

## THE LITTLE ANXIETIES OF CHILDHOOD

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*(Translated by Dr. Marianne Harling)*

The anxious are soothed and cared for. The timid are rebuked with some scorn. But how many timid children are really little sufferers from anxiety neurosis?

Fear of thieves or fear of the dark, fear of being left or of being lonely, fear of dogs, of wolves, of ghosts or even of death, these are the real and mythical shapes which clothe the distress of the young of mankind, the most vulnerable of all living creatures.

Psychologists have rightly sought for an explanation of the terrors of childhood in mistaken or careless upbringing. It is easy to agree that the panic which invades certain children at the prospect of being alone may be the echo of a too early weaning, or of a sudden separation from their mother. It can also be held that these terrors may be the instinctive expression of an ancestral fear, a race memory just as the mouseling fears a cat even before it has experienced her hostility.

But that is only one aspect of the problem.

### Physical and Psychological Cure

Anxiety, even in the child, is the expression of a pathological condition. It can be treated, and cured, with the help of remedies, in almost the same way as a fever or a cough. Study of the materia medica, and more especially the experience which homœopathic physicians have of Hahnemannian therapeutics, show that the administration of a well-chosen remedy alleviates and cures both physical and psychological disharmonies together.

Results of homœopathic treatment underline the double character, psychological and somatic, of the small anxieties of childhood. The ambivalence of most homœopathic remedies makes it easier to find the effective one. Often a physical characteristic will dictate the prescribing of a remedy which cures the psychological disorder. And conversely, a remedy indicated

by a particular mental characteristic will alleviate a somatic symptom which had been hitherto ignored.

In contrast to allopathy which, whilst it does not neglect sufferers from anxiety must—for want of anything better—content itself with solutions as transitory as they are superficial, such as the administration of sedatives and tranquillisers, homœopathy concerns itself with the patient's background and constitution, and attempts to reconstruct the psychic or psychological disorder in its nosological context.

#### **Position of Homœopathy**

In this way homœopathy is in advance of classical medicine. For it is certain that the domain of psychiatry, as it was at first conceived, is narrowing, and will narrow further as medical science progresses. Psychiatry is becoming "de-spiritualised", more and more importance is being attached to hormonal disequilibria, to hereditary disease, to alcoholism, to tuberculosis, to sycosis. Psychopathy is gaining a recognised place.

The time will come when mental disorders will not be considered as taints any more than dysmenorrhœa, or disturbances of cardiac rhythm. We are not quite there yet. But homœopathy, through the ambivalence of its remedies, is well on the way.

In the same way as functional disorders precede lesions, psychic and somatic are but two different expressions of the process. Their co-existence or sequence do not run to any fixed pattern; they are none the less characteristic.

Numerous remedies include anxiety in their pathogenesis. Childish anxiety, more often hidden than that of adults, and therefore more difficult to disclose, answers to a relatively restricted range of remedies. We shall limit ourselves to mentioning those which we personally have used.

ACONITUM can be used in the anxiety accompanying a febrile condition, but can equally well be prescribed as a basic remedy for restless hyperactive subjects who are afraid of everything; afraid of being run over whilst crossing the road, of poisoning themselves when taking their medicine, afraid of going in a car or a lift, of seeing people, of meeting ghosts, unreasonably afraid

of everything, to the point of irritating the best-intentioned parents.

ARSENICUM ALBUM, with its agitation and burning thirst, is most often met with as the remedy of anxiety in the course of an acute illness. The child is nearly delirious and is afraid of dying, or he thinks he sees ghosts.

BORAX is an agitated neurotic. (GELSEMIUM (q.v.) is an inhibited neurotic.) Like PULSATILLA (q.v.) BORAX relates to children of unstable mood, passing quickly from tears to laughter. But whilst PULSATILLA is gentle, BORAX is irritable. It fits the agonised restlessness of very small children. The baby who wakes with a jump because someone near him has shut a book or turned a key, or because a car has passed beneath the window, or a dog has barked, is a fit subject for BORAX.

In adults, the materia medica describes vertigo on coming downstairs. The BORAX baby is afraid of falling, and he shows it; when he is being put to bed he clings on to his mother. If whilst he is lying flat on her knees being changed, his head should protrude the slightest distance over empty space, his lower jaw will tremble, and he may begin to cry.

Even without any disturbing noise he jumps in his sleep; if he awakens he clings to the side of the cot. His fear of falling is really founded upon sensations of vertigo.

On the physical side it must be remembered that BORAX is the remedy for aphthæ, stomatitis, and weeping eruptions.

BROMIUM, like STRAMONIUM and CAUSTICUM (q.v.) is anxious at nightfall. He thinks that he sees ghosts and Will o'the Wisps, is afraid of being followed, and lives in a world peopled by spectres or fairy-tale characters whom he endows with reality.

BROMIUM is indicated in children who lack gaiety, are contrary, have no fixed interest, and find difficulty in learning lessons at school. They may be little asthmatics, or subject to adenopathies. At puberty they may develop acne, especially on the shoulders. The amelioration of all symptoms at the seaside is quite characteristic.

### A Great Remedy

CALCAREA CARBONICA, a great children's remedy, is slow and timid, rather than anxious. He has not enough intellectual development to show anxiety. To be anxious required a degree of awareness which the CALCAREA CARBONICA child has not yet reached, and it is always retrospectively, when hearing the past history of an adult, that one thinks one could well have prescribed CALCAREA CARB.

CARBO VEGETABILIS is haunted by fear of ghosts and of the dark, but it is not really a children's remedy. It is simply mentioned in passing.

CAUSTICUM relates to physically weak subjects with slow medullary development. As babies, they were late in holding up their heads, did not show any early desire to stand up, were slow in finding their balance, and in addition to this neurological retardation sometimes showed a very marked emaciation of the lower limbs. Enuresis is almost the rule. There is a frequent tendency to skin eruptions, specially retro-auricular eczema and blepharitis.

The CAUSTICUM child does not react well. He is sad morose and lifeless. Knowing his own feebleness, he seeks protection, needs affection and a comforting presence. He will not stray far from his mother and his relations; and he is often tearful.

When he is brought to the doctor, he shows his anxiety and worries about what will be done to him. Unlike the LYCOPodium (q.v.) patient who is grumblingly reserved, his mounting anxiety can be felt. He asks: "Is he going to prick me? Is he going to hurt me?" He says to his mother; "Let's go; you won't leave me? I want to get dressed." His heart beats fast. He never stops asking questions. He wants to pass water, and sometimes, like a little frightened dog, wets himself there and then. The combined efforts of his mother and the doctor do not reassure him.

But he is not self-centred and is not only worried on his own account. Listen to little CAUSTICUM at the Punch and Judy show, at the circus, at the cinema, as soon as someone frightening appears, armed with a stick, perhaps. He is full

of anxiety for the other members of the cast: "He isn't going to kill him? I don't want him to hit him. I want to go...?" and he begins to cry.

#### **Horror of Darkness**

This little patient's anxiety is worst in the evening, in the dark: to have to go down to the cellar, to be sent to the garden to pick a sprig of parsley at nightfall, is a real martyrdom, and without a grown-up in the room he can't go to sleep. Thus in the child's mentality can be seen the worried sadness of CAUSTICUM, its terror of being murdered, its sympathy for the troubles of others, its horror of darkness and solitude.

CHINA is only indicated in children in cases of diarrhœa, abdominal meteorism and hæmorrhage. The mental hyperactivity contrasting with physical weakness, and the nocturnal distress, are but rarely characteristic of children's ailments. The fear of animals, especially of dogs, should be remarked upon. It may be useful in the case of those children who are awakened at night by the fear that there is a wolf in their bedroom.

DROSERÀ is usually prescribed as the remedy for a dry cough in whooping-cough or tracheitis. It is also a precious remedy in disorders of the tracheo-bronchial lymph-nodes. It can be of great service in certain primary infections which manifest themselves by an enlargement of the hilar lymph-nodes. But too often forgotten are its mental symptoms, as listed in the materia medica.

The little DROSERÀ patient is worried, always restless, afraid of everything and everybody, rather like the CAUSTICUM patient; but he is unhappier, more worried by solitude than by darkness, and is at the same time less timid and more apprehensive.

#### **Anticipatory Fear**

GELSEMIUM is an inhibited neurotic. It can be indicated in subjects whose mental capacities are reduced, for instance during the course of an acute illness. These are not the cases which interest us here.

GELSEMIUM as a remedy for infantile anxiety is used for

those children who, at the prospect of an examination, of a composition, of having to run a race, or of making any move whatsoever, are seized with panic, do not know what to say, forget their names, stammer, seem stupid, all this because of the anticipatory fear with which the test, whatever it is, inspires them.

GELSEMIUM, remedy for funk, can be profitably given to scholars who lose marks—for fear of losing them.

HYOSCYAMUS is more a remedy for acute delirium or disorders of character rather than of simple anxiety. It can however usefully be given to certain children who suffer from phobias, are afraid of solitude, afraid of being bitten by a dog, or, more rarely, afraid of being poisoned.

IGNATIA sovereign remedy of psycho-somatic disorders, is often indicated for the modern child who, sharing the life of his elders, often, alas, shares their worries too.

Between a mother obsessed with the fear of cancer, and a father preoccupied with interplanetary missiles, faced with a television set which makes him a spectator at the most perilous surgical procedures, intoxicated by the radio, by radiations and by radar, how can he maintain the serenity proper to his age?

Fortunately the little IGNATIA patient retains the ability to turn over the page, and if he is worried, a distraction or a treat will soon chase away his worry, which is never deep. Anxiety which can be relieved by distraction is the key indication for IGNATIA.

#### **Dreams of Parents' Death**

LACHESIS, the woman's remedy, can suit prepubertal little girls who dream that their parents are dead, and take from this nightmare grist for their anxiety. You will find them crying in a corner at the thought of being left alone in the world. They are often jealous, suspicious children, who feel themselves wronged by the presence of a brother, a sister, or of their mother if their affections are centred on their father. Their anxiety sometimes makes them think of suicide, but instead they spare themselves and claim the care and attention of those who surround them.

I remember a little boy with personality difficulties whose anxiety was chiefly manifested by jealousy, and by hostility towards his companions. I asked him, as I almost always do, to draw for me. His drawings were characteristic, full of snakes, crocodiles, and terrifying animals with sharp teeth and gaping jaws, such as had not been seen since the deluge.

This boy often spoke of death, was worried by it, and by the thought that his parents might leave him. Amongst other remedies I prescribed him LACHESIS and STRAMONIUM. His behaviour improved and at the same time the theme of his drawings changed; the diplodocus gave place to horses and cows which seemed much more reassuring.

#### Well-Defined Characteristics

The LYCOPodium subject has such well-defined somatic characteristics that it is easy to recognise him. Must we recall his prematurely aged appearance, his under-developed body contrasting with a protruding, flatulent, over-developed abdomen, his pale brown complexion, the accentuation of the nasolabial folds.

Anorexia is interrupted by sudden pangs of hunger; the child can hardly wait for his meals; but after having swallowed a few mouthfuls with voracity, he is too quickly satisfied.

Another contrast is apparent in his bowel habits; the child wants to evacuate, but often can only pass small hard stools with great efforts. The little patient complains of abdominal pain caused by flatus which he cannot pass. Often he leaves the table to lie flat on his stomach on a chair, which seems to relieve him a bit.

When the somatic symptoms are clear, it is easy to recognise the indications for this remedy. But sometimes your attention will only be attracted by the mental characteristics, and a careful interrogation will afterwards elicit the hitherto unmentioned digestive signs.

Here is a little boy who has been brought for asthma or eczema, or merely because his physical development is unsatisfactory. You are struck at once by his grumpy and reserved appearance. He stays behind his mother, stiff, worried and

unhappy. All your efforts to make friends with him are in vain; he will not say "Good-morning" and even refuses the toy you offer him. He looks at you and draws his own conclusions but you won't get a word out of him.

#### **Horror of Anything New**

See him at home, he is quite different. In familiar surroundings, surrounded by well-known objects, he has lost what seemed to be his fear. The little LYCOPodium patient has above all a horror of anything new. I can think of one little patient who, to every alluring proposal made by the adults, invariably replied: "I'd rather not!" "Do you want to play with the little girl?"—"I'd rather not!" "Would you like to come to the circus?"—"I'd rather not!"

On the other hand, little LYCOPodium does not want to be alone; solitude depresses him; but he doesn't want to meet new people either. He is unsociable, does not like contradiction, does not want to lend his toys because he is afraid they will be spoilt; he is too eccentric to take kindly to a playmate who is not used to his ways. He is irritable, gets cross, and feels himself to be injured.

These unhappy episodes with other children remain with him as bad memories, and aggravate his misanthropy.

When adults object to his hostile reserve he feels that he has been misjudged, and his pride is hurt. Turned back more and more upon himself, but nervous when he is alone, little LYCOPodium is rarely completely relaxed; only his nearest and dearest can appreciate his intelligence and his sensibility.

#### **Most Frequent Remedy**

NATRUM MURIATICUM is undoubtedly the most frequently prescribed of children's remedies. The remedy of demineralisation of irregular growth, of under-development, its somatic symptoms are too well-known for us to have to recall them here.

Mentally, the NATRUM MURIATICUM subject is sensitive and emotional, always on the verge of tears. Indeed one could almost say that he seeks out sad occasions to lend some shape



and pretext to his morose disposition. He is full of fears and apprehensions, but above all he is afraid of the dark and of thieves. This is the child who looks into the wardrobe and under the bed before going to sleep. But it doesn't reassure him; he sobs under the blankets, nothing dries up his tears, and consolation makes them come doubly fast.

PULSATILLA is more timid than anxious. Melancholy and sad, the PULSATILLA child can stand in front of you dumb and blushing, obstinately refusing the sweet you offer him, petrified by a taboo which the grown-ups cannot understand. And, whilst by every possible means you try to coax him out of his mutism, you feel that he is being tortured, that he wishes the end of the world would come, rather than that the conversation should continue.

Suddenly, his resistance ended, his eyes fill with tears, and he throws himself into his mother's skirts, clinging on with both hands and hiding his face. Then if she can find the soothing words he is waiting for the wretch will dry his tears and you can see him smile. You must understand that the poor little fellow would like to be less frightened, and would be happy if he could make friends.

SILICEA is chilly, thin and undernourished, in spite of a surprisingly large appetite. He is subject to enlargement of the lymph glands, and to fetid foot-sweats. His physical characteristics help to distinguish him from the CAUSTICUM subject, the mentalities of the two remedies being pretty close to one another.

The little SILICEA patient is full of apprehension. He lacks confidence in himself, and always thinks that he will be incapable of writing a composition or learning a lesson. "I cannot read," one little six-year-old girl said to me, "because I don't know *how* to." She did not think she would be able to learn, and was in despair.

The SILICEA subject's lack of self-confidence plays its part in the difficulty he has in fixing his attention. He is too tired to stick to a task which he is anyhow too timid to undertake. Less worried than CAUSTICUM, he is also less tearful, and, with

his back to the wall he can be annoyed, can grumble, and can get angry. He is really less anxious than fearful and timid.

STRAMONIUM, otherwise a remedy of delirium and states of dementia, can profitably be prescribed for anxious children who can't bear the dark. The little STRAMONIUM neurotic cannot sleep unless the door of his room is open, or unless a night-light is lit. He cries, gets angry, demands that someone stay with him. If he does go to sleep, he soon starts up with cries and howls of terror. The child sits up and stares haggardly, prey to a frightful nightmare, if one can judge by external manifestations. But he does not wake up, for all that; a little petting and the presence of his mother generally suffice to calm him; he goes on sleeping without having regained consciousness, and without remembering anything of what has happened.

In another case the child will formulate his fear, and thinks that he sees ghosts; a curtain blown by the wind, a garment hanging on the rail, become for him the symbols of terror. They are always nervous, often difficult children, liable to violent outbursts of rage, during which they are irritable and spiteful. But the last quality does not have to be present for prescribing this remedy which can also calm bedtime anxieties and nocturnal terrors in children who have shown no trace of spitefulness.

#### **Remedy of Obsessive Anxiety**

THUJA, the remedy of obsessive anxiety, in contrast to IGNATIA, suits subjects who will not allow themselves to be distracted from their preoccupations. They are little sycotics already tainted by heredity and environment. Born of parents who are too preoccupied with their health, growing up amongst adults afflicted with hypochondria, the precocious little THUJA neurotic will talk of his lungs, of his liver, of his heart, just like a "grown-up", alas!

Brought up by parents who overwhelm him with advice, with warnings, with mufflers, with cough-mixtures, he is from his earliest years submitted to all the vaccinations popularised by medical articles in the lay press. Thus the sycotic diathesis is transmitted from father to son, on both the psychic and somatic levels.

The THUJA subject takes life seriously, tackles his problems, leaves nothing to chance. From childhood he lacks those two virtues of youth, freedom from care, and serenity.

To sum up, then, the following remedies are indicated:—

Fear of the dark: CAUSTICUM, NATRUM MURIATICUM, CARBO VEGETABILIS.

Fear of thieves: NATRUM MURIATICUM, of animals (dogs): HYOSCYAMUS, CHINA.

Fear of ghosts and spectres: STRAMONIUM, BROMIUM.

Fear of illness: THUJA, IGNATIA.

Fear of people, of the unknown: CAUSTICUM, LYCOPODIUM.

Fear of death: ARSENICUM ALBUM, ACONITUM, LACHESIS.

Anxiety takes special forms in children. More simple and primitive than that of the adult, it runs the risk of being misunderstood. It is for the doctor to treat it, and for the parents and teachers to unravel it.

Often, consultation with a psychologist will lay bare the part played by anxiety in certain behaviour difficulties, and when the roots round which the anxiety has organised itself have been disclosed, they can be effectively dealt with. We have said that anxiety is a symptom, amongst others, which can draw the attention of the homœopathic physician to the remedy it signifies, as Dr. Leon Vannier teaches.

The moral climate in which the child lives and must develop plays a most important part which must never be forgotten. Domestic harmony, healthy literature, well-chosen recreation, are all part of a mental hygiene which, from birth, will contribute towards preserving balance, the primary element of happiness.

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