

Pompholyx and the Scarlet Pimpernel – an easy or elusive case?

Louise is a pretty 24-year-old woman. She has an open manner and gives her story in a simple and straightforward way.

Consultation April 1995

I have had this terrible rash on my hands for six months and it is just getting worse all the time ... none of the creams do any good ... well I am using Dermovate four times a day and it only helps the itch and soreness for a while and then it all comes back ... I've had three courses of Prednisolone and it gets better while I am taking it, but it all comes back again even worse afterwards.

... it started as a collection of little water blisters on both hands (shows right palm) here on both sides ... the blisters soon burst and were red underneath, then they cracked and oozed and went all yellow and sore ... that lasts for a few days then they heal and then it all starts again ... yes, it all starts again in the same place ... and at the same time I get another group of them close to the first ... yes, they go through the same thing, they burst and the skin cracks and oozes and then they heal up ... yes, and then they all start again in the same places ... it has happened like this since it all started ... but more and more of my hands are getting it ... it is a bit on my feet ... on the bottom of my feet, but not as bad as my hands ... no, nowhere else.

... It just started ... I had some eczema from when I was little, but it wasn't bad ... it was just a few itchy patches like

normal eczema ... I put some cream on sometimes, but it wasn't a problem.

... I got a lot of sore throats and tonsillitis in my teens ... and I had a bit of acne, but it wasn't much. ... My periods are OK, just a bit sore the first day.

Case analysis

The most striking and unusual symptom is the repetition of the eruption – new vesicles appearing on exactly the same site after initial healing. The prescription was based on recognition of this single unique keynote: that of vesicular eruptions healing and repeating on exactly the same site. This is described by Kent in his *Materia Medica of Homeopathic Remedies* pp 481-482 in his differentiation between the eruptions of *Croton tiglium* and other medicines. The rubric *Extremities; ERUPTIONS; vesicles; upper limbs; hands; healing, new vesicles appear after (1)* appears in Van Zandvoort's complete repertory, in Kent's repertory and in *Synthesis with Anagallis arvensis* as the only remedy. The repertorisation below is retrospective for illustration.

Rubrics (Complete Repertory 2005 Van Zandvoort)

- *Extremities; ERUPTIONS; vesicles; upper limbs; hands; healing, new vesicles appear after (1)*
- *Extremities; ERUPTIONS; vesicles; upper limbs; hands; crops, in (1)*
- *Extremities; ERUPTIONS; vesicles; upper limbs; hands; palms (21)*
- *Extremities; ERUPTIONS; vesicles; lower limbs; feet (40)*

HPTG: Dreaming of Other Worlds with Jonathan Shore

Wednesday 27 June, 9.30am to 5.30pm

Ainsworths Centre, 42 Welbeck Street, W1 London – Cost: £90

"I have nice cases of Cannabis" Jonathan said to me, "and of Alcohol, Coca, Agaricus, Helleborus, Coccus, Opium and Absinthe". Hmm methinks, I have dipped into these remedies and know they are powerful deep-acting drugs. I suspect with the use of recreational and psychiatric drugs in our culture they are even more common than we recognise. I realised I wanted to find out more and, as I've learnt, the best reason for organising a teaching session is wanting to get the teaching yourself. So if you are looking for a one-day treat in good company and want to extend your knowledge and peer into the dream that is for some of our patients their reality, then join us. *David Owen*

To book, please apply by post to the address below and send either a deposit of £30 with the balance of £60 payable 3 weeks before OR a single payment in full of £90. Cheques should be made payable to 'The Natural Practice'

Places are limited due to the venue and so please apply early to secure your place. Applications to: Jonathan Shore Seminar, 106 Stockbridge Road, Winchester SO22 6RL or email dowen@thenaturalpractice.com

Please include your postal and email address and a contact phone number. It would also help to have a note of the number of years you have been qualified in homeopathy.

Management

Prescribed Anagallis arvensis 30CH one dose dry and 30ml drops to keep and use if required and advised to continue using Dermovate cream as before but to reduce use if she begins to improve.

Outcome**Consultation June 1995**

.... it's all gone away, it's amazing... well, you know you said it might get worse for a while before it started to get better... well, it got really terrible ... I took the remedy once and the next day it started to get really bad in my hands ... it was terrible for two weeks the skin was all oozing and cracked and sore and the itch was nasty ... the whole skin then peeled off my palms ... it left a clean pink skin underneath and no blisters since ... it was bad for two weeks then it started to heal ... it has been fine for three or four weeks.

... during all this I got a red patch on my face ... it just suddenly appeared ... it was hot and bright red and spread fast from here (right temple) to across my cheek ... I was a bit hot and groggy with it ... I went to my GP and got penicillin for it and it just went away in a few days (*from her description this sounds like erysipelas*).

.... when my hands were starting to settle my feet got terrible ... it started about two weeks after my hands ... it was the same only worse ... I couldn't walk for the pain in my feet ... I had to crawl to the toilet for a few days ... I was off work for a month ... then they went the same as my hands, the skin all peeled off to leave pink skin underneath, and then the skin just became normal.

.... when my feet were starting to get better I came out in my old eczema ... it was worse than before ... there were little patches of eczema all over ... but it only lasted for about 10 days then it just went away.

... then, as it was fading I came out in acne ... it was on my face and back like when I had it as a teenager, but it all cleared up at the same time ... it hasn't come back.

... my skin is completely fine ... I didn't have any period pains... no, I haven't used any creams since I first saw you.

(*Advised not to take any further doses for skin unless vesicles recur but to take the drops when gets a fever illness in the future and see if it works and phone me*).

Telephone consultation February 1996

I got a real dose of flu last month, so I started taking the remedy drops like you said while I was ill ... it was fine, it seemed to help quicker and better than the usual aspirin or whatever ... I was still ill, but it was all over quicker ... it only lasted three days then I was back at work and OK.

Materia medica and discussion

Anagallis arvensis, the Scarlet Pimpernel, is a member of the Primulaceae plant family. The glandular hairs in the leaves and stems break easily and discharge a liquid readily absorbed by the skin which causes dermatitis in sensitive subjects. 6% of the population are Primula sensitive and get eruptions from contact. The skin symptoms can, rarely,



appear in hypersensitive subjects even without contact with the plant, mere proximity being enough. Anagallis arvensis is the only Primula to produce blistering eruptions which repeat on exactly the same site.

Louise has no garden, no house plants and there are no plants in the bank where she works, and Anagallis arvensis is a fairly uncommon wild plant in Cumbria which blooms in spring (her eruption began in autumn). She is behaving in her chronic illness as if she is hypersensitive to Anagallis arvensis. Her vitality appears to be very high: she persisted in her eruption in its original form despite the powerful suppressive effects of Dermovate and Prednisolone; and her healing reaction follows all the parameters of Hering's Law.

Her healing reaction – the depth and initial severity – prompts several questions. Did my excitement at finding the indicated homeopathic medicine and showing her the rubric with Anagallis as the only entry contribute to her healing reaction? Was the severity of her initial aggravation entirely due to suddenly stopping Dermovate (despite being advised not to)? Or was it a measure of her vitality? Should I have reported this severity of reaction using the Yellow Card Scheme?

Is this case simple and easy or extremely difficult? I have used this case in teaching many times during introductory homeopathic teaching on case analysis, repertorisation and the direction of healing. I have also used it twice during an introductory lecture on homeopathy in the Cumberland Infirmary to a mixed audience of medical students, doctors and nurses. Each time the keynote strange, rare and peculiar symptom of vesicular eruptions healing and repeating on exactly the same site has been easily and quickly identified. The only difficulties were experienced by audiences of homeopathic physicians of some experience in Poland and Russia who had been "Master-classed" by some of the "Great Beasts" of homeopathy.

The beautiful paradox of case analysis exists in the tension between the totality of symptoms and the single most unique, striking, strange, rare and peculiar symptom as first described by Hahnemann in the Organon Aphorisms 7 & 153.

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