

WHICH REMEDY

D. G.

Coffea

Ignatia

Coffea and Ignatia are remedies derived in each case from a plant possessing the power to greatly increase the sensitivity of the central nervous system. This is due in the case of the coffee bean to one of its main ingredients, trimethylxanthine or caffeine. In the case of the St. Ignatius bean, however, the stimulating substance is strychnine.

Neither of these is a true bean. The coffee beans are the seeds of a red or purple berry, clusters of which grow in the axils of the leaves of the coffee tree. Each berry contains two plano-convex seeds. These contain, amongst other substances, caffeol which gives the aroma when roasted, and the stimulating agent caffeine, in amount 1 to 2 per cent.

It is remarkable that in widely separated parts of the inhabited globe six plants have been picked out by man from thousands of other herbs as possessing the power to stimulate when taken in beverage form. Coffee originated in Ethiopia; tea first hailed from the foothills of the Himalayas; yerba mate was first discovered in the jungles of Paraguay; the cola tree was found in Liberia, in Ghana, and in the Cameroons; the liana Paullinia Cupana from which guarana is obtained is found in the regions south of the Amazon; Mexico claims the cocoa tree.

The substances from these six plants, when taken in reasonable doses, all have the ability to stimulate the brain and render the drinker more alert, clear-headed, cheerful and enterprising. In each case the capacity to stimulate is due to the presence of caffeine.

Virtues of Coffee

The virtues of coffee as a drink were extolled in the year 1588 by the Arab author Abd al-Quadir ibn Muhammad al-Ansari al-Jaziri al-Hanbali. In 1637 the Bishop of Smyrna, given sanctuary by Archbishop Laud at Balliol College, was making

coffee "for his own use every morning". By 1683 there were 2,000 coffee houses in London alone; in a contemporary pamphlet in defence of the beverage occurred the recommendation, "Do but this rare Arabian cordial use and you may all the Doctor's slops refuse". Coffee is now produced in and exported from some twenty or more countries.

The St. Ignatius bean is the seed of a plant found in the Philippine Islands, one of the *Strychnos* species. This tall climbing shrub produces a large pear-shaped berry containing up to 24 pebble-like seeds imbedded in a bitter pulp. The seeds are hard, with flattened surfaces, greyish or reddish-black in colour, and intensely bitter in taste. They contain from 2.5% to 3% of strychnine and brucine, and it is to the former they owe their stimulating properties. The seeds were accorded medicinal value and were even worn as amulets to ward off disease.

Poisonous Effects

Coffee is not counted as a deadly poison; nevertheless it may under certain circumstances and in certain people cause undesirable symptoms. It all depends upon the way the drink is prepared, its strength and also, significantly, upon the mental, physical and constitutional make-up of the drinker.

An instance is recorded of a man accustomed to taking his coffee in the Turkish manner who, after the first cup of percolator coffee, showed all the signs of mild poisoning—fever, sweating, trembling hands and difficulty in breathing.

Excessive coffee drinking may produce first garrulity, then restlessness, loss of appetite, nausea, heart pains and tormenting insomnia. The effects of coffee drinking in susceptible persons has thus provided the student of *Materia Medica* with many valuable "accidental provings". Among the symptoms so recorded are deadly anxiety, irresistible languor and dull depression, symptoms quite at variance with the usual effects of stimulation, pleasant relaxation and mental alertness.

The St. Ignatius bean contains the toxic principle strychnine which sets up violent tetanic convulsions. Doses of ten to twenty milligrams lead to difficulty in breathing and unbearable feelings of anxiety. Twitchings and spasms gradually merge

into violent tetanic seizures in which the spine is arched back till the sufferer rests on heels and occiput. The least stimulus, a door banging or even a gentle touch, will set off another ghastly spasm and, the mind remaining clear, the sufferings of the victim are unutterable. Symptoms of a lesser degree of violence may, of course, also occur as the result of taking smaller doses.

Tissue Affinities

Both these drugs have a very marked action on the central nervous system. This is a direct stimulation, unlike alcohol which has an entirely narcotic effect on the brain. The predominant effect of caffeine is on the psychical plane producing mental alertness and acuity of sensation, sight, touch, hearing—noise may be intolerable. There is also an effect on the neuromuscular system, resulting in tremors and twitchings, and on the circulation, manifested in increased cardiac rate, dilatation of superficial bloodvessels and increased flow of urine.

Per contra the hypersensitivity of the central nervous system produced by strychnine, the active principle of *IGNATIA*, is mainly related to physical effects, being manifested by extreme muscular irritability. Twitchings and spasms may be severe and violent, leading in due course to exhaustion effects and paralysis. The psychological effect is one of emotional instability and unreliability.

Physical Features

COFFEA presents a flushed, hot face with dry skin. The feet and hands remain cold. There is inability to keep still, constant quick movements, talkativeness, and possibly trembling of hands and grinding of teeth. Sometimes the opposite picture may be seen—an exhausted appearance and unwillingness to talk.

IGNATIA presents a picture of varying or alternating signs. Violent flushes may be followed by deadly pallor. Involuntary laughter may give way to deep sighing. Hurried awkward movements may give place to despondent inertia and a dejected pose with the head hanging down or laid forward on the table. The physical muscular irritability is shown by facial grimacing,

tremulousness or actual convulsive tics involving a number of muscles. There may be a tendency to clench the teeth or to bite the side of the tongue or the inside of the cheek. Speech may be in whispers or the voice may be lost altogether.

Mental Attributes

With *COFFEA* there is great mental activity, excitement, even ecstasy. Ideas race through the mind, memory may be phenomenal, with ability to quote poetry at length. Incessant activity of one sort or another, always on the go. "Ventre à terre", may end in a "break-down" with dullness, depression, yawning and desire for sleep but distressing wide-awakeness at night. Oversensitivity to all stimuli may result in such intolerance of noise or of pain as to drive almost to despair.

Changeable and contradictory moods are a feature of *IGNATIA*. There is no show of eagerness, anger or violence. Rather is there a tendency to bottle things up, to "suffer in silence", to harbour the "injured feeling" and dwell on wrongs, real or imaginary. Laughter may mingle with tears, or hilarity and gloom alternate. Solitude may be sought or there may be a desire for company and affection. Is fairly serene when things are pleasing but goes to pieces when frustrated. Professes "inferiority" yet hates to be found fault with and is touchy and oversensitive. Is fearful over trifles, impatient, irresolute, quarrelsome.

As with *COFFEA* there is intolerance to pain and noise and, in addition, to tobacco smoke.

General Responses

A *COFFEA* state may be brought on or maintained by excitement or strong emotion, especially of a pleasurable kind. The *IGNATIA* condition on the contrary ensues on grief or prolonged unhappiness or frustration.

Both remedies manifest chilliness and desire for warmth. *COFFEA* is worse at night and out of doors, from narcotics and wine.

IGNATIA finds relief by eating, change of position, firm pressure on the painful part, walking about. The appetite is

contradictory, aversion from ordinary food being in contrast with cravings for indigestible or unusual articles of diet.

Headache

A unilateral headache of migraine type is found with *COFFEA*, accompanied by loathing for food and drink. It comes on after waking and increases in intensity till quite intolerable. It is brought on by over exertion mentally, by excessive talking or extreme joy; it may be described as if "a nail were being driven into the skull". It is made worse by the least noise or movement and also after eating. The sufferer wants to lie in a darkened room or with eyes closed.

Another form of headache met with under *COFFEA* is an unbearable neuralgia affecting ear and face, and relieved by cold applications or by holding cold water in the mouth. The pain returns as the parts become warm again.

The *IGNATIA* headache is associated with the sensations of heat and heaviness and is relieved by stooping forward when sitting. It is better when lying on the painful side and also when the attention is distracted. It may also be relieved by the passage of a large quantity of pale urine. Talking or any extra effort or emotion makes it worse. It also may be described as "nail-like". It may be located in the centre of the forehead above the root of the nose. It may be described as throbbing or shooting and occur in various parts of the head. In "*Materia Medica Pura*" there is a note to the effect that "almost all the kinds of headache from *IGNATIA* are soon removed by coffee". This presumably refers to overdosing with the drug.

Further Items

The *COFFEA toothache* is sharp, severe, often associated with mental distress and crying. It is made worse by any attempt to drink hot tea and is relieved pro tem by holding cold water in the mouth.

The *IGNATIA toothache* may be described as if "the tooth were broken". It is worse when *not* eating, after rather than during the meal.

Throat symptoms are present with these remedies, especially *IGNATIA*. But *COFFEA* also has hoarseness of voice first thing in

the morning associated with much sticky mucus in the mouth, which is difficult to dislodge. There may be a nervous tickly cough, worse at night.

IGNATIA has a variety of throat symptoms. There may be actual soreness, even ulceration of the tonsils, with shooting pains. The latter are noticed chiefly when not swallowing; the soreness is aggravated by empty swallowing and by drinking fluids; it is relieved by swallowing solid food and by belching.

The IGNATIA patient often complains of a choky plugged feeling in the throat, or of "a ball rising up in throat", or "a bubbling sensation". These sensations accompany varying degrees of muscle tension and spasm, the physical counterpart of the mental tension and stress which is the patient's chief trouble.

Both remedies show *nervous diarrhœa*. That of COFFEA is painless and brought on by over-excitement and especially by sudden joy or the receipt of good news. That of IGNATIA is also painless but urgent, and after passage of the stool there is a constrictive pain due to muscle spasm.

COFFEA has *pruritus*, itching, with desire to scratch, but the skin is too sensitive for even light touch. IGNATIA pruritus is relieved by scratching but the itching starts up in another site. It is made worse by heat and in the open air.

Prominent Features

The prominent features of COFFEA are *excessive activity of mind and body, extreme acuity of all the senses, the association of symptoms with pleasurable emotion, and neuralgic pains*.

The outstanding characteristics of IGNATIA are *emotional instability, unpredictability, paradoxical symptoms, complaints which derive from painful emotion, and inward tension*.

IGNATIA is the remedy most commonly prescribed and it has a wide range of usefulness in the nervous disorders so prevalent today, but COFFEA must not be forgotten and in its own sphere is the remedy of choice.

—Homœopathy, Nov., '57