

Lac caninum: A Remedy of Self-disgust

by Berkeley Wingfield Digby

Lac caninum is made from the milk of female dogs. It was valued for its medicinal powers from early Greek times. The Greek physicians used it for the treatment of such things as erosion of the cervix, otitis media, and to expel the dead foetus. Bearing in mind that *Lac caninum* is derived from dogs' milk, inspiration may be gleaned. Dogs are gregarious and socially conscious animals. From early times dogs ran in packs, always following one leader. They are easily trained, and have a natural sense of obedience. They are aggressively protective of their young, and have a marked fear of snakes.

There is a colloquial saying, 'To treat someone like a dog', which means to put them down, insult them and dominate them. As we shall see this is of great significance when we study the provings of *Lac caninum*. The picture in many ways may be represented by a cowering dog with its tail between its legs. After reading the underlying picture this image will mean a lot more.

As an overview of the provings we observe that there are many bizarre and unpleasant imaginings about the state of body and mind. The imagination is greatly stimulated. The provings reveal imaginings of insanity and disease. The provers imagined horrible monsters, snakes, spiders, or disgusting creatures. Feelings of horror and self disgust, along with intense nervous excitability, are most notable. There is an overwhelming impression that there is something dark and disturbing going on within the subconscious mind. There are many recorded delusions and fears. As fears, dreams and delusions all represent the undisguised activity of the psychological defence mechanism, they are most significant in the homœopathic study of remedies and cases.

The Mental Picture

Lac caninum presents a picture of a person who has perhaps been put down by others, criticized and diminished, most likely by their parents during formative years. Lack of self confidence and distrust of others (*Hyoscyamus*, *Nitric acid*), is deeply felt in the *Lac-caninum* emotional state. In Hering we find 'Imagines herself to be dirty' ('Delusions - dirty' in the repertory). All these symptoms which are well represented in the repertory, are clearly an extension of a profound subconscious self deprecatory attitude.

Feelings of self deprecation, self criticism or self disgust epitomize the emotional state. This idea gains further emphasis when we discover in Hering, 'Thinks she is looked down upon by everyone, that she has no importance in life. Imagines herself dirty. Doubts her ability and success.'

Lac caninum is one of the hand washing remedies. It has been added to the rubric 'Washing always, her hands' by Pierre Schmidt. The compulsive urge to wash the hands suggests feelings that there is something dirty within the person that they want to wash out. It is suggestive of feelings of guilt: Kent translates the recorded experiences of the provers into the rubrics 'delusions - despised' and 'Delusions - diminished', and 'Delusions she is looked down upon'. *Argentum nitricum* and *Hura brasiliensis* both express a similar state, appearing in Delusions of being despised' and 'Delusions of being repudiated by their parents'. *Lac caninum* is also found in a rubric 'Contemptuous of self' in the *Synthetic Repertory* along with over-conscientious *Aurum*, and judgemental *Thuja*.

The tendency in *Lac caninum* to imagine they are diseased, may easily be con-

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ceived as a further manifestation of feelings of self disgust. A most telling delusion that was produced during the proving of *Lac caninum* was that 'she is a loathsome horrible mass of disease', and that she has snakes in and around her (Hering). They imagine that they are full of cancer, that they are about to die. The anxiety about disease is most intense. When in this state *Lac caninum* types ultimately develop despair that they will never recover. There is a tendency in people needing *Lac caninum* to develop very intense fears about cancer and heart disease. Their fear of cancer may become as extreme as that of *Nitric acid*, *Arsenicum* or *Phosphorus*. The tendency to swelling of the breasts serves to further compound this fear. They may have an unshakable conviction that they have breast cancer and will die.

There are clear indications of marked self doubt in *Lac caninum*. Thus from Hering we find 'Doubts her ability and success'. It also appears under 'Delusions all she says is a lie'. Clarke records:

'Is impressed with the idea that all she says is a lie; that all her symptoms are unreal and the result of a diseased imagination. It seems difficult to speak the truth'. They feel critical of themselves, to the extent of doubting their own integrity and experiencing guilt for things that they may not have done.

A very intense fear is of snakes (*Carcinosin*, *Lachesis*, *Sepia*). Snakes were vividly imagined during the provings. There were delusions of snakes within the body and all around. Hering has:

'Sensation or delusion of being surrounded by myriads of snakes, some running like lightning up and down inside the skin, some that are inside feel long and thin; fears to put her feet on the floor lest she should tread on them and make them squirm and wind around her legs.'

From the provings we have 'dreams of snakes' often verified in practice. What is significant about the imagination projecting snakes? Snakes represent something threatening, frightening and insidious. This underlines once again the internal feeling of *Lac caninum*. Hering records: 'Sits and looks something nasty going on within them under chairs, tables, and everything in the room, expecting yet dreading to see some terrible monster creep forth, and feeling all the time that if it does it will drive her raving mad'. This clearly suggests a fear of unresolved, terrible feelings which have been buried within the subconscious and are threatening to rise up and engulf the conscious mind causing insanity. *Lac caninum* appears in 'Dreams of black water' in the repertory. Water represents the feeling aspect of the psyche and the subconscious mind. Black water suggests dark and threatening feelings, or subconscious shadows.

Perhaps a person had for many years been pleasant, dutiful and obedient, and had suppressed their negative feelings about things. Tenuous control over very negative feelings within. There is fear to express anger because it may result in being further despised

or put down. These feelings may burst out at times and be directed to family or friends. This is borne out in the provings by 'Intense ugliness and hatefulness; writes to her best friends all sorts of mean and contemptible things' (Hering). I have found this pattern of behaviour appearing in several cases. Interestingly, spiders were also imagined in the provings. Perhaps this remedy has fear of spiders (*Natrum muriaticum*, *Phosphorus*, *Calcarea carbonica*) Like *Stramonium*, fear of darkness or perhaps of their own imagination may make them want the light on all night.

As mentioned, intense nervous excitability colours *Lac caninum*. It portrays a neurotic and hysterical state of mind. *Lac caninum* types (for want of a better word), feel excited, nervous and restless within themselves. The nervous feeling may at times be accompanied by bouts of intense irritability, with cursing and swearing appearing in the rubric 'Cursing' in the repertory along with *Anacardium*, *Nitric acid*, *Nux vomica*, *Staphysagria* and other remedies.

The imagination and nervousness become so heightened that there is a fear that the mind will give way. Fear of insanity is recorded several times in the provings. Loss of control seems imminent, and shows itself in convictions of impending insanity, or a feeling as if about to faint a fear of becoming unconscious, wherein control over the conscious mind is lost and the dark force of the subconscious may take over.

Again we find the idea of tenuous control over powerful inner feelings. Hering has 'Very nervous, constant dread; a feeling as if she was going to become unconscious'. This may rise up as a fear of collapsing or losing control and an agoraphobic fear of going out (*Argentum nitricum*, *Calcarea carbonica*, *Pulsatilla*, *Tabacum*). Like *Borax*, *Lac caninum* has fear of falling downstairs. Feelings as if floating also occur, reflecting the absence of centredness of not being 'earthed' expressed in the repertory as 'Delusions - hovering in the air'. Finally, there is a marked inability to concentrate and absent mindedness; 'Makes purchases and walks off without them' and 'Forgetful'.

Physical symptoms

There may be abnormally sensitive nerves; in the provings this state was underlined by experiences of being easily startled, having intolerance to the brightness of sunlight, and feeling a disagreeable thrill on smelling flowers. The breasts, vagina and the external throat may be acutely sensitive to touch. Like *Lachesis*, there is a dislike of pressure. There may be a desire to remove rings or anything that causes pressure. *Lac caninum* has the peculiar sensitivity of not wanting the skin of the fingers or legs to touch one another. A desire to sleep in such a position that legs don't touch one another, or keep fingers apart was recorded in the provings (*Psorinum*). Sexually, increased sensibility and eroticism is represented

clearly in the provings, 'Hysteria at the height of orgasm'. The genitals become so sensitive that sensations may be almost too much to bear.

Symptoms affecting the breasts are particularly prominent. As *Lac caninum* is bitches' milk, no wonder the breasts are a most important area of focus within this remedy. Breasts represent nurture within the psyche. In *Lac caninum* this may evolve from an early age where the person felt, consciously or subconsciously, that they were not being nurtured and cared for. The relationship with the mother is probably more aetiological than the father. Perhaps parents were distant from the child in some way. This sort of background seems to come up in several cases. Mothers may be excessively conscientious about their children, or about children in general. Two women who were benefited profoundly by *Lac caninum* wished to adopt children, even though they had their own. Breasts may develop tumours and lumps, or become excessively swollen and painful.

There may be thrush like symptoms with soreness and itching of the vulva. Pains in the ovaries occur, particularly the left (*Lachesis*, *Platina*). Menses may be membranous or stringy and may smell ammoniacal. There may be bearing down as if everything were about to come out of the vulva. Flatus escapes from the vagina. Constipation occurs before and after menses. *Lac caninum* is a most important pre-menstrual remedy.

Sore throats are a frequent affliction, often occurring during or prior to menses. The throat becomes bright red and acutely sensitive. A white membrane may be present. Empty swallowing particularly is painful. Pains may characteristically go from side to side.

Pains in the lumbar area, sacrum, hips or sciatic nerves are common. They may be worse by touch and pressure, and worse at night in bed. Pains in the joints may, like *Rhus toxicodendron* be worse on initial motion. Warts may be present, on the fingers in particular. Cracking of the jaw while eating is a marked symptom.

Peculiar symptoms

A peculiar characteristic of this remedy is that pains alternate from side to side. All symptoms are worse around the time of the menses, before or during. Also like *Lachesis*, they are aggravated by touch. The food desires are for milk, whisky, spices and highly seasoned foods especially black pepper, and for salt. I have found *Lac caninum* to be complementary to *Lachesis*, *Phosphorus* and *Tuberculinum*.

Conditions in which *Lac caninum* may be found of use include vitiligo, tumours of the breast, vaginal thrush, vaginal warts, rheumatoid arthritis, chronic back or neck pains, throat problems, involuntary urination, progressive deafness, and headaches.

Comparisons

Lac caninum may easily be confused with *Lachesis*, *Argentum nitricum*, or *Phosphorus*. Like *Lachesis* there is an affinity for the throat and female genitals. It prefers the left ovary. It also has a marked aggravation around menstruation. Like *Lachesis* there is fear of snakes, and aversion to pressure which aggravates their conditions. *Lachesis* is also often highly nervous and intense, having feelings of floating and delusions or fears about snakes. The two remedies may be complementary in some cases.

Lac caninum shares with *Arsenicum* a fear of losing control, and a threatened feeling. The difference is that the enemy of *Lac caninum* lies within, whereas existential insecurity of *Arsenicum* is over outer threats. *Lac caninum*, like *Arsenicum* has fear of those things that signify loss of control. Thus there is fear of incurable disease, fear of death, fear of insanity, fear of falling and of fainting. Both these remedies desire company.

Argentum nitricum is the closest remedy to *Lac caninum* when the mental symptoms are compared. They are both in the rubric, 'Delusions she is despised' and 'Delusions of snakes'. They have similar fears. Both have fears of falling, of fainting, of insanity and of disease. They may be difficult to tell apart. Their physical symptoms may serve to differentiate.

Phosphorus with its basically pleasant disposition, nervousness, heightened imagination, and fear of disease may also be confused with *Lac caninum*.

Case 1

A middle aged man complained of rheumatoid arthritis for several years. The hands, right elbow, and lower lumbar spine were inflamed and painful. The pains were worse on waking, on initial motion, from jarring and from touch. They were better from motion. There was a summer aggravation. The affected parts were very sensitive to touch. He also complained of burning in the soles, allergic skin reactions (sensitive skin), and bladder problems. Urination was retarded, and scanty with a feeling as if the bladder had not been completely emptied. There was a skin irritation around the testicles with desquamation. He had warts on the fingers, fear of snakes and heights. He craved spicy foods. He felt depressed and irritable. Concentration was poor, with mistakes while writing and a tendency to absent mindedness. He also had suffered recently from profound depression in which he was hateful towards his family.

Medorrhinum, *Sulphur* and *Fluoric acid* were given without result. *Lac caninum* was given after re-repertorization, with completely curative effect. The bladder and skin symptoms also disappeared. It has the modalities, food desires and bladder symptoms. He was finally given *Lachesis* on the basis of summer-time aggravation and a recent sense of constriction across the chest.

Case 2

A young mother presented with a small nodular and indurated lump over the laryngeal area of the throat. It was painful to touch, easily palpable and mobile. She had great anxiety that it was cancer. She was an extremely nervous, and vivacious person. Her imagination was active, with vivid, fantasies which were at times confused with reality. She worried over-much about her children, and created worries at times of quiescence. She was very maternal and had fostered a young girl. She was exceedingly sympathetic and helpful to others in need. She felt over-excited and unstable emotionally, and had fears of going insane. At times everything seemed unreal and she wondered if she had dreamed it all. She felt anger at her husband for being critical of her, but didn't express it. All her senses were acutely sensitive. Before menses she suffered from swollen and painful breasts. The lump became painful and enlarged before and during menses. She also complained of arthritic pains in the hands and wrists, with stiffness of the joints.

After *Phosphorus*, prescribed on account of her vivid imagination and vivacious, sympathetic disposition, she was given *Conium*, with little notable effect. *Lac caninum* was then given on the basis of fear of insanity, delusions – everything seems unreal, Fear of disease (cancer), painful breasts before menses. The lump disappeared. She became more calm and centred emotionally, and her arthritic pains disappeared.

Case 3

A lady consulted for pre-menstrual tension. She suffered from mood changes, painful breasts, and at times a sore throat before menses. She had received laser treatment for an erosion of the cervix a year before, and there were now signs of a return of this condition. She was of lean build and excitable temperament. She tended to worry, particularly about her health, and had a pronounced fear of cancer. If she read about diseases, she imagined that she had them. She also feared snakes, heights and the dark. She reported that her senses were extremely sensitive. she was sensitive to odours and to noises. Even sexually she was almost too sensitive. She remembered that as a child she sometimes felt that there was something wrong with her, as her mother didn't give her much affection. As a consequence she lacked confidence, and tended to keep things to herself. In her relationship with her husband she was insecure and possessive. She particularly liked fish, bananas, and prawns (shellfish). She had a dislike of fats and chocolate. Her digestion was upset by spices. She hated tight clothes and was chilly, although averse to stuffiness. Her palms sweated profusely when nervous.

My analysis of the case led me to deduce that the remedy for her emotional state was *Lachesis*, and her constitution probably *Phosphorus*. *Lachesis* has aggravation before menses, fear of snakes, dislike of tight clothing and stuffiness, painful breasts before menses, and desire for prawns. *Phosphorus* is often of lean build and excitable temperament. It has anxiety about health, fear of cancer, oversensitive senses, aggravation from spices, desire for fish and also bananas (*Thuja* and *Theridion*). The lack of confidence and introversion was not explained by either remedy. I therefore felt uneasy.

Lachesis 200 was given with little effect. When I next saw her she was complaining of attacks of faintness. She feared to go out lest she faint. Her anxiety about cancer had reached unmanageable proportions. *Lac caninum* was given. Her faintness and pre-menstrual symptoms disappeared, and her throat troubles resolved. Her fear of cancer was greatly allayed, and she felt calmer and more confident. A subsequent smear test showed no sign of positive cells. She was later given *Phosphorus*.

Case 4

A young lady of lean and nervous temperament who complained of pre-menstrual symptoms and back pains which alternated sides, also had genital herpes. She felt such self disgust about the herpes that she had not been able to tell her boyfriend about it for two years prior to the consultation. She had dreams of a dark and threatening monster in the basement of her house (subconscious mind).

Lac caninum was given on the basis of: dreams of devils, pains alternate sides, and the pre-menstrual symptoms. It cured her pre-menstrual symptoms, her back pain, and greatly improved her mental attitude.

Summary of confirmatory indications

Guilt or self-disgust
Fear of disease particularly cancer
Fear of fainting or collapse
Fear of snakes
Fear of insanity
Great nervousness and anxiety, with feelings of losing control
Sensitivity of the nerves
Sexual problems – guilt or over-sensitivity
Pre-menstrual symptoms with sore breasts, worse from slightest touch or jar
Scanty breast milk (*Lac defloratum*)
Throat problems: glistening white or red patches
Pains and symptoms which alternate sides
Worse around menses, touch, jar, cold air
Better cold drinks, open air.