

A SIDE LIGHT ON BERBERIS VULGARIS*

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There are quite a number of drugs in our Materia Medica, which have not been proved very extensively and even if proved well, have not been applied as widely and effectively as they deserved. Their main action on certain specific functions or organs have eclipsed their versatility in other lesser known therapeutic byeways. Practically no cases are reported of the lesser known actions of such drugs. It is our duty to record and report such cases, so that we can enlarge and widen their therapeutic spectrum. We can make a more accurate application of these drugs to human suffering. Thus we can avoid failures. Berberis Vulgaris is one of these drugs. When we think over Berberis Vulgaris, we think usually of renal colic and renal stones. The large majority of our profession prescribe Vulgaris usually in mother tincture in cases of renal colic and sometimes in cases of gall bladder colic. But if you study the drug deeply and read in between the lines you find it has got numerous other possibilities. I am going to illustrate certain unusual aspects of this drug by means of some clinical cases. In my early practice I used to prescribe it only in acute renal colics or in cases where there was a history of recurrent renal colics.

Sometime ago I came across a case where a lady was suffering from severe cystitis. A lot of treatment had been done, but it gave no relief practically. She used to have frequent relapses. There was pain in urthra and bladder but only after urination. The pains were of stiching nature and they extended up to the bladder also. There was frequent urging to urination and this urging was made worse by least movement. The pains were worse also by a severe bout of coughing. Sometimes the pains ran down the hips and front of the thighs.

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The urine was full of mucus and at times with this there was a little bearing down sensation also. She was given *Berberis Vulgaris*, 20ⁿ, every six hours and to increase interval to every 24 hours in case she felt better. The medicine was to be stopped if there was quick and definite relief. On the fourth day the patient was completely comfortable and there was no pain and difficulty in urination. A relapse, a few weeks later responded again to the drug.

This drug apart from affecting the bladder, the kidneys and the gall bladder has some sorts of influence on joints and articulations. This has a definite curative action on lumbago. I am reminded of a case of a 46 years old man who complained of pain in the lower lumber region which extended to the left shoulder and down to the hips. It was more seated in the right hip. Sometimes there was so much of disability in rising from a seat that he would hold the chair by means of hands and lift his weight. There was a sort of lameness and paralytic weakness in the lumber region and he felt as if there was no backbone left. When he stood up and moved a little, he was better. Other concomitant symptoms were that he felt depressed and there was a dull heavy headache in the forehead. Appetite was poor and there was bad taste in the mouth. The one peculiarity about the patient was that he would feel better as soon he passed a lot of copious and clear urine. The moment he started this type of urine, the pain would decrease or disappear. *Rhus-Tox* helped but to a small extent. Later on, he was prescribed *Berberis 1M*. He was very much relieved and the treatment was discontinued. After two or three months he needed another repetition of the same medicine because he had a relapse but later on he never came to me for treatment for this.

This drug unfortunately has not been used as often in rheumatic and arthritic complaints as it should have been. For example this is one of the most useful drugs in certain cases of osteo arthritis and rheumatoid arthritis of the knees. There is plenty of stiffness, soreness in the knee. It is swollen even and there is sensation as if the knee is bruised and beaten. *Berberis Vulgaris* given in 3x potency, every two to four hours,

sometimes charms away the swelling and the pain in a very short time. Just as in the case cited above, with berberis pains there is certain amount of lameness, bruised feeling. The pain is usually worse on beginning to move. For example in pain in the knee, there is great difficulty in rising from sitting. The backache also is worse while lying or sitting. This reminds me of a case, which I saw a couple of years ago. It was the case of a young man of 35 suffering from arthritis of the left knee. The modalities of the pain were as mentioned above. But along with that, the peculiar feature that I noticed was that the swelling in the left knee would disappear when the patient started passing a lot of red sand in the urine and the days on which the urine was free from sand, the pain in the knee would come on. I thought of giving lycopodium but lycopodium had been already prescribed by some body with no results. So I decided to give Berberis 1M, 3 doses, every 10 minutes. The result was that he passed large quantities of red sand with frequent and copious urine. Within a course of 2 or 3 days, the knee was very much better. In this case the patient was suffering also from frequent attacks of sneezing, dull headache and postnasal catarrh but the postnasal catarrh, however, did not improve under the influence of the drug.

I found Berberis very useful for the pains in the heels worse especially in the morning when the patient first starts moving. The first few steps are very painful and the pain is as if heels are ulcerated. Here Berberis has helped me a number of times. In most of these cases I have not come across any history of renal or vesical symptoms or history of stones. If it were so, the medicine is likely to be doubly indicated in such cases. Berberis Vulgaris is often missed in cases of rheumatism of the small joints of the foot. It has got rending, stitching pain in the metatarsal bones and joints. This pain may be accompanied by swelling also. In certain cases of gouty swelling of the big toe with scanty urine I found Berberis Vulgaris coming to my aid, when other usual drugs failed to relieve. If we study the Materia Medica carefully we find that there are a number of symptoms pertaining to the foot and its joints.

Another favourite sphere of action of Berberis Vulgaris is

rectum and anus. Already Dr. Kent has emphasised the value of Berberis in fistula, especially associated with chest complaints or pulmonary tuberculosis. Besides its action on fistula Berberis Vulgaris has a number of symptoms relating to various pains in anus associated with the passage of stools. There is burning, stinging pain in anus before, during and after stool. This can be useful in cases of hæmorrhoids or fissure. But apart from the pains there are various kinds of eruption also around the anus. I remember the case of a lady who had herpetic eruptions with violent itching around the anus and papular and pustular eruptions on the face. I could not come across any drug having the association of eruptions around the anus and on the face. Having failed with the other drugs, I tried Berberis Vulgaris and I found, it gave her an immense relief. I have given Berberis in certain cases of fistula because of paucity of symptoms, but it was usually a failure. There was however, a case which was very remarkable and confirmed the earlier observations of the great masters. The case in question was a man of about 50 years who came to me with a severe sinusitis of the left maxillary and frontal sinuses. He would pass huge quantities of thick, yellow, or greenish purulent discharge from the nose. Occasionally he would have attacks of asthma. Because of chronic asthma he had developed a certain amount of emphysema. Recently, however, he has had very few attacks of asthma. It seemed that as long as he passed plenty of discharges from the nose, the chest symptoms were held in abeyance. He also told me that he had been suffering from discharging fistula for a long time. The fistular discharge when examined by the pathologist showed that it was tubercular in character. I gave a number of drugs; deep acting constitutional drugs which relieved his sinusitis and all the usual attending complaints with it, for example headaches, lassitude, feverish feeling etc. But with the lessening of the nasal discharge and the improvement of the sinusitis the fistula became much more active. The patient observed that the discharge from the fistula had increased to a great extent and that he was finding it very inconvenient. The discharge was yellowish puslike mixed with blood. It was at this stage that it

dawned on me that there was a case in which there was a certain amount of alternation regarding the complaints of the anus and chest and sinusitis. So I prescribed Berberis Vulgaris—6 to be taken every 6 hours. The patient started improving and the chest became clearer and later on the discharge also started lessening. I think this case will take little more time before it is permanently cured.

Berberis Vulgaris is a grand remedy for practically all the complaints associated with the pelvis and the pelvic organs. We have considered rectum and the symptoms associated with the bladder and urinary organ, but in the cases of female, genital organs also, it has some therapeutic action. This is indeed a greatly neglected remedy in these complaints. There was a case of scanty menses with severe dysmenorrhœa. The pains were characteristic in their distribution, that is they were radiating in all directions; going upwards, down the thighs, both in the front as well as posteriorly. The flow was scanty, bloody, watery and slimy and even greyish in colour. The discharge was slightly irritating with offensive odour and the pains in the lumber region were severe labour-like. Associated with these symptoms was bursting headache relieved by tight bandaging. Berberis gave a great relief and the prescription was made because of radiating, flying pains. She became very much better and the period became normal after treatment of six months or so. Of course the flying and radiating pains of Berberis are well-known. Like only a few other drugs the pains start from a small area or a region and radiate to distant parts. But in the cases of gall bladder and pain in liver, unlike Chelidonium the pains radiate to the left scapula and not to the right. It does not mean that in a case of Berberis gall bladder-colic pain would not extend to the right scapula. That is a more or less a symptom of the disease itself, hence a common symptom but in a case where the pain seems to refer to the left scapula the indication of this drugs are on definitely on a surer ground. Berberis Vulgaris comes in useful once in a while in the field of dermatology. A characteristic symptom found in Berberis Vulgaris eruptions is that the eruptions leave

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16. *Spongia*:—Cases of orchitis where there is great pain, soreness and tenderness with great heat in the testicles. Swelling is very hard. There are pinching, bruised, and squeezing pains in the swelled and indurated testicles.

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a sort of brownish spots of pigmentation after the disappearance. A case was reported where acne of the face was characterised by this typical pigmentation after the disappearance. It has got papulo-pustular type of eruptions. The eruptions are surrounded by a red areola. On drying up these eruptions leave a brownish stain. The favourite location for the Berberis eruptions are, near about anus, wrists, hands and the lower extremities. The itching of the eruptions is worse by scratching, warmth, rubbing and walking. The eruptions are better by cold application. It is usually overlooked in the treatment of the skin eruptions. Actually it is one of the great antipsoric remedies and we could enlarge its therapeutic horizon if we could deeply and apply it also on the unbeaten paths.
