



## BECHAMP & PASTEUR - CLASH & CONSEQUENCE

By Samantha Flower

The world of Western medicine has always been rife with controversy, with each new 'ground-breaking' discovery being challenged as a matter of course by one or more experts working in the same field. Yet there has been no dispute to rival the conflict between two famous 19th century French scientists, Louis Pasteur and Antoine Béchamp. The subject of their clash was Pasteur's germ theory of disease. It prevailed, and to this day serves as the foundation of orthodox medicine, causing many of its shortcomings and limitations. It is tantalizing to wonder how medicine might have developed if Béchamp's approach had been adopted - an approach that today is favoured by many innovative orthodox and complementary practitioners. To understand the conflict and its consequences, let's consider the basic facts.

Many discoveries and innovations are linked to the name of Louis Pasteur (1822-1895). The best known is "pasteurization", the sterilization of foods at a temperature that is claimed to destroy harmful microorganisms without damaging the food (neither claim has stood the test of time). Pasteur discovered this method while trying to deal with wine diseases, and found that the microorganisms causing the problems could be killed by heating wine to 55o Centigrade. From this he developed the basic rules of sterilization. His method, by preventing infection, revolutionized hospital proceedings, especially surgery and obstetrics.

Immunization via vaccination was another of Pasteur's vital discoveries. Through his research into rabies, he found that this was transmitted by agents so small they could not be seen under a microscope. By discovering how to attenuate such virulent microorganisms, he was able to produce life-saving vaccines, although it's worth remembering that the first effective vaccination - against smallpox - had been carried out in 1796 by the British doctor Edward Jenner. One of Pasteur's British followers was the surgeon Joseph Lister, who proved that deadly infections in hospitals could be prevented by antiseptic operating procedures. As a result of his prodigious research work, Pasteur eventually came to formulate his Germ Theory of Disease, which he published in 1862.

### The Germ above All?

Put at its simplest level, this theory claims that most infectious diseases are caused by external factors, germs, to which a person becomes exposed. And there is no doubt that the discovery of germs was a major breakthrough, on which the science of modern microbiology rests. However, Pasteur's approach was reductionist, over-emphasizing the role of bacteria and disregarding all else, yet Western medical thought has been resting on this flawed concept for the best part of a century and a half. At any rate, Pasteur was regarded as one of Europe's most outstanding scientists in his lifetime, and also for a long

time after his death. Only in comparatively recent times has his achievement begun to be questioned.

Pasteur's adversary, Antoine Béchamp(1816-1908) is considerably less known in modern medicine, yet in his time he was considered to be one of France's greatest scientists. Much more highly qualified than Pasteur, he was a physician, chemist, biologist and naturalist, who served as Professor of Medical Chemistry and Pharmacology at the University of Montpellier, and was also Professor of Biological Chemistry and Physiology at the Paris Sorbonne. Despite his great prestige and dazzling reputation, today his work is practically forgotten.

### **What is A Microbe?**

In stark contrast to Pasteur, Béchamp maintained that microbes were a process, "deriving from a single strain {prebacterial particles - microzymes - present in all organic structures} which could change size and form according to the health of the host". He claimed that the 'microzymes' which he had discovered were the origin of life, existing in all living things. In humans their form would vary depending on the general state of their host, i.e. the human body, and, significantly, their host's nutritional status. According to Béchamp, disease would only occur when there was a disturbance in the host's normal functioning. This approach was in line with the statement of the acclaimed French physiologist, Dr Claude Bernard (1813-1878): "The microbe is nothing, the terrain is everything."

In basic terms, Pasteur claimed that the microbe caused the disease, while Béchamp maintained that the disease, the disturbed functioning of the organism enabled the microbe to thrive. Pasteur's approach, which won the day, demands that in terms of treatment methods, the pathogenic microbes must be attacked by external means. This is reflected in the way ill health is being treated to this day in Western medicine, which almost exclusively uses invasive methods, such as powerful drugs and surgery. This approach clearly contradicts the tenets of the Hippocratic Oath, one of the oldest binding medical documents, supposedly, but with diminishing zeal, observed by all doctors everywhere: "I will apply dietetic measures for the benefit of the sick according to my ability and judgment; I will keep them from harm and injustice. I will neither give a deadly drug to anybody who asked for it, nor will I make a suggestion to this effect." (One can't help wondering how this pledge relates to the use of chemotherapy and the total neglect of nutrition in the treatment of cancer.)

Conversely, Béchamp's theory encouraged the reinstatement of health in the host organism. As he believed that disease resulted from a change in a person's state of health, his way to proceed was to help that body return to good health without the use of invasive methods. In his view, potentially damaging microbes could not possibly survive in a healthy well-balanced organism. This approach has been employed by naturopathic

physicians ever since the time of Hippocrates, the Father of Modern Medicine; one of its outstanding examples is the Gerson Therapy®.

### **What Went Wrong?**

These days modern orthodox medicine's commitment to Pasteur's approach is being increasingly questioned. Given what we know about the vital role of the immune system in maintaining health, it makes little sense to introduce substances to the body, such as powerful drugs, which are known to reduce the weakened immune system even further. True, this kind of treatment can bring relief by suppressing symptoms, but it leaves the cause of the illness untouched. Given our knowledge of old-style, pre-technology medicine and Béchamp's logical theory, one wonders why the medical establishment had originally chosen to back Pasteur. Unfortunately there appears to be more to this story than medical considerations and the pursuit of the good of mankind - ego and power seems to have played their part, too.

Among recent critiques of Pasteur's true achievement, we find this explanation by pharmacist Dr Marie Nonclerq: "In this fight Béchamp was beaten - not because his arguments were mistaken but because Pasteur benefited from circumstances at the time, from his experiments and results, falsified to favour his primary notions. Today this doctoring seems unbelievable. Serious examination in the realm of bacteria showed that the facts simply did not support his ideas. Pasteur had deliberately ignored the work of Béchamp, one of the great 19th century French scientists, whose considerable oeuvre in chemical synthesis, in biochemistry and pathology of infections goes unrecognised today, having been degraded in favour of the illustrious Pasteur who, unlike Béchamp, had a genius for publicity and for what we now call public relations."

It is said that on his deathbed Pasteur finally acknowledged the rightness of Béchamp's life's work by quoting Claude Bernard's motto: "The microbe is nothing, the terrain is everything." Perhaps, when faced with his own mortality, Pasteur's conscience finally got the better of him. Yet, much to the continuing indignation of many highly trained and forward-looking health professionals, Pasteur's last words have remained unfamous. One wonders what kind of health care system we would have today, if the medical establishment had chosen to follow Pasteur's final message.