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Ipecacuanha, a study

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PHARMACOGNOSY

The source of this remedy is the dried root of the perennial plant *Cephaelis ipecacuanha*, one of the Rubiaceæ family, of which *Cinchona* is also a member. It occurs as a low straggling shrub, found principally in the forests of the Matto Grosso and Minas Geraes provinces of Brazil, growing in the rich, moist forest humus.

The brownish underground portion consists of a slender rhizome bearing wiry roots covered with little annular discs and more slender smooth rootlets. The rhizome arches upwards and becomes continuous with a short, green aerial stem, 5 to 9 inches in height. This bears pairs of large, petiolate, entire leaves with stipules at their base; the leaves are some 3 to 4 inches long, shaped like the head of a spear, bright green above and whitish green underneath. They are relatively few in number. The flowers are rather insignificant, white in colour and aggregated in a solitary head possessing a short round downy stalk which tends to droop with the weight of the flower head. The fruit is a cluster of purple berries, each containing two plano-convex seeds.

The plant as a whole is described as bitter, acrid and nauseating to the taste, and possessing a peculiar odour which may cause sneezing or even asthma in sensitive subjects. The roots together with portions of the rhizome are gathered from wild or cultivated plants from January to late March, dried in the sun and packed in bales made from hide.

There is a record in 1648 of the wide use of the drug in Brazil for the treatment of dysentery, and it was introduced into France for the same purpose in 1672. In subsequent years the drug became used for a great variety of ills and was combined with Opium and Potassium sulphate in the popular remedy Dover's Powder. More recently the plant's main alkaloid, emetine, in the form of the hydrochloride, has been relied on as the best available drug for the treatment of amœbic dysentery and associated liver abscess.

PHARMACOLOGY

There are a number of alkaloids in the root of the plant, the most important being emetine (60 per cent) and cephaline; other constituents include a glycoside, an acid, starch and calcium oxalate. The expectorant, emetic, diaphoretic and germicidal actions of the plant are attributed mainly to the presence of the above-mentioned alkaloids.

It is of note that the drug is not able to destroy amœbæ which are free in the lumen of the bowel, but only affects those parasites which are still in the wall of the gut or elsewhere in the tissues, e.g. the liver. The amœbicidal action of the drug is apparently, therefore, not a direct one but dependent on some factor present in the tissues of the host.

It has been observed that the smallest quantity of the powdered root in the air of a room is sufficient to induce in a sensitive individual considerable swelling and injection of the conjunctiva and of the nasal mucous membrane with resulting lachrymation, sneezing, salivation, bronchial catarrh and asthmatic respiration.

When applied to the skin as liniment the drug produces redness, itching, and occasionally a pustular eruption.

When large doses of emetine are injected hypodermically the toxic effect of the drug is revealed in severe nausea, vomiting and purging, with blood in the stools, and collapse. This indicates that the drug is excreted by the mucous membrane of the gut, inducing irritation and inflammation in the process, and dealing with any amœbæ present at the same time.

Toxic symptoms have also been observed following over-large dosage with the Fluid Extract of the drug, evidenced by severe vomiting, intermittent convulsions, apnœa, and the passage of bright red blood per rectum. A fatal issue has been recorded in children.

A poisonous action on the heart muscle has also been observed both as acute and cumulative effects. Deaths following the emetine treatment of dysentery have occurred, especially among white children in the East. It is recognized that emetine is a general protoplasmic poison tending to produce degenerative changes in liver, heart muscle, kidneys and muscle elsewhere.

The main tissue affinities of the plant, thus, appear to be with (a) the mucous lining and musculature of the digestive and respiratory tracts, giving rise to increased secretions and spasm; (b) the vomiting centre in the medulla, inducing via the pneumogastric nerve a very persistent nausea with or without vomiting; (c) heart and liver, causing degenerative changes; and (d) the skin, producing erythema and blister formation.

PHYSIOGNOMY

Pallor predominates, and a typical facies nauseatica may be present with downturned corners of mouth and well-defined naso-labial furrow. This is especially liable to be observed in children and will call to mind two other remedies, *Æthusa cynapium* and *Antimonium tartaricum*.

In fever, however, the face may be flushed and bright red or, if there is much gagging and choking, the face will become suffused and dark red owing to obstruction of the venous return from the head and face.

Again, if owing to lung involvement there is impaired æration and consequent hypoxia, the facial hue will be cyanotic associated with blue lips and nails.

The pupils tend to be large, and a gummy exudate accumulates at the lateral canthi.

Rather surprisingly the tongue usually remains clean.

Speech is affected in that the child tends to "go dumb" and the adult becomes glum and not a word is spoken.

Movements are awkward and clumsy with a tendency to bump into the furniture. Shuddering may be prominent.

PSYCHOLOGY

The *Ipecacuanha* subject manifests extreme impatience, and is described as being full of desires which are vague and ill-defined. This leads to discontent and a tendency to be scornful of anything and everything.

Children wail and scream continuously; adults are sulky and ill-humoured all day long. Everything is repugnant—a psychological nausea and disgust.

There is great sensitivity to noise, especially music played loudly.

The remedy may be called for when illness has been brought on by vexation and bottled-up displeasure.

PHYSIOLOGY

Excessive chilliness is the rule; there is no warmth in the body at all; the slightest cold is unbearable. Feels cold shudders as if from a fright or in terror; actual rigors may occur.

Appetite is seriously affected; anorexia is accompanied by aversion from all food, and this is associated with a deathly nausea which nothing relieves.

A prominent feature may be thirstlessness, when the opposite might be expected.

Sleep is restless and disturbed by vivid dreams, the content of which is not remembered. There is a tendency to sudden starting awake with a jerk.

Modalities. As would be expected there is aggravation in cold weather, but great heat is also resented. While dry weather is uncongenial there is also an adverse reaction to hot moist winds. Taking food causes aggravation, especially eating veal or pork. While contact is resented, firm pressure may give relief. Feels better in the open or when at rest with the eyes closed.

PATHOLOGY

The special feature of this remedy is that all complaints are accompanied by nausea, also very often by shuddering, yawning and malaise. The onset of the illness is sudden and progress rapid; this is in contrast with *Antimonium tart.* which is characterized by a gradual onset of symptoms.

Pains are associated with a bruised sensation, and sudden exhaustion is common. Absence of marked thirst would distinguish here from the exhaustion so characteristic of *Arsenicum album*. Fever is accompanied by severe pain between the shoulders and a sensation as if the back would break.

Hæmorrhages are prominent in connection with the remedy, occurring from any mucous surface, associated with nausea, a sinking sensation, even actual syncope. The bleeding is of oozing type with intermittent gushes of bright red blood.

Head. An occipital headache is described, associated with a bruised or crushed feeling in the bones of the skull, as if "something pierced through the skull from vertex to face, teeth or root of tongue". The whole head aches.

Hemicrania is accompanied by pallor, deadly nausea and blue rings round the eyes, vomiting may be so intractable that not even a sip of water can be retained. Prostration occurs in spells, again differing from that associated with *Arsenicum album*, which is continuous.

A bursting type of headache may occur similar to that associated with *Ptelea* and *Veratrum album*.

Eyes. Various eye symptoms are listed, notably neuralgic pains in the eye, spasm of the lids with gush of tears when the spasm relaxes; the spasm accompanies sudden severe inflammation with photophobia.

Respiratory System. Acute coryza is accompanied by much sneezing and either blockage of the nose or profuse discharge of blood-stained mucus. Copious epistaxis of bright red blood may occur. There is a tendency to downward spread.

A dry, teasing cough results from a very persistent tickle in the larynx or all the way down the air-passages.

Sudden, suffocative spasmodic cough is associated with severe dyspnoea, much wheezing and rattling in chest, accompanied by gagging and vomiting. The chest feels oppressively tight and the sufferer has to sit up in order to breathe.

The child is apt to become apnoeic while coughing, turn pale or blue, and go quite stiff.

The adult may suffer from moist asthma and stand for hours beside the open window in search of oxygen.

An indication for the remedy is capillary bronchitis in infants, of rapid onset, with great accumulation of mucus in the chest, which is full of bubbling rales; cough is spasmodic, dyspnoea acute, and phlegm is vomited. If the cough lessens but the condition worsens owing to progressive weakness and loss of expulsive power, and the lungs are still clogged with mucus, it is advisable to switch to *Antimonium tart.* in frequent doses till an adequate cough reflex is restored. Should pneumonic changes supervene, a switch to *Phosphorus* would be called for, and possibly then to *Sulphur*, if response inadequate.

The remedy may be called for in whooping-cough, if associated with epistaxis, red visage, gagging and vomiting and lack of thirst.

It also has a sphere of usefulness in relation to emphysema and asthmatic bronchitis in old people, especially when the condition is aggravated by damp or by a sudden change in the weather.

Indicated also in hæmoptysis with bright red blood, which wells up without effort, and is increased by the least exertion.

Alimentary System. Toothache is mentioned with a sensation as if the tooth was being pulled out.

Very characteristic is a combination of nausea with persistent vomiting which does not, however, relieve the nausea. This is accompanied by an abundant flow of watery saliva. The tongue remains clean and may even look pale. *Antimonium crudum* may present a somewhat similar picture but the tongue will be thickly coated and milky white as if it had been whitewashed.

The condition may occur after over-indulgence in rich food, or it may accompany chronic gastritis. Severe hæmatemesis may demand the remedy.

Cutting or pinching pains occur in and below the epigastrium: the pains pass from left to right and are so severe that the sufferer cannot stir or breathe till the pain passes off; vomiting and prostration are concomitants.

Flatulent colicky pains may be felt in the region of the umbilicus and a sensation as if "the bowels were grasped by a hand" or as if "the stomach was hanging down". The abdomen may be distended, tympanitic and tender to the touch.

Dysenteric symptoms are accompanied by an almost continuous urge to stool and awful tenesmus; nausea and vomiting are prominent, and may even be the first symptom. The stools are slimy and usually contain blood.

Choleraic diarrhoea in infants is characterized by stools which are grass-green in colour or foamy and fermented in appearance, like molasses. The child passes copious amounts of greenish slime.

Nervous System. The remedy may be called for in connection with cerebro-

spinal meningitis associated with vomiting of everything ingested. a red raw tongue, severe convulsions especially affecting the left side, and possibly opisthotonus. The face is red and flushed.

Urinary System. Shooting pains are felt in the loin associated with hæmaturia. There is a frequent urge to urinate and bright red blood and small clots are passed. The urine appears turbid with a sediment like brick dust. Distress is felt in the whole length of the urinary tract and nausea and vomiting are likely concomitants.

Genital System. Here the most prominent indication is bleeding. This may be a menorrhagia after taking cold or after a shock, or some other form of uterine hæmorrhage, showing a steady flow of bright red blood, or intermittent gushes with oozing in between. The bleeding is accompanied by nausea, faintness, and by air hunger if excessive.

Another indication is in threatened abortion with pinching pains around the umbilicus; the pains tend to fly from left to right and nausea is present.

Locomotor System. Pains are felt in bones as if bruised, and tingling may be noticed in the joints which feel "dislocated" or as if the part had "gone to sleep".

Skin. Pruritus occurs in association with nausea. The itching is especially violent in arms and thighs; the sufferer must scratch till vomiting ensues, and this affords some relief.

POSOLOGY

The 200c potency has been found effective in both hæmorrhage and asthma. Complementary remedies are *Arsenicum album* and *Cuprum metallicum*.

Antimonium tartaricum, a study

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PHARMACOGNOSY

This remedy is prepared from tartar emetic, antimony-potassium tartrate, which may be in the form of a white powder or colourless, transparent crystals. Much used formerly as an emetic it carried serious risk being a highly poisonous substance when absorbed into the body. Its use medicinally was revived early in the present century for the treatment of kala-azar, the debilitating and often fatal disease associated with infection by the Leishman-Donovan body. Intravenous injection of the drug produces severe vomiting; treatment had to be protracted. Other and less nauseating antimony preparations are now available.

The substance has been used for homicidal purposes, though much less frequently than arsenic. It produces symptoms very similar to those resulting from arsenic poisoning, but the symptoms are more rapid in onset and more grave in effect.

PHARMACOLOGY

The salt has affinity with a variety of tissues and organs, notably mucous membranes, leading to irritation and increased secretory activity. This is manifested in such conditions as gastro-enteritis and bronchial catarrh. Fatty degenerative changes are produced in the myocardium, in the liver and the kidneys. The latter organs and the skin are also affected as the poison is being eliminated. A more direct action on the skin causes an erythema with formation of a papular or pustular eruption. An effect on the central nervous system is to produce profound depression of mind and impaired vitality of medullary centres.

The symptoms of *Acute Poisoning* are instructive. On swallowing a dose there is an immediate onset of symptoms—a metallic taste in the mouth, burning in throat and stomach, violent and incessant vomiting, severe purging and tenesmus. Profound depression follows with vertigo, extreme thirst, subnormal temperature, thready pulse, cyanosis, cramps, coma, collapse, and death in 12 to 24 hours. The skin is cold and covered in clammy sweat.

Chronic Poisoning is characterized by anorexia, nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, emaciation, great depression, associated with headache, giddiness, mental confusion, dimness of vision and drowsiness. Finally extreme exhaustion ends in death.

PHYSIOGNOMY

The seriously ill patient looks almost moribund. Cheeks are pale or cyanosed, there are dark rings round the sunken eyes. The nose looks pinched, with actively dilating nostrils; lips and nails are blue, or lips are pale and shrivelled.

There is a cold sweat on the forehead; hands and feet are cold as ice. There is constant twitching of the facial muscles and tremors are present affecting head and hands.

Respiration is distressed with gasping and bubbling, and the sufferer is obliged to sit up in order to breathe. The child exhibits much pitiful whining and crying, associated with moaning respiration.

A horrible pungent odour is present in the sickroom—the smell of death.

PSYCHOLOGY

The child shows a great aversion from being touched or looked at, but likes to be carried and clings to those around.

The adult manifests irritability, restlessness, anxiety, doesn't want to be meddled with or bothered; everything is a burden. There is often a despair of recovery such as is met with under *Arsenicum album*, *Natrum sulphuricum* and *Psorinum*.

PHYSIOLOGY

The *Antimonium tart.* patient feels chilly but is very averse from a stuffy hot atmosphere or being too heavily wrapped up. This is especially so when there is much respiratory distress accompanied by a desire for cool air and to have the windows thrown wide open.

There may be a craving for apples, as also for acid drinks, which tend to disagree. There is aversion from and, indeed, intolerance of milk, which incites nausea and vomiting. In association with nausea there is often a deadly loathing of all forms of food.

Thirst may be conspicuously absent or, on the other hand, intense for sour drinks. These have to be swallowed in sips as fluids are apt to be vomited soon after ingestion. The unthirsty patient will show annoyance when offered a drink, probably because of the fear of fresh vomiting.

Drowsiness is very pronounced, especially after a bout of vomiting. The child on waking seems stupid. The drowsiness may alternate with giddiness.

Cold sweats occur in association with pallor and prostration.

Modalities. Aggravation results from exposure to damp cold, and from change in the weather, also from bathing in cold water. There is aggravation from lying down and in the evening. Relief is obtained from cool air, by sitting erect, by belching, and by bringing up phlegm.

PATHOLOGY

General. There is no sudden violent onset as is characteristic of *Aconitum*, *Belladonna* and *Ipecacuanha*, but a gradual subsiding into a state of poor reactivity and prostration.

There is only low fever, with general hypotonus, chilliness and cold sweats. Mucous membranes tend to become ulcerated with resulting hæmorrhage from nose or stomach.

Jerkings, tremblings accompany great weariness, weakness and lassitude; there may be a generalized soreness and tenderness all over the body.

Head. A variety of stitches, shooting and other pains have been noted in the head, but the most characteristic condition is one of dullness, confusion and bewilderment accompanied by the aforesaid drowsiness.

Eyes feel fatigued, bruised; wants to keep lids firmly closed. The eye symptoms

accompanying measles, scarlet fever, small pox and other exanthemata may call for this remedy.

Respiratory System. Fluent nasal catarrh is often accompanied by ulceration and uncontrollable epistaxis.

Every change to wet weather tends to bring on a fresh catarrh of throat, and involve larynx, trachea and lungs. There is a great accumulation of mucus in the air passages, but cough is weak and feeble, and tends to be worse at 4 a.m. There is great difficulty in raising the sputum which is thick, ropy, white in colour and as sticky as glue. Respiration is consequently noisy with coarse rattling and bubbling. The cough is made worse by anger or annoyance. This is especially so in children, and eating too tends to aggravate the cough. The remedy may be called for in whooping-cough. It should also be considered when repeated attacks of bronchitis occur in children; no sooner is the child over one chesty cold than another is contracted with the rattling respiration and concomitant weakness and debility.

The remedy is of value in relation to pneumonia associated with hepatic congestion and jaundice, meteorism, nausea and vomiting, such as occurs in alcoholics.

A further indication is in connection with recurrent attacks of bronchitis in old people, with much thick white phlegm, great dyspnoea, driving from bed or causing the sufferer to sit up and ask to be fanned. The presence of yellow sputum would suggest *Ammoniacum*.

Asthma also may require this remedy, when there is aggravation at 3 a.m., causing the patient to sit up, with much wheezing, rattling and cyanosis. On falling asleep severe dyspnoea brings on fresh distress.

Alimentary System. Copious saliva accumulates in the mouth. The tongue may be heavily coated with white fur or streaked with red.

Nausea is severe and very persistent, accompanied by great anxiety, much yawning, cold sweat on brow, prostration and trembling; it is, however, relieved by vomiting.

There is much uneasy vomiting, gagging and retching, associated with tremors of hands and drowsiness. It may lead to actual fainting, and is sometimes eased by lying on the right side. Eructations taste like rotten eggs. The vomitus is watery, contains green bile, food and much slimy, ropy mucus.

Gastric symptoms are accompanied by superficial tenderness in the epigastrium. There may be a sensation as if the "belly was full of stones", which is aggravated while sitting and on stooping. Sometimes there is a complaint of an indescribable sinking feeling in the stomach.

Sharp cutting colicky pains are associated with thin, slimy, offensive, grass-green stools. Combined vomiting and purging may induce a state of collapse suggestive of *Veratrum album*. With *Antimonium tart.* there is more drowsiness whereas with *Veratrum alb.* there is more cold sweat on the forehead and the whole body is of marble coldness.

Cardio-vascular System. General hypotonus may give rise to palpitations, often with a complaint of a warm or hot feeling in the heart region. Circulatory weakness may result in œdema.

Urinary System. A variety of bladder symptoms are described, among them

burning in the urethra during and after urination; some blood may be passed in the urine at end of the act, accompanied by violent pain in the bladder. Nocturnal frequency may occur with burning thirst and scanty urine.

Locomotor System. Violent pain may occur in the lumbosacral region and the slightest effort to move will cause retching and the outbreak of a cold, clammy sweat. A dragging downward sensation may be felt as of a heavy weight in the coccyx. Gouty infiltration of joints, and dropsical swellings of joints are associated with this remedy.

Skin. Pustular eruptions occur, tending to leave a bluish-red mark when healed. The remedy may be called for in impetigo or smallpox, also in chickenpox if the pustules are large and severe.

POSODOGY

The remedy is not usually indicated at the start of an illness but when weakness and lack of reactivity have supervened, unless the sufferer is already in a debilitated condition before the more obvious illness sets in.

It is of special value in chest conditions both acute and chronic as described above. In chronic bronchitic patients the 6c can be given daily for considerable periods.

It is useful in relation to the ill effects of vaccination when *Thuja* has not given relief.

It is indicated in children suffering from suppressed eruptions, especially when there are associated head symptoms and dyspnoea in a desperately ill child.

It may be needed in sequence to *Ipecacuanha* in chest complaints in children.

Baryta carb. is complementary to the remedy, notably in old people who have difficulty in raising sputum.

A rash resulting from *Antimonium tart.* can be antidoted with *Conium*.





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