

The Life and Work of James Tyler Kent: His Contributions to Homoeopathy and the Twelve Observations

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ABSTRACT

Dr. James Tyler Kent (1849–1916) is one of the most important personalities in the history of homoeopathy, who is remembered for his deep teachings, systematic philosophy, and sharp clinical observations. Based on the work of Samuel Hahnemann, Kent constructed a disciplined methodology to case analysis and remedy assessment that has been followed by generations of practitioners. His masterpieces, Lectures on Homoeopathic Philosophy and Repertory of the Homoeopathic Materia Medica, are still cornerstones of traditional homoeopathy. One of his most lasting bequests is the doctrine of the Twelve Observations, a system by which physicians can measure the improvement of patients following the giving of a remedy. This paper discusses Kent's early life, educational and professional development, contributions to homoeopathy, and the enduring importance of his Twelve Observations.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

James Tyler Kent (1849–1916) was one of the most influential American homeopath, whose philosophy and writings systematized the practice of homeopathy.¹ Kent's Repertory of the Homoeopathic Materia Medica, brought together his clinical experience and spiritual approach, giving homoeopathy a systematic foundation.² His influence extended far beyond America, leaving a legacy that continues to inspire practitioners worldwide.

Born in Woodhull, Steuben County, New York on 31st March 1849, the son of Stephen Kent (1803-1879) and Caroline Tyler (1811-1887).⁶ Kent, though trained in orthodox medicine, was converted to homeopathy after the cure of his wife through homoeopathic treatment.⁷ Kent stressed the unity of mind, body, and spirit in his teaching, and his writings emphasized the individuality of each patient.⁸ Strongly influenced by Swedenborgian philosophy, Kent viewed health as a balance of vital force and disease as a disturbance of that harmony.⁹ His Repertory and philosophical lectures remain foundational texts, cementing his role as one of the greatest exponents of Hahnemannian homeopathy.

Kent's was not only a practitioner but a teacher, who systematized homoeopathy into a science of disciplined observation, interpretation, and individualized prescription.⁵

Aims

To study the life, contributions and philosophy of Dr. James Tyler Kent in order to understand his impact on

the development of homeopathy.

Objectives

1. To highlight Kent's early life, education and the turning point that led him from allopathy to homeopathy.
2. To analyze Kent's contributions to homeopathic philosophy and Materia medica.
3. To evaluate his legacy in the advancement of homeopathy worldwide.

Materials and Methods

1. Primary Sources : Lectures on Homoeopathic Philosophy, Repertory of Homoeopathic Materia Medica
2. Secondary Sources : Classical texts by Hering, Stuart Close, and Vithoulkas and others

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Early Life and Education

James Tyler Kent was born on March 31, 1849, in the rural town of Woodhull, New York, where he spent his childhood surrounded by the quiet, hardworking life of an American farming community. His upbringing in a modest household environment cultivated discipline, persistence, and curiosity that would characterize his medical career.¹

In his early childhood, Kent began his primary education at the Franklin School in Prattsburgh.¹⁴ For his higher school years, he studied at the Woodhull Academy in his birthplace, completing his secondary education there.¹⁴

At the age of nineteen, he enrolled at Madison University in Hamilton, New York State, where he graduated with a Ph.B. degree.¹⁴ Two years later, Kent further pursued studies at the same institution, receiving the degree of A.M. (Master of Arts).¹⁵

After completing his undergraduate studies, Kent decided to enter the field of medicine and enrolled at the Bellevue Medical College in New York City, one of the leading medical schools of the time.

In 1871, he successfully passed his examinations with distinction and obtained his doctor of medicine degree.¹⁴ Following this, Kent expanded his knowledge by attending two courses of lectures at the Eclectic Medical Institute in Cincinnati, Ohio.¹⁴ At this stage, Kent was firmly rooted in allopathy, practicing the standard methods of diagnosis and treatment prevalent in late 19th-century medicine.

However, though well-trained, Kent recognized the limitations of allopathy when treating chronic diseases, which led him to explore homeopathy.³

Turning Point: Introduction to Homeopathy

Kent's transformation from a conventional physician to a pioneer of homeopathy was deeply personal. His wife fell gravely ill, and despite the best efforts of allopathic treatments, her condition showed no improvement. His wife was restored to health through homoeopathy after failing to respond to allopathic treatment.⁶ This event struck Kent profoundly. It opened his eyes to the depth and power of homeopathy and compelled him to dedicate himself entirely to this system of medicine. Kent's initial skepticism gave way to conviction, and this event shaped his life's mission.⁴

His religious and philosophical leanings influenced his interpretation of medicine.⁹ Kent, influenced greatly by Swedenborgian philosophy, described health as harmony of vital force and sickness as its discord.⁹

Academic and Professional Journey

Kent developed into a renowned practitioner and teacher, ultimately teaching at a number of homoeopathic colleges, including the Homoeopathic Medical College of St. Louis and the Hering Medical College in Chicago. His strength lay in expressing homoeopathy as a coherent, systematic philosophy of medicine.¹ His teaching was marked by a strong emphasis on Hahnemann's principles, particularly the concepts of vital force, single remedy prescription, and minimum dose.

His work, *Repertory and Lectures on Homoeopathic Philosophy* became standard texts for homoeopaths worldwide.² His repertory, gave a systematic tool for remedy selection, while his lectures provided principles for understanding health, disease, and cure.¹

Career

Dr. Kent began his professional career in St. Louis as a physician of the eclectic school, at the same time he was actively connected with several eclectic journals and taking an earnest part in the councils of the Eclectic National College, St. Louis, from 1877-78.

Kent became the first President of the Hering Medical College in 1903, resolving disputes between the Hering and Dunham schools.⁵

Students from England, European countries, India and other parts of the world sought admission to the institution where he taught the subject. Sir John Weir, A.H. Grimmer, Pierre Schmidt, B.K. Bose, and other famous homoeopaths from all over the world were his disciples. Kent also served as President and Trustee of Chicago Homoeopathic Hospital.⁶

Kent's Contributions to Homoeopathy

Kent as a writer

1. 1897 - *The Repertory of Homeopathic Materia Medica*
2. 1900 - *The Lectures on Homeopathic Philosophy*
3. 1905 - *The Lectures on Homeopathic Materia Medica*
4. 1926 - *Lesser Writings – Clinical Cases, New Remedies, Aphorisms & Precepts*
5. 1958 - *New Remedies* was first printed in India
6. *What the Doctor's Need to Know in Order to Make a Successful*

Kent as a Teacher

1. 1881 – 1888 He taught *Materia Medica* at Post Graduate School of Homeopathy, St. Louis.⁶
2. 1882 - He was appointed as Chair of Surgery at Missouri Homoeopathic Medical College, St. Louis.⁶
3. 1888 – 99 He served as Dean of Philadelphia Post Graduate School of Homeopathy.³
4. 1890 – 1899 He taught *Materia Medica* at the School of Homeopathy, Philadelphia.⁴
5. 1903 – 1909 He was a senior lecturer in *Materia Medica* at the Hahnemann Medical College and Hospital, Chicago.¹
6. 1909 He became Dean and Professor at Hering Medical College and Hospital, Chicago.⁵

His other Contributions

1. Kent favored the use of high potencies - **30th** , **200th** , **1M** , **50M** , **CM** , **DM** and **MM** prepared on centesimal scale.¹
2. His “**Doctrine of Series**” in degrees guided the treatment of chronic diseases.³
3. He pioneered the use of potencies above 20th, formulating his “**Theory of Octaves**”.⁴
4. He described the “**Law of Vital Action and Reaction**”, explaining the curative responses of remedies.⁹
5. Systematic Teaching of Homoeopathic Philosophy

Kent played a vital role in systematizing and teaching Hahnemann’s philosophy at a time when Homoeopathy in America was facing a crisis. His lectures transformed Hahnemann’s sometimes difficult concepts into a structured, progressive, and clear course that medical students could grasp. By dividing philosophy into topics such as the vital force, simple substance, and hierarchy of symptoms, Kent created a curriculum that shaped homoeopathic education for generations.

6. Construction of Kent’s Repertory

The Repertory of the Homoeopathic Materia Medica was one of Kent’s greatest achievements. Before Kent, repertories existed but lacked a logical scheme. He arranged symptoms beginning with the Mind, then the General symptoms (affecting the whole organism), and finally the Particulars (symptoms of local organs).¹⁶ This structure helped practitioners navigate the vast body of materia medica more effectively, creating a repertory that is still a cornerstone of practice.

7. Centrality of the Mind in Case-Taking

Kent insisted that the symptoms of the mind were the most characteristic of the patient, and thus decisive in choosing a remedy. While other physicians often emphasized pathological or physical complaints, Kent urged his students to look deeper into the altered mental and emotional state, which represented the innermost disturbance of the patient. This method became a hallmark of the “Kentian” school of prescribing. The symptoms of the mind are to be given the greatest importance, for they represent the very man himself.¹⁵

8. Doctrine of Simple Substance

Kent contributed to the philosophical depth of homoeopathy by introducing the doctrine of simple substance. He taught that the immaterial “vital substance” precedes matter and is responsible for life and disease. Disease, in his view, originates in a disturbance of this dynamic substance, not merely in tissues or fluids. This doctrine linked medicine with metaphysics, giving homoeopathy a unique philosophical foundation.

9. Hierarchy of Symptoms

Kent introduced the concept of evaluating symptoms based on their significance. According to him, generals—symptoms that describe the patient as a whole—were most important, followed by particulars, while common symptoms had little value. This hierarchy provided physicians with a scientific basis for analysis and differentiated homoeopathic prescribing from mere symptomatic treatment.

10. Spiritual View of Man in Healing

Kent viewed disease as beginning on the interior plane—spiritual or dynamic—before manifesting in the body. This holistic view meant that cure required addressing the innermost disturbances of the patient, not just external symptoms. His integration of spiritual understanding into medical practice distinguished his approach from materialist medicine. The sick man is first a sick soul; the outermost is the body, but the interior is the man himself.¹⁵

11. Twelve Observations in Remedy Action

Kent's Twelve Observations gave practitioners a practical guide for evaluating the effects of remedies. By observing whether symptoms improved, worsened, or changed in particular ways, the physician could judge whether the remedy was curative, needed repetition, or required change. This systematic observation added precision to homoeopathic practice.

12. Defence of Pure Homoeopathy

Kent strongly defended classical homoeopathy against deviations like polypharmacy or material doses. He insisted on single, potentized remedies prescribed according to the law of similars.¹⁵ His strict adherence to principle preserved Hahnemann's original vision at a time when it was under attack.

Kent Proved Drugs

Kent proved several drugs including Alumina phosphorica, Aurum iodatum, Baryta iodata, Calcarea iodata, Caulophyllum, Ferrum arsenicum, Hamamelis, Kali arsenicosum, Natrum sulphuricum, and Zincum phosphoricum.¹⁰

He also proved other drugs like Alumina silicate, Arsenicum sulphuricum flavum, Aurum arsenicum, Aurum sulphuricum, Barium iodatum, Barium sulphuricum, Calcarea silicate, Calendula officinalis, Ferrum iodatum, Kali bichromicum, Kali muriaticum.

Influence and Legacy

Kent attracted a devoted circle of students, many of whom spread his teachings.³ His writings and teaching gave homeopathy a strong intellectual and spiritual foundation both in America and Europe.¹ He insisted on purity of method and fidelity to Hahnemann's principles, and shaping classical homeopathy.²

His systematic and philosophical language elevated homeopathy, giving it a more spiritual dimension.⁹ Kent was not only a practitioner but also a voracious teacher whose lectures stimulated thousands of students. He emphasized mind-body unity, the vital force, and the exact observation, distinguishing him from contemporaries.³

Influence on World homeopathy

Kent's teachings extended beyond the United States and influenced homoeopaths worldwide.³ His works were translated into numerous languages and became standard texts throughout Europe, India, and the world.² In India, Kent's philosophy became central to homoeopathic education, influencing generations of practitioners.⁸

Kent's Twelve Observations

One of Kent's most lasting contributions was his creation of the Twelve Observations. The observations provide a framework for judging the effects of a prescription.¹ They form a roadmap for interpreting events after a remedy.

They avoid early alteration of prescription and enable the physician to keep himself clear-headed during case management. By systematizing clinical phenomena, Kent demonstrated deep understanding of cure and remedy action.⁴

- **Observation 1 :** A prolonged aggravation with final decline of the patient.⁸

The physician has to interpret that the case was an incurable one. We have handled a case with unfavourable prognosis. Pathological destruction may have already taken place in this case. The reaction of the vital force is almost impossible or useless.

Steps to be taken: Antidote the remedy immediately. The case is an incurable one, so the prognosis will be bad if not antidoted.

Lesson to learn: In incurable and doubtful cases do not use higher potencies, use the remedies with care and never above 30% or 200th. In such cases, always start the remedies in 30th potencies, and never repeat the doses frequently. Cases with organic damage or pathologically advances cases deep acting, curative remedies should not be given. Always start the treatment with low potency.

- **Observation 2 :** Long aggravation with final and slow improvement.⁸

This observation indicates that the disease is still in the curable state. The organic or pathological changes are not so advanced. The tissue change is in the beginning stage. The vital force is still in the form of reactive stage; hence the aggravation has lasted for a long time, followed with final slow improvement. We have given the curative remedy in the right time, if the remedy was given a little time later the case would have advanced further and cure would have been impossible.

Steps to be taken: The case is curable. Prognosis is good, do not repeat any remedy, wait and watch for the reaction.

- **Observation 3 :** Aggravation is quick, short, and strong with rapid improvement of patient.⁸

This is the classical homeopathic aggravation. It is the most favourable condition any homeopath would like to observe. The selected remedy is the correct one. The improvement of the patient will be long lasting There is no structural or tissue changes in the patient. Prognosis of the case will be very good.

Steps to be taken: The case is in a good condition, wait and watch. Stop any repetition of the remedy.

Lessons to learn: In acute cases the third observation of Kent is seen few hours after administering the remedy, in chronic cases it is seen in few days of administering the remedy.

- **Observation 4 :** No aggravation, with recovery of patient.⁸

It is the classical homeopathic cure. The selected remedy, its potency and the dose are exactly suitable to the case. There is not pathological change in the patient. The disease is in its functional level and belongs to the nerves and its functions.

Steps to be taken: In both acute and chronic cases if the fourth observation is noticed any repetition of the remedy has to be stopped. In acute cases it proves to be curative In chronic diseases it is difficult to judge; hence any repetition of the dose has to be stopped because this may interrupt the action of the curative remedy that has been given. The case has to be kept under observation.

- **Observation 5 :** Amelioration comes first and the aggravation comes afterwards.⁸

This condition is unfavorable The remedy prescribed has either acted superficially or in the palliative manner. Also happens in some cases that the patient was in an incurable case and he was administered partially table remedy based on the most annoying symptoms alone.

Steps to be taken: Re-examine the symptomatology and find out whether the selected remedy was chosen based on the totality of symptoms.

Lessons to learn: in a long seated and severe case, if amelioration comes first the physician has to suspect the case and re-examine it again. He tries to find out the fault in the remedial level, patient level and the repetition of the remedy etc.

- **Observation 6 :** Too short relief of symptoms.⁸

The higher potencies act for a long time. The curative remedy relieves the patient for a long time. In some cases, initially the patient reports that he has been doing well and improving, but after a long gap he may complain, "I have been running down". Then the condition requires the following investigations:

Steps to be taken: There may be some obstacles to cure. The patient may have done something to interrupt the action of the remedy. Habits like drinking alcohol, smoking and handling some chemicals like ammonia etc, may interfere and spoil the curative action of the remedy.

If such obstacles are not present in acute cases, the sixth observation indicates high grade inflammatory conditions which may interfere with the prognosis and the improvement of the case. In chronic cases, the sixth observation indicates that the case is pathologically advanced one of the structural changes have taken place in the patient already. Hence the prognosis is bad.

- **Observation 7 :** A full time amelioration of symptoms yet no special relief to the patient.⁸

In the latent conditions and the latent organic conditions we observe this seventh observation. The patient in such conditions does not improve above this state. Example: a patient with one kidney can improve to a certain degree only as his organic development is such. A patient with fibrinous structural changes in certain places like tubercles that have been encysted and lungs capable of doing only limited work will have limited symptoms. These symptoms will be ameliorated from time to time with remedies, but the patient is only curable to certain extent. He cannot go beyond and rise above such state.

Steps to be taken: The case is only suitable to homeopathic palliation and the prognosis with these palliative remedies will be good. But the patient is not cured and is never cured.

Lessons to learn: In some latent organic conditions, cure is not possible and palliation is the only solution. We cannot expect highest ideal of cure in almost every case we handle.

- **Observation 8 :** Some patients prove every remedy they get.⁸

If such condition is observed, we have to think that the patient is an idiosyncratic person. These patients are known to be hysterical, over wrought, oversensitive to many things. After receiving high potency. they go on proving this medicine. When they are under the influence of this medicine they cannot come under the influence of any other medicine. Such patients are great provers; they will prove higher potencies of medicines. After they get out of one proving, they are quite ready to repeat it or go into another.

Steps to be taken: These over-sensitive patients are sometimes incurable. These type of cases will have bad prognosis. When you find a case that proves everything that you give in higher potencies, go back to 30th potency and 200 potency. We can cure their acute conditions by giving them 30th and 200h potencies and their chronic conditions by giving them 30th, 200th and 500h potencies.

- **Observation 9 :** Action of the medicine upon provers.⁸

Healthy provers are always benefited by the proving, if they are properly conducted. The constitutional symptoms of the prover have to be carefully noted down and subtracted from the symptoms of the drug proved. These symptoms will not very commonly appear during the proving; if they do, note the change in them.

- **Observation 10 :** New symptoms appearing after the remedy.⁸

If array of new symptoms appear after administration of the remedy, the condition will be unfavorable.

Steps to be taken: Before coming to any conclusion, the new symptoms have to be verified by the physician with the help of patient and his attendants. In some instances, the new symptoms turn out to be old symptoms which the patient may have forgotten to mention during case taking, considering them to be unimportant. If

these symptoms were never observed by anybody before, appearance of new symptoms is an unfavorable condition. The remedy has to be antidoted, or changed

- **Observation 11 :** When old symptoms are observed to reappear.⁸

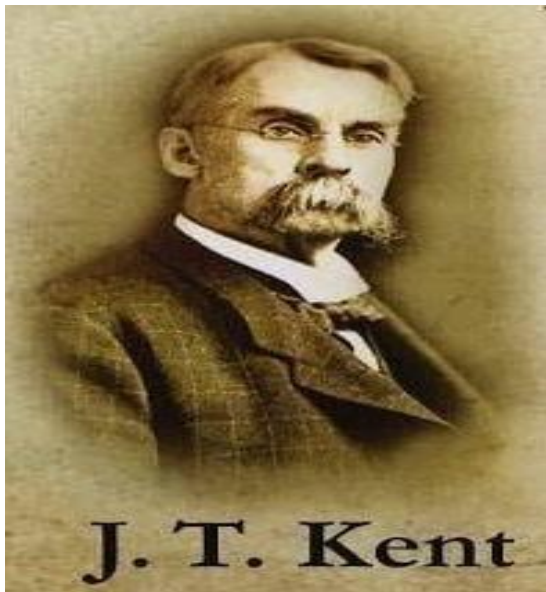
The condition is much favorable. The disease is curable one. If the symptoms are following the reverse order of appearance of symptoms are following Hering's law of cure, cure is inevitable. Patient is on the road to recovery.

Steps to be taken: Remedy has to be left to complete its action. Further repetition of dose is not advisable at this stage, as it may interrupt the action of the remedy. If the old symptoms come back to stay, a repetition of dose is often necessary. The patient must be encouraged that he is on the road to recovery.

- **Observation 12 :** Symptoms take wrong direction.⁸

It is not a good condition. The symptoms are not following Hering's law of cure. The administered medicine is not the perfect similimum. The medicine was not selected properly by considering the general symptoms, but it was selected based on the particulars. Prognosis of the case would be bad, as the remedy is suppressing the disease manifestations.

Steps to be taken: Antidote the medicine immediately. Otherwise, structural changes would take place in the new site.



KENT METHODOLOGY

1. Philosophical Foundation

Disease is not structural change but disturbance of vital force, to be treated by individualization.¹

2. Case-Taking

Kent stressed mental, emotional, general, and local symptoms in case-taking, along with modalities and history.⁸

3. Totality of Symptoms

Kent taught that the totality is composed of mental, general and particular symptoms, emphasizing peculiar and characteristics ones.¹³

4. Repertorization

The repertory is the physician's tool to find remedies covering the case totality.²

5. Miasmatic Analysis

Kent integrated Hahnemann's miasm - psora, sycosis, and syphilis – into case analysis and management.⁹

6. Individualization

For Kent each patient required one individual remedy at a time.⁴

7. Potency Selection

Kent favored high potencies such as 200C or above to stimulate the vital force.¹

8. Therapeutic Principles

Kent's principle: treat the patient, not the disease; mental symptoms are the highest guides.³

Kent's Theories & Modern Medicine Parallels

1. Individualization of Treatment

Kent: "No two cases are alike; each must be studied in its own totality".¹

Modern Medicine: Precision medicine is an approach to disease treatment and prevention that takes into account individual differences in : Genes, Environment (e.g., pollutants, exposure risks), Lifestyle.

Genomics is the study of a person's complete set of DNA.

2. Minimum Dose Principle

Kent: "The smallest dose that will cure is the best".¹

Modern Medicine: Low Dose Immunotherapy (LDI) with its highly specific and fast acting nature improves immune tolerance, and provides effective relief for various conditions while minimizing side effects.¹²

Micro-dosing : Individuals who engage in micro-dosing report that it improves their mood and well being, as well as reducing symptoms for depression, anxiety, post traumatic stress disorder, attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder, and substance misuse.

3. Mental Symptoms as Central

Kent: "The highest and most important symptoms are those of the mind".¹

Modern Medicine: Psychoneuroimmunology confirms that stress and emotional states directly alter immunity and healing.¹¹

Criticism

1. Kent's repertory places mental and general rubrics first and systematically privileges generals over localized pathological/clinical categories, which alters the order and emphasis compared with clinical/nosological repertories.
2. Critics argue this prioritisation of subjective mental/general symptoms makes Kent's method less directly connected to objective pathology and harder to validate by measurable clinical criteria.

3. Kent argued potentization could infinitely enhance an inner quality of medicines and promoted very high potencies and serial escalation; critics view this as incompatible with pharmacology and empirical testing.
4. Kent's repertory is widely used because of its logical general→particular arrangement, but its condensed language, ranking of degrees, and simplifications introduce limitations that affect reliability and proper use.
5. Kent transformed miasm ideas and at times denied microbes as primary causes — later commentators regard as incompatible with modern bacteriology and pathology.
6. Kent's metaphysical concepts (vital force as 'simple substances', etc.) concatenate metaphysical and medical concepts and thereby can immunize the system against exoteric critique and empirical falsification

Limitations

1. Prioritisation of "Mind" / generals first : Kent's repertory is deliberately organised to put Mind (mental/general rubrics) first and to move from general → particular, a structural choice that foregrounds subjective and constitutional symptoms over organ-based pathological classification.
2. In his Lectures on Homoeopathic Philosophy Kent presents disease and cure in terms of an immaterial vital force and related metaphysical ideas; commentators say mixing these metaphysical claims with clinical reasoning makes Kent's theory philosophically distinct but scientifically unfalsifiable.
3. Kent's practice and writings at places imply a remedy is homoeopathic because it cures, a circular method that critics say undermines independent testing and systematic pharmacological validation.
4. Kent explicitly defends the clinical value of high potencies and potentization as imparting or enhancing a non-material curative quality; critics say Kentian potency claims lack a plausible pharmacological mechanism and separate practice from conventional experimental standards.
5. Kent's condensation and the way degrees/grades are represented introduce structural limitations that users must understand to avoid mis-indexing or omission-errors
6. Miasm and disease causation: selective reading of Hahnemann : Kent reworks Hahnemannian miasm ideas and sometimes downplays microbial/modern pathological causation in favour of chronic constitutional/miasmatic explanations; historians say this places Kent partially at odds with modern bacteriology and pathophysiology.

Final Years and Death

Dr. James Tyler Kent (1849 – 1916) passed away on June 6, 1916 in Stevensville, Montana, USA., bringing to an end a remarkable career devoted entirely to homeopathy. His death marked the close of an era in which he had strengthened and systematized Hahnemann's philosophy, trained countless students, and produced enduring works like his Repertory. Though his physical life ended, his disciples continued his works his ensuring his influence remained alive.³

CONCLUSION

James Tyler Kent's life and writings are a bridge between the seminal ideas of Hahnemann and the systematic practice of contemporary homoeopathy. His Lectures on Philosophy and Repertory are evergreen, and his Twelve Observations continue to be a guide to practitioners in the subtle art of case- taking. Kent's stress on spiritual teachings, vital force, and orderly progress towards cure has made him a permanent influence within the homoeopathic community.

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