

The story of Kent's Repertory

by André Saine

This article was submitted by André Saine after the following letter to the editor was forwarded to him for an answer:

How did he do it? Kent, that is. I have never come across any information on how James Tyler Kent compiled his *Repertory*. It is such an extraordinary work, done, no less, in a pre-computer age! Now days we could enter symptoms and remedy names into a database and zap zap, they would be alphabetized. But how did Kent do it? Hundreds of people with thousands of papers scattered all over the floor? Over what period of time? It is truly a labour of love and devotion. Would this subject be of interest to *Resonance* readers?

Naomi Lifejoy
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To answer the question of your reader, 'How did Kent do his repertory?', I am sending you Kent's own description as he wrote it in *The Homœopathician* in 1914. Did he have hundreds of helpers? He did it essentially with his second wife, Clara Louise. But as is shown below, Kent's *Repertory*, like most repertories, is the compilation of additions, verifications and corrections of preexisting repertories. Kent essentially based his repertory on Constantine Lippe's *Repertory to the more Characteristic Symptoms of the Materia Medica* (1880) and on Edmund Lee's *Repertory of the Characteristic Symptoms, Clinical and Pathogenic, of the Homœopathic Materia Medica* (1889). In turn Lippe's *Repertory* is based on the repertory found at the end of Jahr's *Manual of Homœopathic Medicine*, translated in 1838 by Constantine Hering and the other members of the faculty of

the North American Academy of the Homœopathic Healing Art in Allentown Pennsylvania. Lippe wrote, 'To this have been added selections from Boenninghausen's works, A Lippe's *Materia Medica*, Bell on Diarrhoea, H.N. Guernsey, Hering and Jahr'.

As for Lee, he considered his *Repertory* a second edition of Lippe's *Repertory*. He wrote:

'After the death of Dr. Constantine Lippe (1884), all the manuscripts he had written for the second edition of his repertory were secured and included in this work. This repertory might in fact be considered as the second edition of Dr. Lippe's book, with such additions and corrections as the present editor has made. The works of Hahnemann, Boenninghausen, Hering, Lippe, Jahr, Dunham, etc., have been used. Besides these the author has had valuable aid from Dr Edward Rushmore, who has sent him over three hundred pages of notes; also from Dr. S. A. Kimball, who collected many valuable notes from the interleaved repertory of Dr. W.P. Wesselhoeft, and carefully revised the chapter on 'Desires and Aversions'; from Dr. J.T. Kent's interleaved repertory many valuable symptoms have been gathered. In the last ten years the editor has received numberless and most valuable hints from the late Dr. A. Lippe; the celebrated repertory of Boenninghausen has been translated especially for this work; From Dr. E.W. Berridge notes and corrections have been received, and have been of great value.'

At the time of its appearance Lee's *Repertory* was considered 'nearly perfect'. Unfortunately only the first two chapters of Lee's *Repertory* were ever published viz, the 'Mind' and 'Head' sections, probably from a lack of interested subscribers.

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Kent presented not only a more complete repertory but it was also a more practical, detailed and reliable book. Jahr and Lippe used two levels of gradation (roman and italic), while Kent and Lee used three levels (roman, italic and bold). Jahr's *Repertory* contains 190 remedies while Lippe's had 298, Lee's 648, and Kent's 586. Kent eliminated symptoms and remedies from unreliable sources. He published the first edition of his *Repertory* in sections, starting with the section 'Mind' in 1897. The complete version of the first edition became available only two years later in 1899. The printing was pleasing to the eye and the arrangement was as clear as it could be. Unfortunately its use was difficult for the busy practitioner as there was no index. By 1896 Calvin Knerr had published a complete *Repertory of Hering's Guiding Symptoms*. These two major works were somewhat in competition. Neither book became very popular until Kent published the second edition of his *Repertory* in 1908. The cost of the book did not help to popularize it. The first edition was offered in unbound sections at first, for \$30.00 while the second edition was reduced to \$16.50 (bound). (The average annual earnings of a physician allopathic or homœopathic, in 1905, was around \$800). One reviewer wrote that the second edition was 'no mere republication, but a book revised from beginning to end, with the addition of much new matter and the correction of many errors inseparable from this class of work.' Kent wrote in the foreword of his second edition that 'the first edition was largely a compilation from other repertories. I took and accepted what I thought had been from good authorities, but use showed that there were many errors even in Boenninghausen. I therefore had to scrutinize very carefully and trace disputed points back to some source. It was possible for me to do so as I have all the old provings that are known. Boenninghausen often disagrees with Hahnemann's original symptoms in matters of aggravation and amelioration. I accepted Hahnemann as first, best and final whenever a dispute occurred. Many errors were found in Lippe's, also many in Lee's *Cough Repertory*, and other minor works. Therefore you will find many remedies omitted that were in the first edition.'

Many students of Kent have mentioned how they 'begged' him to publish his interleaved repertory. Gibson Miller, one of Kent's earliest students, recalled that as early as 1884, while a student of Kent at the Homœopathic Medical College of Missouri, he

'had the privilege of copying his manuscript notes.' Alumni of the Philadelphia School of Homœopathics described how 'throughout the clinical work in the dispensary teachers and pupils encountered many difficult cases, for which the remedy could not be found even with the faithful use of the existing repertories. Reaching this point we were not discouraged, for we knew that in the office of the dean was an unpublished repertory, – our last resort – which did not fail us. How we revered that repertory and how we begged for its publication.' Kent reluctantly imposed upon himself the task of making a complete repertory. He did it at the cost of his own health. In fact he and his wife became nearly blind during their exacting work. Miller wrote that 'for twenty years every spare hour was given to this book. The labour was immense, for every symptom had to be traced back to its original source, and only those who have undertaken such work can realise what it meant. But to him it was a labour of love, and he grudged no time, trouble or expense, if only he could by means of this book, render the cure of disease more certain and quick'. Yes, to edit such a repertory in those days was 'truly a labour of love and devotion' as your reader puts it.

Miller added that 'only those who have essayed to do similar work can realize the strain on brain and eye and body it involves, and it is little wonder that Kent's health several times broke down, but it was alabour of love and nothing could alter his determination to complete the work.' In 1910, in a letter to Margaret Tyler Kent said that "while I am only 61 years old I am worn out." Kent had indeed done an extraordinary job for the time. The second edition of his *Repertory* in 1908 became the last 'complete repertory to be assembled before the advent of the computer. Kent pointed out to us the importance of a clear, well organized and more complete repertory for successful homœopathic practice. In the same letter to Tyler he says "I have been lecturing to classes on homœopathy and materia medica since 1883, and it has been a bitter fight continuously. Though I have enjoyed it it has worn me out. For fifteen years I gained little but sneers; then, now and then, a pupil would try and do it. But not until I had put out the *Repertory* twelve or thirteen years ago could I feel that I had made any impression.... There are 1200 repertories now in use." Homœopathy owes Kent its highest respect. Dr Kent, thank you from the bottom of our hearts for all your untiring efforts.

Together Again

The Society of Homœopaths Conference 1990
 Friday 14th – Sunday 16th September
 University of Nottingham