

ZINCUM METALLICUM

An analysis of Materia Medica

by

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Background information

Zinc belongs to the Magnesium group of metals. It is frequently combined with copper to make brass. Zinc coatings are often applied to iron and steel to prevent corrosion. Its other main use industrially is in batteries. It is a reducing agent, which dissolves in acids and bases. For hundreds of years zinc-based ointments have been used to suppress skin eruptions.

Clark gives details of symptoms of poisoning suffered by cows who were grazing beside a Zinc-smelter, including emaciation; drawing back of eyes into their orbits; milk drying up and finally death from total prostration.

Sensation and function

My aim in this article is to demonstrate that the common themes running through the Materia Medica of Zincum Metallicum can be summarised as:

Sensation: under attack. Function: must retreat.

The following rubrics, taken from the Complete Repertory, show the nature of the perceived attack. It is interesting to note that many of these refer to being attacked by those in authority.

MIND; DELUSIONS; accused, thinks she is

MIND; DELUSIONS; pursued, he was; police, by

MIND; DELUSIONS; arrested, is about to be

MIND; DELUSIONS; crime; committed, as if he had

MIND; DELUSIONS; called before court, on account of wicked actions, during climaxis

MIND; DELUSIONS; devils; after her, during climaxis

MIND; DELUSIONS; murdered; he would be

MIND; DELUSIONS; persecuted, that he is

MIND; DELUSIONS; pursued, he was; enemies, by

MIND; DELUSIONS; voices, hears; abusive and filthy language, voices from within him speaking in

Suppression as an inimical force to life

It can be argued that Zinc's well-known ability to suppress physical symptoms (particularly eruptions and discharges) is only the most obvious form of its ability to suppress the life force in general. According to Hering's observations on the direction of cure, the ultimate outcome of driving in dis-ease will be death. This view of suppression as an inimical force to life extends beyond ointments and injections to factors that can suppress spiritually, mentally and emotionally. In the case of Zinc the strongest factor mentioned in the Repertory is authority (be it the legal system or those in charge of the hell realms) and the power to exact punishment. This sensation of being attacked extends to ordinary stimuli, which are also perceived as assaults. The irritability and over-sensitivity of Zinc to pain, noise, touch and sensual impressions is a pervasive theme in the Materia Medica.

One of the key passages to understanding Zinc comes in Kent's Materia Medica p.1015." You will find some deep-seated brain troubles that will try your patience. Some cases go slowly and gradually into unconsciousness; rolling of the head for days; eyes lustreless; body emaciated; involuntary discharges of faeces and urine in the bed; tongue dry and parched, so shrivelled that it looks like leather, lips also; face

withered and every day looks older; paralysis of one hand or one foot, or it seems the whole muscular system is paralysed ...

A dose of Zinc will sometimes bring this patient back to life. In a few days after the remedy there will be a jerking and a quivering in the parts that were motionless, or its action will be shown in a copious sweat, much vomiting; sudden arousing that is alarming for it looks like a threatened sinking, but this is the beginning of a reaction. Now, for days and nights while this little one is coming back to consciousness, the restoration of sensation in the parts is accompanied with the most tormenting formication, tingling, prickling, creeping and crawling ... This suffering is but the awakening to life."

Hering (p.485-6) gives the symptoms:

"Thinks of death calmly..." and

"Quiet thoughts of death in the afternoon, with weakness." Hence, there is a distinct polarity between:

life which represents suffering; intolerable enervation; being attacked and death which represents calm and peace; an end to suffering through retreat.

In physical terms the retreat involves a receding, a movement from without to within.

Indeed the case cited above by Kent is one of

"deep-seated brain troubles". Since this withdrawal is opposite to the direction of cure, the ultimate result of such a retreat will be death. With this polarity in mind we can divide symptoms into two distinct and opposing categories.

They represent either:

a retreat into death	or	a return to life.
lack of reaction		overreaction
unconsciousness		over-sensitivityparalysis
restlessness		
numbness		formication
reflexes abolished		jerking / twitching
suppression		eruption
dryness		discharges
silent		vociferous complaints
thickening of eyes (conjunctiva/ lids)		intense photophobia
sexual desire suppressed		intense sexual desire
chilliness		intense burning
menses absent		flow ameliorates

During the "retreat into death" the vital force recedes from the body into the central nervous system and then moves up the spine to the brain and in the "return to life" this process is reversed. There are symptoms that give us hints of this:

SKIN; BENEATH, sensations are just

SKIN; FORMICATION; under skin

SKIN; FORMICATION; flesh, between and

SKIN; INACTIVITY

BACK; PAIN; burning; Spine; sitting, while

BACK; PAIN; burning; Spine; walking amel.

CHEST; CHILLINESS in

CHEST; CEASE; sensation as if heart; had ceased

CHEST; HANGING by a thread, as if heart

HEAD; TINGLING; speaking aloud, on

HEAD; HEAT; coldness of, with; feet*

As part of this process we see the head and brain becoming over-loaded:

HEAD; CONSTRICTION
HEAD; CONSTRICTION; band or hoop
HEAD; FORMICATION
HEAD; HEAVINESS
HEAD; HOLD up head; unable to
HEAD; HYDROCEPHALUS
HEAD; INFLAMMATION, of; Brain
HEAD; INFLAMMATION, of; meninges, meningitis
the attack continues:
HEAD; CRASH, explosion in
HEAD; CRACKLING sensation in
HEAD; NOISES in; roaring
HEAD; SHOCKS
and so does the retreat:
HEAD; BORES head in pillow
HEAD; FALLING of head; backward
HEAD; DRAWN; backward

A further confirmation of this hypothesis comes from the strange, rare and peculiar symptoms relating to urination, for which Zinc is the single remedy. The first is the desire to keep moving the legs, for fear of losing urine. This shows up that unless the vital force is dissuaded from its retreat into death, through a conscious focussing of activity in the extremities, then involuntary urination, which is ordinarily a characteristic of death, will ensue. Yet the reverse is also true. When urination is retarded, allowing the retreat to occur facilitates the passing of urine. Hence we have the symptoms; must sit bent backward to ameliorate retarded urination and dysuria.

ZINC

A case history

Female. Married with 2 children. Office worker. NBWS 18 years of age.

First appointment April 1997

Presenting complaint: Migraine.

Appearance: Petite woman. Looks drawn and tired, sits with her arms folded across her body.

In the last 12 months had been taking 2 Solpadine every day, whether or not she had a headache, to try to prevent an attack from starting (suppression).

She gets headaches very frequently. The pain is throbbing, located over eyes < travelling by car; < bright lights (at 18 she went to work in an office with a lot of glass windows); < stuffy rooms; < day before menses; > going to bed; >> during pregnancies. Concomitant nausea and loss of appetite, yet > eating; > fresh air. Likely to start if she was "flustered, stressed out... I can't take the pressure."H/O delayed menses, occurring only 3 or 4 times per year. At 19 menses were so painful that she often fainted from cramping pains around half an hour from onset. Had miscarried her first child at between 2 and 3 months. Her children were born 3 and 6 weeks premature respectively. Since her pregnancies menses come every 5-6 weeks.

Family history:

Maternal grandmother died in her 50s from TB.

Maternal grandfather died shortly after of a broken heart (also in his 50s).

Maternal aunt had migraines.

Mother had toxæmia whilst pregnant with her brother.

One brother has migraine.

Paternal grandmother suffered from headaches all her life.

Father had rheumatic and muscular complaints. Alcoholic.

After describing her symptoms she continues:

"My mother is very religious and as I was the eldest girl and closest to her I was more affected by it. When I was 9 or 10 my father touched me... in a sexual way. I felt it was a huge thing to me. For years I lived in dread of it. He never did it again, but he fancied me. I felt total distrust. When I was 18 I met my current partner. We got engaged when I was 23, but at 24 I realised I couldn't face a sexual relationship and postponed the marriage for a year. During this time I had acne and intense depression. I was moody. Extremely low. My partner encouraged me to see someone. I went to the Rape Crisis Centre in Cork, but the counsellor couldn't understand my problem she said maybe I hadn't found the right relationship. I came away desperate I thought: 'no one can help me'. I have very mixed feelings towards my father. When he's sober he's so different. I should be more angry. I started watching a film about incest a while ago and I couldn't watch it. I had a happy childhood, but it could have been better. (She begins to weep). My husband says I'm not as demonstrative as I could be. I worry about our finances. Everything (financially) is a lot tighter (she repeats this three times).

My energy is iffy lately. If I'm out with friends I can fall asleep in public (!) at around 10pm. Its hard to wake up in the morning. My sleep is not refreshing. In the past week I've had new symptoms. I get dizzy, it's worse if I turn my head then turn it back suddenly. I can see these tingly balls. Like blue speckles in front of you. I get tingling in my fingers on the left if I sleep on that hand.

Occasionally, if I've eaten out and had alcohol, I get cramps during the night, then vomiting and diarrhoea then I pass out. A year ago this happened about 3 or 4 times in 6 months, but its less frequent now." I asked her to describe herself for me, she replied:

"I'm trustworthy, genuine, I hate people who are two-faced. I'm not laid back." She was quite a closed patient and found it difficult to describe her feelings about the abuse incident. One could not say she was suffering from suppressed anger, because she didn't feel angry with her father. She did say, however, I should feel angry. By saying this she is making the judgment that her reaction to the event is inappropriate. One of the first things she speaks of is her mother's religious nature and says this affected her most. From this I deduced that she felt ashamed or mortified by the incident with her father. In "The Mind Defined" by Lauro Part and Rebecca Preston mortification is described as: "n. : humiliation or vexation; the state of being humbled or depressed by disappointment, vexation, crosses or anything that wounds or abases pride. Generally, deprivation or depression of self-approval; chagrin."

The italicised aspects of this definition seem to fit the situation well.

Hence a useful rubric would be:

MIND; AILMENTS from; mortification, humiliation, chagrin* (57 remedies)

Next, I wanted to stress the persistent nature of the headaches.

HEAD PAIN; GENERAL; chronic* (36 remedies)

The fact that the head pain was always worst the day before menses served to link the complaint with the sexual sphere, where I felt the dis-ease had originated:

HEAD PAIN; GENERAL; menses; before* (76 remedies)

Another symptom that had been linked to menses was fainting and this was still a feature of the case although now it related to the vomiting episodes

GENERALITIES; FAINTNESS, fainting* (303 remedies)

Another example of this sudden loss of consciousness was her tendency to fall asleep in public

SLEEP; SLEEPINESS; overpowering* (92 remedies)

These were all fairly large rubrics so the polychrests were likely to dominate the repertorisation, so I tried it first with all remedies. Then using my computer programme I eliminated ten polychrests to see what emerged.

Zinc was not the first remedy to come up, but I always pay more attention to the number of rubrics a remedy covers than to the total scores. This is because although only one prover may have experienced a particular symptom, qualitatively it might be a more characteristic symptom of the remedy than one experienced by many provers. I was drawn to Zinc because the case seemed to fit my understanding of the remedy. What struck me initially about this case was the determination to suppress symptoms, to the extent that she would take painkillers, whether or not they were needed, on a prophylactic basis. I felt her symptoms were related to the sexual abuse she experienced at 9 or 10. Following this, post-menarche, her menses had frequently been absent (retreat). When she was 18 she started working in an office with huge windows and the headaches started (return to life). This might have been due to the sun and indeed Zinc appears in the rubric: Head pain, general, exposure to sun, but perhaps more significantly she met her future husband and began "awakening to life". They had no sexual relationship during their courtship and she so dreaded the prospect of having one that it caused her to postpone their wedding. Although she managed to overcome this dread, with his help and patience, her husband said that she was "not as demonstrative as she could be". Her dysmenorrhea and fainting (retreat) during menses also seemed to indicate a strong connection with the sexual sphere. Apart from her headaches and dizzy spells (complete with tingly balls affecting her vision) the tingling she experienced in her fingers also indicated an attempt to return to life.

Remedy: Zincum metallicum 30c (Bedtime and Rising) with spares to hold.

Follow up appointment 4 weeks after remedy: May 1997

"Improved vastly. Not a single migraine, when I was off work, for a whole week. (She job shares a week on, a week off). They came back at work, but not every day and were > after only one Solpadine (used to take two). In the third week I had no migraine at all. I still had a migraine before my period. I had a migraine yesterday, but it was less painful. When it's like that I can go without Solpadine. I have a nagging sensation in my jaw. I know it's in my jaw now. Before I couldn't differentiate if it was my jaw; my mouth or my wisdom teeth. I grit my teeth a lot. The dizzy spells with the spots (alias tingly balls) in front of my eyes have gone. So has the tingling in my fingers. I'm maybe not as tired. Haven't fallen asleep in public. It's a bit easier to get up." No remedy. Wait.

Second follow up: June 1997

"I'm much > had three migraines in the past month. They tend to be on Sunday or Monday (before work). Repeated remedy Zinc 30c. I had blisters on my gums but they're gone now. The nagging sensation in my jaw is >. I feel a lot >. Happier. In > spirits. Don't let things get me down. My energy is good I'm able to stay awake > than before" Dizzy spells still >> and Fingers, LH side, tingling >>

Third follow up: late August 97

" Had a period at end of June. We were on holiday in a mobile home. Had headaches every day, maybe from gas fumes? (Husband and two small children in a confined space- maybe too much life?) Rest of July wasn't great. Took Zinc 30c twice. Had headaches again at the end of July with my period. August I was very bad at the beginning of the month. I had headaches every second day and had to take two

Solpadine each time. (On the 18/8/97 I sent Zinc 200c) Took Zinc 200c on 20/8/97, that seemed to work, I've only had two mild headaches since then. Still clenching my teeth a lot at night. After work I used to be more inclined to visit someone, now I prefer to stay at home and wind down. I like to get organised and then relax.

(Energy?) It's grand. Phone call: November 1997

"Just ringing to tell you I'm pregnant again, so I'm fine. I never get headaches when I'm pregnant." SOURCE MATERIAL: Complete Repertory, Roger van Zandvoort

Materia Medica, James Tyler Kent

The Guiding Symptoms of our Materia Medica,

Constantine Hering

A Dictionary of Practical Materia Medica,

John Henry Clarke

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