpose, Fowler advocated an abstemious vegetarian diet, guided by the unperverted appetite, together with the usual hygienic observances. The process of disease he saw as “much less complex than generally supposed” and, should it occur, nature had supplied all the necessary medicine in the form of food, though fasting was indicated in acute illness. Nature was the great physician whose cures, unlike those attempted with poisonous medicines, fortified rather than undermined the constitution: and hydropathy was particularly efficacious because the skin was “the great sluice-way for

⁶⁹ For the Fowlers in America, see Frederick C. Waite, ‘Dr. Lydia Folger Fowler’, *Ann. med. Hist.*, 1932, new series, 4: 290–297. Weiss and Kemble, op. cit., note 24 above, pp. 26–27, 36, 38. Stern, op. cit., note 13 above.

⁷⁰ Lydia F. Fowler, *Woman, her destiny and maternal relations*, London, W. Tweedie, 1864; *The diseases of children*, London, W. Tweedie, 1864, pp. 8, 20. Waite, op. cit., note 69 above.

the egress of excrementitious matter".⁷¹ In this volume, Fowler did not emphasize the curative function of acute illness though he explained the discharges associated with a cold as carrying off the corruption retained by closing the pores of the skin. But elsewhere he wrote that "Fevers are a curative process".⁷² Against a background of similar ideas, Lorenzo's lectures in Britain "united physiology to phrenology" on the basis that health required harmony between the bodily functions and the faculties of the mind.⁷³

By the 1860s when the Fowlers arrived, phrenology in Britain seemed to have suffered a major decline after the intellectual excitement surrounding it early in the century. Alfred Wallace dated the decline from around 1845 and thought it partly due to ignorant itinerant lecturers; and John Epps admitted in 1858 that phrenology had lost ground in England, but he saw it still as a leaven permeating all branches of morality and intellectualism.⁷⁴ When Fowler arrived, he discovered few whom he considered active and competent phrenologists in England, frequently being greeted by the comment that "I thought phrenology was dead".⁷⁵ Certainly, the allure of phrenology to middle-class intellectuals had declined but, at the same time, it had attracted considerable working-class interest.⁷⁶ This popularization was seen as debasing the subject, but it was one of the factors that allowed the emergence in this country of a substantial body of "practical phrenologists" who read heads for a fee and advised the customer accordingly. By 1891, Jessie Coates wrote of the prospect for phrenology as brighter than at any time in the previous twenty years. Practical phrenologists were uniting to raise their status, an unofficial register of practitioners listing fifty-four on mainland Britain in 1891, a figure rising to 100 at the end of the century.⁷⁷ By 1896, Stackpool O'Dell was claiming that phrenology was as much a profession as medicine or the law.⁷⁸

Lorenzo Fowler played an important part in the new manifestations of phrenology. His early lecture tours stimulated the formation of phrenological societies in various towns: by 1867, however, those at Manchester and Bristol were struggling, though others, such as the Bradford Phrenological and Physiological Society, still flourished.⁷⁹ In 1880, Fowler started publishing the *Phrenological Magazine*, as well as other

⁷¹ O. S. Fowler, *Physiology, animal and mental: applied to the preservation and restoration of health of body, and power of mind*, New York, Fowler & Wells, 1847, pp. iii, vi, 25–28, 38–50, 57, 179–198, 267–272, 311–312.

⁷² O. S. Fowler, *Science of life*, London, Fowler Institute, 1875, p. 997.

⁷³ For examples of the Fowlers' lecture programme see *Human Nature*, 1867, 1: 461, 527, end pages; 1868, 2: 109, 571; 1871, 5: 47. L. N. Fowler, 'Phrenology in England', *Phrenological Magazine*, 1880, 1: 5–7; *How to live*, London, W. Tweedie, [n.d.], p. 4.

⁷⁴ Alfred Russell Wallace, *The wonderful century*, London, Swan Sonnenschein, 1898, pp. 179–181. John Epps, letter quoted in Stern, op. cit., note 13 above, p. 180.

⁷⁵ Fowler (1880), op. cit., note 73 above.

⁷⁶ See Angus MacLaren, 'Phrenology: medium and message', *J. mod. Hist.*, 1974, 46: 86–97. Historical interest in phrenology has centred on the first half of the nineteenth century, and the resulting literature has been reviewed by R. J. Cooter, 'Phrenology: the provocation of progress', *Hist. Sci.*, 1976, 14: 211–234. At that time, Cooter noted that the phrenology of the late-nineteenth century had been neglected by historians, but later approached the subject himself in Roger Cooter, *The cultural meaning of popular science*, Cambridge University Press, 1984, especially pp. 256–271.

⁷⁷ Jessie Coates, 'The present outlook', *Phrenological Annual*, 1891: 11–14, also 63–66; 1899: 77–82. See also the enthusiasm of J. P. Blackford, *British Phrenological Year Book*, 1896: 5.

⁷⁸ Stackpool E. O'Dell, 'Phrenology as a profession', *Popular Phrenologist*, 1896, 1: 54.

⁷⁹ *Human Nature*, 1867, 1: 61–63.

hygienic literature. A further crop of new local societies followed, for example in Birmingham (1883) and Nottingham (1885), and there was talk of a society for London where previous attempts had lacked sufficient support.⁸⁰ Finally, the British Phrenological Association was founded in London in 1886 with Fowler as its president.⁸¹ His personal standing continued to increase so that, in 1894, Charles Forward wrote of him as “Phrenology’s grand old man”, while J. Millott Severn ranked him as coming “next to the Combes” and living “to be regarded as the Father of Phrenology”.⁸²

The attitudes of Lorenzo Fowler and the practical phrenologists differed sharply from those of the earlier philosophical phrenologists; and these attitudes had already characterized the Fowlers in America. The reviewer of one of their books for the Edinburgh *Phrenological Journal* in 1839 noted the contrast of styles, commenting that “Messrs Fowler appear to make a trade of Phrenology” and that “Had this been an English publication, it would have been unhesitatingly set down as the work of empirics of some talent and more pretention”.⁸³ Davies suggests that George Combe had not bothered to visit the Fowlers, and they received the briefest of mention in his account of America.⁸⁴ A few British phrenologists towards the end of the century may have reflected the attitudes of earlier years, but most were literally practitioners in the new style. James Burns ascribed to the Fowlers “the merit of reducing the science to a more practical form” and described Lorenzo in 1867 as doing a great “business” in phrenological examinations. Fowler used the same operative word in describing the only notable London phrenologist he found on his arrival as one who did a moderate “business”. Burns continued his description of Fowler with the comment that he was “not very philosophical, radical, or eloquent”, but that he was a most useful man who had “conferred much happiness and eternal benefit upon thousands who have listened to his homely teachings”.⁸⁵ In this role of teacher of hygienic principles and through the individual contacts of practice, the later phrenologists helped to sustain the tradition that was to continue through into naturopathy.

It is not surprising that those attracted to phrenology were often attracted also to the group of ideas that have been identified in naturopathy. Both systems offered an understanding of human nature, in terms of behaviour or physiology, on a simple and apparently logical basis, satisfying both to those seeking simplicity in principle and those not formally educated into abstruse ways of thought. Both were optimistic and claimed to be useful: phrenological insight could guide the individual and help society understand its constituent members, while nature cure also offered physical and mental

⁸⁰ *Phrenological Magazine*, 1886, new series, 2: 217–218, 300–301, 321–322. J. Millott Severn, *The life story and experiences of a phrenologist*, Brighton, [the author], 1929, pp. 106–107. *Human Nature*, 1875, 9: 142; 1876, 10: 573–574.

⁸¹ ‘The new departure’, *Phrenological Magazine*, 1886, new series, 2: 397–398. ‘The new Phrenological Association’, *ibid.*, 403–412. See also J. F. Hubert, ‘History of the British Phrenological Association’, *British Phrenological Year Book*, 1896: 69–75.

⁸² C. W. Forward, ‘Phrenology’s grand old man’, *Merry-go-Round*, 1894, 1: 123–125. Severn, *op. cit.*, note 80 above, pp. 104–105.

⁸³ *Phrenological Journal*, 1839, 12: 96–97.

⁸⁴ John D. Davies, *Phrenology. Fad and science*, New Haven, Conn., Yale University Press, 1955, pp. 46–64.

⁸⁵ *Human Nature*, 1867, 1: 51–52. Fowler (1880), *op. cit.*, note 73 above.

salvation to the individual as well as guidelines for perfecting society.⁸⁶ The influential Fowler had a place in both movements, so the same sympathies occurred naturally among his associates. The most striking example of the coincidence of interests is that of Alfred T. Story, who was the first secretary of the British Phrenological Association and later a founding vice-president of the British Nature Cure Association.⁸⁷

Story was a prolific writer with a particular interest in education, and a holistic approach which ensured that his writings on the development of mental powers were interspersed with naturopathic advice on temperance, exercise, vegetarianism, bathing, and the avoidance of tobacco, tea, coffee, and any but the most moderate use of salt. He commended Sylvester Graham particularly for stressing the importance of diet rather than medicines as the key to health, and his desire to simplify life and to live nearer to nature was reflected in his appreciative essay on Thoreau's *Walden*.⁸⁸ And Story's social concern was expressed in his *Martyrdom of labour* (1899) which was enthusiastic for the co-operative movement and advocated non-violent social evolution through the "alchemy of education".⁸⁹

Another early associate of Fowler, acknowledged by twentieth-century naturopaths, was James Burns. He had been agent for the Fowlers' initial lecture tour and called himself a practical phrenologist, but his wide interests (as displayed on the title-page of his journal, *Human Nature*) included spiritualism, physiology, the laws of health, and sociology.⁹⁰ His journal reprinted material by Russell Trall and attacked both vaccination and the "absurd vagaries" of the upper classes, to which "we attribute the degradation, impoverishment, ignorance and wretchedness of the people".⁹¹ Burns chaired an organizing committee for a proposed temperance and hygienic hospital and college in London, to provide facilities for the poor. Here nature would be allowed to do her work of clearing the system of impurities without the use of alcohol or poisonous drugs.⁹² The project does not seem to have prospered, but it is not surprising that Burns was acknowledged by the British Nature Cure Association though he had died ten years before its formation: he was described as the "Late prominent Naturopathic Evangelist".⁹³

⁸⁶ For the association of phrenology with medical dissent and self-healing in the second half of the nineteenth century, see Cooter (1976), op. cit., note 76 above, pp. 265–267.

⁸⁷ *Phrenological Magazine*, 1886, new series, 2: 403–412; 1887, 3: 169. *Nature Cure*, 1907, 2(5): 13. 'Our portrait gallery. Alfred Thomas Story', *ibid.*, 1907, 2(6): 49.

⁸⁸ A. T. Story, *How to make a man*, London, L. N. Fowler, 1907, pp. 59–88; *How to control and strengthen the mind*, London, L. N. Fowler, 1907, pp. 103–148; *Books that are the hearts of men*, London, A. C. Fifield, 1906, pp. 138–154.

⁸⁹ A. T. Story, *The martyrdom of labour*, London, George Redway, 1899, pp. 7–8, 190–191, 236–253.

⁹⁰ For a study of Burns in the context of spiritualism, see Logie Barrow, *Independent spirits*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986, pp. 101–104, 135–139, 193–195. Barrow identifies Burns as an important "plebeian spiritualist", and argues that spiritualists "seem virtually always to have seen themselves as very much part of a broad medical heterodoxy", see *ibid.*, pp. 227–228.

⁹¹ John Melville, 'James Burns (1835–1894)', *British Phrenological Year Book*, 1896: 141. *Human Nature*, 1867, 1: 173–176, 386–389, 632–634.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 1868, 2: 52–54. The project may have been associated with James Ellis's successful attempt to set up a hydropathic sanatorium for the working people of London, see Metcalfe, op. cit., note 62 above, pp. 50–57.

⁹³ *Nature Cure Annual*, 1907–8: legend to photograph of Burns. 'Our portrait gallery. James Burns', *Nature Cure*, 1907, 2(5): 15–18.

While most phrenologists embraced hygienic principles, some health reformers reciprocated with qualified approval of the principles of phrenology (T. L. Nichols, for example⁹⁴). The hygienic physician, T. R. Allinson, lent support by speaking at a phrenological centenary celebration and writing in the phrenological literature.⁹⁵ And phrenology was discussed in the *Scottish Health Reformer*, a pioneering naturopathic journal, where John A. Gray expressed approval of its use in the right hands — such as those of John Millott Severn and James Coates.⁹⁶ Severn, who edited the *Popular Phrenologist* and served a term as president of the British Phrenological Association, had worked as a miner and as a joiner before receiving his phrenological education in London by attending evening and weekend lectures by Stackpool E. O'Dell. The enthusiasts who attended these lectures also formed the Social and Political Reform Association, whose visiting lecturers included William Morris, Sidney Webb, and Mrs Besant. Severn recommended hydropathy and hygienic measures broadly similar to those of the naturopaths, but was not strictly vegetarian.⁹⁷

James Coates, the other phrenologist approved by Gray, was born in Belfast but learned his phrenology in America. He went to sea as a purser and, after complex adventures in the American Civil War, settled as a furniture warehouseman in New York where he later became a phrenologist. Returning to Britain, he practised first in Liverpool and later in Glasgow.⁹⁸ He and his wife, Jessie, described themselves as registered professional phrenologists and hygienic practitioners and became well established, James editing the *Phrenological Annual* and writing “Health Notes” for the *Popular Phrenologist*.⁹⁹ Like Severn's, his hygienic advice was similar to that of the naturopaths in general terms but not in some details. His particular emphasis was on the power of mind, and he was a practising hypnotist and an advocate of conscious suggestion and auto-suggestion.¹⁰⁰

Many instances could be quoted of British phrenologists promoting the ideas that subsequently characterized the nature cure movement. Perhaps the best example with which to end is R. B. D. Wells of Scarborough, the practical phrenologist, hygienic practitioner and hydropath, whose writings probably contain the fullest exposition of these ideas by any late-nineteenth-century British phrenologist. In the now familiar phrases, Wells attacked the “poisonous and dangerous system” of drug medication, explaining that orthodox practitioners failed because they believed that disease was something to be “killed” by poisonous drugs. In truth, disease was “a remedial struggle” and “a friend in disguise”. Illness arose from violation of the laws of health, which were “comparatively few and simple, so that most persons are capable of understanding and practising them”. If nature needed aid when illness occurred, the hygienic physician used only remedial agents “normally related to living structures”: these included air, light, exercise, bathing, diet, rest, sleep, temperature, electricity, animal magnetism, manipulation, and other agents “that will purify, tone up and

⁹⁴ Nichols, op. cit., note 43 above, p. 70.

⁹⁵ Severn, op. cit., note 80 above, pp. 212–214. T. R. Allinson, ‘The influence of food upon character’, *Phrenological Annual and Register*, 1898: 64–67.

⁹⁶ John A. R. Gray, ‘Phrenology and pathology’, *Scottish Health Reformer*, 1903, 1: 99–100.

⁹⁷ Severn, op. cit., note 80 above, pp. 99–107, 282, 451–459.

⁹⁸ ‘Sketch of James Coates’, *British Phrenological Year Book*, 1897: 21–24.

⁹⁹ James Coates, ‘Health notes’, *Popular Phrenologist*, 1896, 1: 15 *et seq.*

¹⁰⁰ James Coates, *Self-help*, London, Mental Science Series Publishing Co., 2nd ed., 1892, pp. 17–21; *Self-reliance*, London, L. N. Fowler, 1907, pp. 7–10, 159–162, 224–265, 280–283.

invigorate the system". But illness need not occur if due regard is paid to natural law, and, with the optimism characteristic of nature cure philosophy, Wells believed that "a bright and happy prospect — a real millenium is opening up in view of the possibilities of human improvement and advancement by attending strictly to the laws of Hygiene".¹⁰¹

EMMET AND HELEN DENSMORE, AND SOME LATER COMERS

Another of the "heroes" listed in *May's practical methods*¹⁰² was Emmet Densmore, MD (New York), who arrived in Britain shortly before 1890 with his wife, Dr Helen Densmore. They had worked in New York for ten years but had come to Britain to retire from medical practice and devote themselves and their journal, called *Natural Food*, to the cause of "Health and the Higher Life".¹⁰³ They made an immediate impact on the world of food reform because Densmore had come to consider cereals to be "unnatural and disease-inducing foods". They were to be replaced by fruit and nuts and, in some instances, even by flesh foods. Such a retreat from his previous vegetarianism was attacked vigorously by the purists.¹⁰⁴

These dietetic theories were set against the familiar health reform principles. Health was man's birthright, and incurable disease was not in accordance with the nature of a loving God.¹⁰⁵ Helen Densmore saw sickness as due to disobedience to physiological laws, an incorrect diet being the most frequent violation. It followed that most disease was avoidable and even that sickness was related to diet as drunkenness was to drink.¹⁰⁶ Orthodox physicians were wrong in seeing disease as "an organised enemy" at war with the vital powers, and misguided in hurling the "shot and shell" of their heroic medication at the invisible enemy. In reality, illness was "an unflinching and friendly expression on the part of the system of an effort to rid itself of conditions and substances inimical to health".¹⁰⁷

The Densmores' treatment of acute illness usually started with fasting, which they classed "among the greatest discoveries in therapeutics", and continued with various applications of water. Maintaining health required the usual hygienic measures and conservation of the vital force, which could be squandered by chronic lack of sleep, the use of alcohol, tobacco, or poisonous drugs, and indulgence of the passions.¹⁰⁸ Following the familiar pattern of ideas thus far, the Densmores showed some ambivalence over drugs, believing that Trall had overdone the exclusion of all such

¹⁰¹ R. B. D. Wells, *Good health and how to secure it*, London, H. Vickers, [n.d.], throughout but especially pp. 7–17, 30, 35, 38–43, 80–81, 169, 375–381.

¹⁰² May, op. cit., note 64 above.

¹⁰³ *Natural Food*, 1891, 1(4): 6. Emmet Densmore, letter, *ibid.*, 1892, 2: 104.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, preamble to each issue. C. W. Forward, 'Why I object to the Densmore regimen', *Hygienic Review*, 1893, new series, 2: 92–101, 206–216; see also 130–133.

¹⁰⁵ E. Densmore, *How nature cures*, London, Swan Sonnenschein, 1892, p.x. Helen Densmore, 'The gospel of health', *Natural Food*, 1892, 2: 128–130.

¹⁰⁶ Helen Densmore, 'A word about colds — la grippe', *Natural Food*, 1891, 1(4): 1–2.

¹⁰⁷ E. Densmore, op. cit., note 105 above, pp. 7, 9–13.

¹⁰⁸ Helen Densmore, 'The value of fasting', *Natural Food*, 1891, 1(2): 3–4. E. Densmore, op. cit., note 105 above, pp. 21–34, 57–158.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 183–188.

therapy. But, they claimed, “when people live in healthy situations, and in accordance with the laws of hygiene, no medicines are needed”.¹⁰⁹

Densmore did not cut himself off irrevocably from America: writing on the open-air treatment of consumption in 1899, he implied that he was seeing patients both in Britain and New York; and, in an introduction to Hudson Tuttle’s *Arcana of nature* in 1908, Densmore used New York addresses.¹¹⁰ But his influence on the British nature cure movement was acknowledged. Watson Macgregor Reid, the moving spirit of the British Nature Cure Association, described himself as an erstwhile pupil of Dr Densmore: and when Reid’s journal, *Nature Cure*, was being revived in 1927, an advertisement claimed that it had been founded in 1900 by Densmore.¹¹¹ Richard Haynel, a naturalized German hygienist practising in Surrey and appearing in the British Nature Cure Association’s “portrait gallery”, quoted extensively from Densmore’s *How nature cures*, “a well-known and most valuable book”.¹¹² Densmore’s book was also among those recommended by James C. Thomson, founding president of the Society of British Naturopaths.¹¹³

Other eminent American health reformers paid brief visits to Britain earlier in the nineteenth century and should be mentioned. Russell Trall was warmly received by the Vegetarian Society in 1862, when it was resolved to reissue some of his writings in this country.¹¹⁴ His work probably added to the current of health reform in Britain, though T. R. Allinson claimed to have completed his *System of hygienic medicine* before he “came across” Trall’s *Hygienic practice*.¹¹⁵ Another visitor was Dio Lewis, advocate of temperance, musical gymnastics, and opportunities for women, who stayed briefly in London in 1872. His system of gymnastics had, however, been ably taught in this country by Moses Coit Tyler, who arrived from America in 1863 and stayed for three years.¹¹⁶

Finally must be mentioned Bernarr Macfadden, a long-term visitor to Britain, who first arrived in 1898 on a tour to promote an apparatus designed to aid exercising.¹¹⁷ Although preaching the whole gospel of health reform, Macfadden’s emphasis was overwhelmingly on physical culture, and his showmanship set him apart from the general run of health reformers.¹¹⁸ His impact on this country was mainly in the early-twentieth century, at which time the influence of J. H. Kellogg was also felt when Alfred B. Olsen and M. Ellsworth Olsen arrived in Britain, where they edited *Good Health* and organized Good Health Leagues, a branch of Battle Creek Sanatorium

¹¹⁰ E. Densmore, *Consumption and chronic disease*, London, Swan Sonnenschein, 1899. H. Tuttle, *Arcana of nature*, London, Swan Sonnenschein, 1908, preface by Densmore.

¹¹¹ Advertisement, *Nature Cure*, 1909, 4(1): end pages. Advertisement, *Universalist*, May 1927: front cover.

¹¹² Richard Haynel, *The health guide*, Worthing, [the author, n.d.], pp. 8–10. ‘Portrait gallery. Richard Haynel’, *Nature Cure*, 1909, 4: 332–337.

¹¹³ James C. Thomson, *An introduction to nature cure*, 5th ed., London, C. W. Daniel, 1930, p. 143.

¹¹⁴ *Dietetic Reformer*, 1862, 5: 97–108. *Human Nature*, 1868, 2: 41.

¹¹⁵ T. R. Allinson, *A system of hygienic medicine*, London, F. Pitman, 1886, p. 88 note C.

¹¹⁶ Mary F. Eastman, *The biography of Dio Lewis*, New York, Fowler & Wells, 1891, pp. 82–86, 129. *Human Nature*, 1872, 6: 379. Howard Mumford Jones, *The life of Moses Coit Tyler*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1933, pp. 90–115.

¹¹⁷ C. Fulton Oursler, *The true story of Bernarr Macfadden*, New York, Lewis Copeland, 1929, pp. 97, 202–204.

¹¹⁸ Mary Macfadden, *Dumb-bells and carrot strips*, London, Gollanz, 1956.

being opened in Surrey.¹¹⁹ American missionaries continued to arrive in the early decades of the century and, although this further wave of American influence is beyond the scope of this present paper, a few details will be quoted to support the contention that American-trained naturopaths were important in the formation of our early naturopathic societies.

Among these influential arrivals was the Scottish-born James C. Thomson, who had moved in his youth to the United States, where he received naturopathic training and where he became superintendent of Lindlahr's Nature-Cure Sanatorium in Chicago. He returned to Britain to become the founding president of the Society of British Naturopaths and, in 1913, to set up the Edinburgh School of Natural Therapeutics.¹²⁰ V. Stanley Davidson, who established the Davidson School of Natural Therapeutics in Newcastle upon Tyne in 1928, had also been a staff physician at Lindlahr's sanatorium: he was a fellow and ardent supporter of the British Association of Naturopaths.¹²¹ Perhaps best known, however, was Stanley Lief, of Russian birth but South African upbringing, who obtained naturopathic qualifications in Chicago and arrived in Britain in 1914 at the age of twenty-three.¹²² He first took over the Health Home at Orchard Leigh, Chesham, which had been abandoned by Macfadden, but later set up the establishment at Champneys, which was to become widely known.¹²³ He was the influential editor of *Health for All*, in which he printed articles by American naturopaths and, in 1932, he became president of the Nature Cure Association of Great Britain and Ireland.¹²⁴

DISCUSSION

This account of the American health reformers who moved to Britain in the nineteenth century has focused attention on the similarity of their ideas to those expressed by the naturopathic societies founded in Britain early in the present century. To explain this similarity, it has been suggested that the American missionaries exerted a lasting influence by contributing to a local tradition that laid the basis for the subsequent naturopathic movement. Such an argument implies that it is possible to identify a distinctive collection of beliefs and attitudes which characterized both the naturopaths and their nineteenth-century forerunners. The main problem with this suggestion is that several of the naturopaths' ideas could equally well have been found in a great variety of sources, ranging widely from classical medical texts on the one hand to popular advice manuals on the other. And there have always been orthodox physicians well aware of the healing power of nature and the limitations of drug therapy.

¹¹⁹ 'The Good Health movement', *Good Health*, 1902, 1: 10–12, 153; 1904, 3: 53, 192.

¹²⁰ Edgar J. Saxon, 'The making of a nature cure physician', *Food Reformers' Year Book*, 1923: 19–21. 'Society of British Naturopaths', *ibid.*, 1928: 105.

¹²¹ V. Stanley Davidson, *Nature Cure*, London, Thorsons, 1936, pp. 157–159. Extracts from Henry Lindlahr's *Philosophy of natural therapeutics* were published in *Health Practitioners Journal*, 1935, 1: 101–103, 135–137, 152–154, to explain naturopathy to other fringe practitioners who were uniting for self-protection against threatened legislation.

¹²² *The Times*, 5 July 1933, p. 4a; 6 July 1933, p. 4a.

¹²³ *Food Reformers' Year Book*, 1920: 20. *Health for All*, 1927–8, 1: 68, 70, cover advertisements.

¹²⁴ For examples of articles by American naturopaths, see *ibid.*, 1928–9, 2: 16–17, 91–92, 125–126, 174–178. 'Nature Cure Association notes and news', *ibid.*, 1932–3, 6: 44–46.

The recognition of a distinctive naturopathic philosophy depends upon viewing its contents as an integrated whole, and upon seeing it in its social context. While medical orthodoxy might approve of a few naturopathic ideas in isolation, there existed a distinctive package of many interrelated beliefs which were accepted as a logically consistent system by the naturopaths and by their forerunners, and which recurred regularly in the same combination and relationship in different contexts. The elements of this package have been mentioned repeatedly, but a basic one was the rejection of orthodox medical views of the nature of disease and of the consequent requirements of therapy. From this rejection of theory followed what was probably the crucial distinction both of the naturopaths and of the American health reformers who came to Britain, namely that they were aware of themselves as, and frankly declared themselves to be, a group clearly separated from the orthodox practitioners. And, as well as differing on medical theory, they differed also in their view of society.

A good illustration of how their world differed from that of the regular practitioners is provided by the observation that all the health reformers mentioned as moving to Britain in the nineteenth century were husband-and-wife teams: the wives were actively involved with their husbands in teaching or practice. This was true of the Nicholsons, the Fowlers, the Densmores, and the Coateses; but it was not true of the regular practitioners in Britain. The contrast reflects a social distinction resulting from a difference in beliefs and attitudes, and was reflected again in the struggle to exclude women from orthodox medical education. The professionalism of the regular practitioner established his special skill as knowledge apart from everyday life, distancing the man in his consulting room from his wife in their home. Naturopathy and nineteenth-century health reform, in contrast, did not mark off a special esoteric knowledge of healing by complex pharmacological means, surrounded by Latin jargon and applied from a position of assumed superiority. Rather, they sought to heal through the everyday processes of eating, bathing, and exercising, and through the regulation of attitudes to work and social intercourse. The whole of life's activities were involved and the home was of particular importance. From such a position, it was logical to accept women on an equal footing to men. The feminist attitudes of Lydia Fowler and Mary Gove have been mentioned, and Emmet Densmore also attacked existing sexual inequalities.¹²⁵

On attitudes to professionalism, however, there was an interesting contrast among the health reformers. Nichols and the Densmores, on the one hand, wished to give up medical practice in favour of spreading the gospel of hygiene: Fowler and the practical phrenologists, on the other hand, built up limited but definite "practices", with addresses where clients could be examined and advised. The former attitude is the one characteristic of naturopathy in which individuals are taught to take responsibility for their own health and the role of the "doctor" is diminished. This self-effacing tendency of the pure naturopath provides a further reason why the phrenologists may have been

¹²⁵ Emmet Densmore, *Sex equality*, London, Swan Sonnenschein, 1907.

of particular importance in sustaining the naturopathic tradition. Their premises and client-contact provided a base from which to spread hygienic propaganda.¹²⁶

The social concern of the nineteenth-century health reformers has been noted repeatedly. It was a logical outcome of their holistic approach, which interested them both in man as an individual and man in society. Idealistic social concern was also very apparent among pioneers of the naturopathic organizations in Britain. The literature of the British Nature Cure Association was notable in this respect generally, and, on the day-to-day level, supported such causes as the garden city movement. The latter is chosen as an example because it also drew words of support from Charles A. Hall, who edited the *Scottish Health Reformer*, and from Kellogg's followers in Britain.¹²⁷ Edgar J. Saxon, a founder member and some-time president of the Nature Cure Association of Great Britain, illustrated his broader perspective by including Edward Carpenter's *Towards democracy* among the fifteen books he recommended nature cure enthusiasts to read.¹²⁸

While the writings of the health reformers and early naturopaths demonstrated a concern for their fellow men, it is difficult to assess how far any sections of the public responded to that concern. Harrison has discussed the appeal of "physical puritanism" to early Victorian radicals,¹²⁹ and the political attitudes adopted by many health reformers later in the century suggests that their teachings may well have appealed to a similar audience. Thomas and Mary Nichols had arrived in Britain with a letter of introduction to Cardinal Wiseman, at whose house they met Cardinal Manning,¹³⁰ and their many articulate friends and allies in Catholicism, spiritualism, and the literary world have been detailed by Aspinwall, who was particularly concerned to show them in their Catholic context.¹³¹ The range of their contacts and sympathies illustrates how, in general, the domain of natural healing has bordered or overlapped many other humanitarian, religious, environmental, and even aesthetic movements, all of which have contributed to naturopathic thinking. Aspinwall concludes, however, that Thomas Nichols, despite this active intellectual life, had been "very unlikely to influence the Catholic masses". But in health reform, Nichols was probably successful in reaching a popular audience through his practical and frequently reissued writings on a cheap and wholesome vegetarian diet: and the lasting importance of his *Esoteric anthropology* is demonstrated by the publication of its fourteenth edition in 1916. Mary's attempts at popular instruction through her novels seem, however, to have been disappointing because they "contained the obnoxious

¹²⁶ For similar reasons, early this century the so-called health food stores supplying vegetarians and naturopaths were frequently kept by herbalists, presumably because these fringe practitioners already had retail premises and contact with the public. Between 1919 and 1924, for example, the first "Health Food Stores" listed in directories of Bristol, Newport, and Cardiff were all at addresses also used by herbalists.

¹²⁷ F. W. Rogers, 'The garden city of Letchworth', *Nature Cure Annual*, 1907-8: 29. Charles A. Hall, *The art of being healthy*, Paisley, Alexander Gardner, 1903, pp. 14-15. 'Garden cities', *Good Health*, 1903, 2: 4; see also *ibid.*, 1905, 4: 169-171.

¹²⁸ Edgar J. Saxon, *Towards radiant health*, London, C. W. Daniel, 1925, recommended reading. Many of Edward Carpenter's ideas accord with naturopathy, particularly in *Health a conquest*, appendix to *The art of creation*, London, George Allen, 1904, pp. 243-250.

¹²⁹ Harrison, *op. cit.*, note 4 above.

¹³⁰ T. L. Nichols, *op. cit.*, note 24 above, p. 103.

¹³¹ Aspinwall, *op. cit.*, note 36 above.

element of trying to teach as well as to amuse — and novel readers, generally, do not wish to be taught”.¹³²

The Densmores, as far as can be judged from their journal, *Natural Food*, seem to have been seeking mainly intellectual contacts and these in a more restricted circle. If any of their activities were directed at a more popular audience, they are less apparent, because the Densmores did not leave such an informative record as Nichols’ long-running and voluminous *Herald of Health*. The scale and scope of the practical phrenologists can, however, be assessed more easily because they depended on direct contact with the public and, if at all substantial, they appeared in local directories. The practitioners listed in the “Register” published for 1891 and 1892 in the *Phrenological Annual* were well scattered through the country.¹³³ A number were to be found in regions such as Birmingham, Manchester, and the West Riding of Yorkshire, but the practical phrenologists did not show a distribution so strikingly biased towards the industrial Midlands and North as did the herbalists in the late-nineteenth century when they were still largely medical attendants for the poor.¹³⁴ About a tenth of the phrenologists on the register even had addresses in the southern seaside towns of Brighton, Margate, Folkestone, Bournemouth, Weston-super-Mare, and Ilfracombe. Distribution within a town, studied for Bristol, illustrates the importance of the market setting. Trade directories for the final two decades of the century always showed two phrenologists and sometimes three: the two who were listed throughout this period both had businesses in the central popular shopping arcades.¹³⁵

Phrenologists remaining in business for many years must have achieved some success in practice but, even if a large number of clients consulted them for a phrenological reading when considering marriage or choosing a career, it is likely that only a small proportion received or heeded much in the way of hygienic advice. The phrenologist might, as has been argued, help to maintain a tradition of natural healing, but the launching of anything that could be termed a nature cure “movement” would require the efforts of more single-minded naturopaths. Theory might suggest that naturopathy should undermine both the doctor and the patient roles, but its success in Britain was to depend upon the emergence of a body of naturopathic practitioners and of patients anxious to consult them.

The British Nature Cure Association, in 1906 the first of the societies, scarcely initiated a “movement”. Watson Macgregor Reid, its founder, had no formal medical qualification but treated patients as well as loudly proclaiming the gospel of nature cure.¹³⁶ Its vice-presidents included practitioners in the form of Joseph Stenson Hooker, MD, and the hydropath, Mrs A. S. Hunter: but the other vice-presidents were, like A. T. Story, not primarily practitioners; and the president was a Liverpool building contractor.¹³⁷ Although a teaching institute with examinations and diplomas was projected,¹³⁸ the association did not become a rallying point for naturopathic

¹³² T. L. Nichols, *op. cit.*, note 24 above, pp. 113–114.

¹³³ *Phrenological Annual*, 1891: 63–66; 1892: 85–89.

¹³⁴ Brown, *op. cit.*, note 6 above.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, for listing of directories consulted.

¹³⁶ *Nature Cure*, 1906, 1(1): 15.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 1907, 2(5): 13; 1907, 2(10): 185–186.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 1909, 4: advertisement.

practitioners and can be traced only for a few years. It remained for the next generation of naturopathic societies to achieve a lasting degree of practical organization. The British Nature Cure Association seems to have followed most directly in the tradition of the theoretical health reformers of the nineteenth century: the next wave of societies was, as already mentioned, strengthened by further arrivals from America and was more firmly based on clinical practice. By 1932, a handbook could list 116 nature cure practitioners in Britain,¹³⁹ about 100 of these being accounted for by members of the Nature Cure Association of Great Britain and Ireland, the Society of British Naturopaths, and the British Association of Naturopaths.¹⁴⁰ It is not appropriate here to trace the subsequent history of these organizations in their complex relationships with other “fringe” medical groups and through the changing social and economic climate before and after the war and the inception of the National Health Service. But naturopathy has survived, and the descendants of these societies persist as formally-structured organizations.¹⁴¹

¹³⁹ *Health and Nature Cure Handbook*, 1932, 2: 83–87.

¹⁴⁰ Membership lists of the main societies were published from time to time in *Food Reformers' Year Book and Health Seekers' Guide*. A precise sum is not possible: the figure quoted (one hundred) is an estimate.

¹⁴¹ Fulder, *op. cit.*, note 1 above, pp. 319–323. See also an attempt to assess the naturopaths' scale of operations in Stephen Fulder and Robin Monro, *The status of complementary medicine in the United Kingdom*, London, Threshold Foundation, 1981, pp. 35–46.