

## WHICH REMEDY

DR. D. M. GIBSON

*Colchicum*

*Colocynthis*

A corm and a cucumber, a lily and a gourd. These two remedies although botanically belonging to different families, nevertheless share a great many similarities symptomatically. They are found together in many rubrics of the repertory and both are listed in the same group by emanometer tests. Each remedy, however, has its own personality and its own distinguishing characteristics.

### The Plant

*Colchicum autumnale*, the autumn crocus, is a most peculiar plant and behaves quite unlike the rest of its family, the lilies. While other plants are gaily flowering and producing their fruit and seeds, this plant remains underground disdaining or shunning the hot summer sun and ignoring the normal rhythm of leaf, blossom, fruit.

Then suddenly in the warmer days of the autumn, during Indian summer, the flower rushes into view, rising from an underground corm which is not a bulb but a stem node formed from the underground rhizome. Leafless and unprotected this slender, somewhat pallid, delicately mauve, crocus-like blossom arises in its brave beauty when all around the flowers are fading and the leaves falling. Boldly it flaunts its loveliness, defying convention, and meriting its title "naked maiden".

Its three dark green ovate leaves do not appear above ground till the following March or April, when they bring with them a large three-valved capsular fruit. It is July before the seeds are mature, an unusually long time for the ripening process, and it is not till then that the seed-vessel bursts and liberates them.

The members of the lily family do not normally behave in this unconventional independent manner. As one writer has

pointed out, there is significance in this distorted rhythm, this natural process arising at the wrong site and at the wrong time. While flower, leaf and fruit are being formed underground a virulent poison is being manufactured in the plant in the shape of an alkaloid, Colchicine.

Colchicine is a mitotic poison interfering with the process of normal cell-division. It disturbs the rhythm of bone-marrow activity and may thus bring about either leucopenia or leucocytosis, a shortage or a plethora respectively of white blood cells (granulocytes). It possesses anti-allergic and anti-phlogistic properties and can thus interfere with the body's natural defences as manifested by inflammation. It poisons the capillary vessels of the circulation causing hypermæia (congestion) and hæmorrhages.

Although the flower possesses a delicate and alluring beauty the plant is acrid to the taste and has a nauseous odour. All its parts are poisonous, even when dried, and many cases of fatal poisoning have been recorded. Calves and infants have died through drinking the milk of cows which had eaten the plant a short time before. The case is on record of a woman at Covent Garden who died as the result of eating the corms in mistake for onions.

*Colocynthis*, Bitter Apple, is a member of the gourd family, cucurbitaceæ, to which our English Bryonia Dioica also belongs. It is found growing wild in Mediterranean countries, and is a perennial vine with angular hispid stems, long-stalked palmate leaves and short tendrils.

The flowers are yellow and axillary in site, and the fruit is a greenish-yellow globe-shaped berry, two to four inches in diameter. The fruit is three-celled, becoming spuriously one-celled on ripening, and contains yellowish orange seeds embedded in a softish pulp.

The whole fruit has an intensely bitter taste. It contains a glucoside, Colocynthin, which possesses toxic properties, a purgative alkaloid and resins, a crystalline alcohol, Citrullol, gum etc. It is marketed either as Colocynth Pulp or as Colocynth Apples (the whole fruit with the epicarp removed).

Like Bryonia it is a climbing plant, but it shows much less tendency to immobilisation, indulging in a twining, twisting habit of growth. Its bristly stems suggest unsociability.

#### Effects in the Body

Both plants have a close relationship with the gastro-intestinal tract and with the kidneys. *Colchicum* has also an affinity with the muscular system causing great loss of tone and weakness, and with serous membranes and fibrous tissues. The latter may result in affections of the joints with "rheumatic-gouty" symptoms; also effusions may occur into the pleural, pericardial or peritoneal cavities.

*Colocynthis* shows a relation to the nervous system with a tendency to severe neuralgic pains in various parts of the body.

#### Appearances and Moods

The *Colchicum* subject looks pallid and waxy, and appears utterly exhausted; sits or lies very still, afraid to make any movement. In grave illness may slide down in the bed through a tendency to severe neuralgic pains in various parts of the body with œdema which pits on pressure with the finger tip.

Emotionally *Colchicum* is exceedingly irritable, everything wrong, nothing right, least thing annoys. This is the reaction to the sense of frustration which results from the weakness. There is also the added irritation of being oversensitive to light, noise, least jar or jolt and, especially, odours; the latter if strong or pungent may even induce fainting. Mental weakness makes the subject forgetful, absent-minded and unable to think clearly.

With *Colocynthis* the picture is different. There is none of the extreme weakness, but rather a mixed appearance of anger and anguish. The face is dark red or pale, owing to disturbance of the circulation, and may be distorted with agony. The patient is writhing about in pain or bent double, possibly pressing some hard object into the belly for relief. A child lies on its stomach or with its thighs drawn up, tossing from side to side.

The sufferer may be speechless with rage or pain, or may scream aloud. Here too there is marked irritability and trifles annoy. But this is due to pain rather than weakness. The consolations of friends are not appreciated and the sufferer wants to be let alone and is averse from making the effort to talk. The child is apt to be naughty and easily takes offence.

There is not the hypersensitivity here but instead a close association with moods, symptoms being induced or aggravated by rage, anger, indignation, chagrin, grief. There is a psychological oversensitiveness rather than a physical one.

#### Body States

*Colchicum* present a very chilly individual, like the "naked maiden" shivering in the cold autumnal air, feeling cold even when close to the fire, but subject to occasional flashes of heat.

Cold and damp aggravate, especially the cold rains of autumn, but extreme heat is also resented, being too much for the weakened constitution. There is aggravation from the least movement or even from being touched, and symptoms are worse from the evening on through the night. Warmth is appreciated and the sufferer wants the affected part warmly wrapped up and kept at rest. The fragile crocus enjoys the warmth and unfolds on still sunny days but folds up in chill cold air.

*Colocynthis* is not so chilly, but its symptoms are also worse in cold damp weather and from cold winds. Other aggravations are caused by eating fruit, drinking iced water when hot, by rest, around 4 p.m., by suppressed sweats, and especially by getting angry and annoyed.

The symptoms are relieved to some extent by firm pressure and local application of heat.

#### Pain

The pains of *Colchicum* are quite intolerable owing to the acuteness of all sensations, the degree of pain-awareness being on this account stepped up to an unbearable pitch. The pain also is associated with extreme exhaustion and muscular weak-

ness—too weak even to hold the head up. The drooping flower can no longer cope with adverse circumstances and withdraws into relative inertia below ground. *Colchicum* is associated with states of grave non-reactivity, for example in typhoid fever.

*Colocynthis* pains are paroxysmal coming on in waves. Both the onset of the pain and its relief are abrupt, but while active the suffering is intense and the sufferer is quite unable to stay still. The pains are often associated with, or brought on by, emotional causes, especially anger with indignation.

#### Digestive Tract

In this sphere there are certain similarities between the actions of these two remedies. There are also important differences in details by which one can be distinguished from the other.

With *Colchicum*, as might be expected, the teeth are oversensitive, especially when clenched tightly. The gums tend to recede with loosening of the teeth in their sockets.

A most striking feature with this remedy is deadly nausea associated with bilious vomiting and extreme prostration. There is an extraordinary aversion from all kinds of food, intense nausea being excited by sight, smell, mention or even thought of food. But it is especially the odour of food or cooking which, owing to the peculiar acuteness of the sense of smell, gives rise to the peculiar acuteness of the sense of smell, gives rise to gagging, retching, vomiting or even fainting.

Burning may be complained of in the pit of the stomach or, in some cases, an icy coldness. The belly shows drum-like distension being full of wind. Soreness or spasmodic griping pains may force the sufferer to bend double, and these are aggravated by movement and by taking food.

Loose stools, possibly dysenteric in type, are apt to occur, in the autumn especially, the stools being jelly-like in consistence or putrid, dark, streaked with blood and containing shreds of mucus. There is a tendency to rectal prolapse.

With *Colocynthis* the symptoms in this sphere are of special violence and import.

There is an extremely bitter taste in the mouth. The tongue is sore and feels as if burnt or scalded; it is either very red or heavily coated. The teeth are sore with a feeling as if the nerve of the tooth was on stretch.

There is an extreme degree of flatulent distension in the belly, associated with violent, cutting, gripping colic—as if “the gut is being ground between stones” or as if “the stomach was grasped by the clutching fingers of a giant hand”. The pains characteristically cause the sufferer to bend double but, instead of wanting to lie still, he has to keep walking about or writhing around—unable to stay put.

As Nash says, “No remedy produces more severe colic than this one, and no remedy cures more promptly.”

Kent points out that, “The vomiting of *Colocynthis* is different from that of most other remedies. Nausea does not appear at first but when the pain becomes sufficiently intense nausea and vomiting begin, the contents of the stomach are ejected, and the patient continues to retch until the severity of the suffering decreases. Colic in infants is relieved by lying on the stomach, but as soon as the position is changed they begin to scream again.”

The differences here are apparent. With *Colocynthis* also the need for firm pressure is so great that the patient may be found leaning over a chair-back or the bedpost or pushing some hard object into the belly for relief. After a while, however, the abdomen becomes so sensitive that even touch is not tolerated. Local application of heat, violent movement, the passage of flatus or stool may give relief.

There may be frequent urge to stool with passage of copious, thin, spluttery, frothy, saffron-yellow stools having a musty or mouldy odour. Dysenteric stools may be incited by taking even the least amount of food or drink, which causes a reflex activity in the large bowel.

#### Neuro-muscular Complaints

Both these remedies have important symptoms in the nervous and locomotor systems.

*Colchicum* manifests a tendency to "pins and needles", the numbness affecting wrists, hands, fingers, tissues under the nails and being specially noticed when grasping objects. There may be neuralgic pains in the head, eyes and face.

Muscular rheumatism, twitchings or a bruised feeling in the muscles may be complained of, especially affecting the nape of the neck and the chest. Redness, heat, swelling may affect the small joints of the hands and feet with sharp sticking pains, shifting about from joint to joint. The pains are aggravated by both warmth and cold, especially damp cold, and also by the least touch—hence the fear of being approached.

With *Colocynthis* there are frightful pains in spine, limbs, head, ovaries, neuralgic in type and often precipitated by anger or indignation. Sciatic pain is found, especially on the left side, which is worse at rest and relieved to some extent by lying on the affected side with the limb drawn up or by moving about. It may be accompanied by a feeling as if "the hip-joint was fixed in iron clamps".

Pains, vice-like in nature, with much stiffness are felt in the muscles, especially in the nape of the neck, the upper part of the back, the right shoulder and the palms of the hands. These pains are made worse by movement and may be accompanied by formication and numbness. They tend to be relieved by warmth and also by the passage of flatus from the bowel. They are probably due to localised muscle spasm.

### To Sum Up

The foregoing are, perhaps, the more essential features of the *Materia Medica* pictures of these two most interesting and invaluable remedies. Finally it may be helpful to set forth in tabular form their respective prominent characteristics:—

*Colchicum**Colocynthis**Hypersensitivity**Touchiness**Intolerable pain**Agonising colic**Aggravation from movement**Relief from pressure and**Extreme weakness**movement**Deadly nausea with repug-*  
*nance for food**Aggravation from anger**Inflammatory conditions**Nausea induced by pain**Neuralgias and muscle pains**—Hahnemann, Jan., '59.***CORRIGENDA**

HAHNEMANN NUMBER (April, 1962)

1. Page 194 Footnote, 4th line, please read 1782 in place of 1882.

2. PP. 197-98, the last quotation—"We must perpetuate and increase....., so gloriously waged in the past".

We came to know later on, that this statement does not belong to Hahnemann, but to Dr. J. L. Jennings, and was published in "*The Homœopathic Recorder*" of 1914. We cannot give any further detailed reference as the volume is not available with us just now. While apologizing for the discrepancy, we may add that this fact does not any way devalue the gravity or significance of the statement.—J. N. K.