

The killer that cures

by *Dr D.M. Gibson*

At 2.30 am on Monday the 24 March, 1957, a young Frenchman, Emile L'Angelier, awoke his landlady by frantic clanging of the doorbell. Her husband was away at the time and she called out to know who was there. It proved to be her young lodger whom she found on the doorstep in great anguish, complaining of vomiting and feeling "very bad", and on the point of further vomiting.

He did indeed vomit again after getting up to his bedroom and yet again before managing to get fully undressed. This time he also complained of intense pain. He became very cold and asked for hot water bottles for his feet and stomach. These were brought,

with extra blankets to put on the bed.

At about four o'clock another attack came on and an hour later yet another, the most severe of all. She sent for a doctor but he temporised to start with by ordering laudanum drops in water and a mustard plaster to the stomach. The doctor finally arrived some time after seven o'clock and found the patient looking dehydrated, complaining of feeling terribly cold and of pain on breathing and frontal headache. His pulse was weak and his voice increasingly so.

The doctor assured Mrs Jenkins, the landlady, that the patient would recover but he said he would make a further visit between 10 and 11am.

When he did return, Mrs Jenkins reported the patient was asleep and it seemed a pity to waken him. However, the doctor wished to make sure and went into the bedroom. When Mrs Jenkins pulled back the curtains, he found that Emile L'Angelier was dead.

Clinically a typical case of Arsenic poisoning. In fact, 82 grains of white arsenic were found in the victim's stomach.

This unfortunate young man had been the clandestine lover of Madeleine Smith, the 21 year-old daughter of a Glasgow architect. He had been given

Arsenic



Photo: Science Museum/Science & Society Picture Library

his congé as a more “suitable” suitor was in the offing.

The killer

Arsenious oxide, white arsenic, has been a most prolific killer down the centuries. As an odourless, almost tasteless, and readily soluble white powder, it has provided an all too convenient weapon for the homicidal poisoner, the more so as the symptoms of poisoning can so easily be mistaken for those of so-called natural disease.

In the 15th and 16th centuries those arch-poisoners the Borgias made full use of arsenic in their cantarella, aquetta di Napoli, and other subtle concoctions of evil fame. So common was death by poisoning in the glamorous era of Louis XIV, that the period was known as “The Age of Arsenic”.

It was during this century that a notable woman poisoner, La Tofania, carried out her nefarious trade as a poison-vendor from girlhood till her execution at the age of 70. To Neapolitans the poison was known as Acqua Tofa’na and was peddled to distressed, adulterous, neglected or jealous wives over well-nigh all Europe. Her poison was apparently crystallised arsenic compounded with, for no serious reason, the herb cymbalaria.

When justice did finally catch up with La Tofania she confessed to having poisoned some 600 persons and gave the names, some of them great names, of those who had been her clients. After La Tofania’s death, fewer husbands died suddenly in Italy.

But arsenic poisoning was not limited to former eras. Far into the 20th century it was still by no means

discarded despite the advances of forensic tests for the detection of minute quantities of the poison in the tissue of victims.

A 20th century epidemic of poisoning took place in a district in Hungary enclosed in a loop of the river Tisza, beginning before the First World War and continuing till 1929.

The evil genius of this epidemic was an old witch-like woman known as Auntie Fazekas who for 80 pengo (then worth about £3) would sell a fatal dose of what she called “The Water of Inheritance”, which she made by stewing a few pennyworth of arsenical fly-papers. She did a steady trade for about 20 years until in 1929 the authorities took very belated action.

How “the killer” cures

This terrible killer when potentised becomes a curative agent of great worth. This has been amply proved by experience as the appended case notes can demonstrate.

Alimentary system

A boy aged nine years had suffered from severe bilious attacks for five or six years. He was a nervous child, afraid of school, always on the fidget, always chilly. With the attack he was prostrated for two or three days, with much vomiting of green bile, thirst for frequent small drinks, and action of bowels accompanying vomiting.

He was given a dose of Arsenicum 200 and improved from then on. Not only did the bilious attacks cease to recur every five or six weeks as formerly but he became much less nervous and fearful.

A man, aged 39, a gold

smelter, had complained of burning pain in the stomach for three months accompanied on three occasions by severe vomiting with retching and gagging. An attack would last about one day, aggravated by the least amount of food or drink, accompanied by loose stools, extreme prostration, a feeling of freezing cold, shivers, and a terribly dry mouth.

He felt restless, must be doing something, and admitted to being fussily tidy. Given: Arsenicum 1M to take four hourly as required. Two weeks later he reported having taken 12 doses in all and feeling very much better. He said, “It is now a pleasure to work. I feel a new person.”

A case reported by Dr Royal Hayes of the USA, was a man of 50 who had become poisoned by eating toadstools. He presented one of the most horrible pictures Dr Hayes had ever seen. Unbearable burning pain in the stomach, violent vomiting and retching, loud groaning, insatiable thirst, copious sweat, thrashing the bed with anxiety, countenance deep red and expressing intense suffering and horror. About 10 minutes after a dose of Arsenicum CM he was improving. Within half an hour he was quiet and convalescing. Arsenicum is, of course, the remedy par excellence in food poisoning.

A woman of 53, a variety artist, had suffered from stomach trouble for 30 years. She complained on attendance at hospital of severe pain deep to the right scapula like red-hot poker. Other features were extreme prostration, great restlessness, and despair of recovery. She was given Arsenicum 10M two doses to be followed by Cheledonium 6.

Seen some six weeks later she reported that she was

Arsenicum is the remedy par excellence in food poisoning caused, for instance, by eating toadstools



Photo: Garden & Wildlife Matters Photo Library

“very much better; was surprised when the pain went: did not need to take the second medicine”. After a further six weeks she recorded “No return of stomach pain”.

Chest conditions

A man of 41 was having very frequent attacks of asthma. These were so acute as to cause him to crawl around on all fours fighting for breath. He was apt to wake into an attack between 1 and 2am when he had to sit straight up in search of air. Any emotional upset aggravated the condition. He was restless, must be occupied, extremely tidy, well-groomed in appearance.

This man's asthma responded at once to Arsenicum. He was usually worse in the summer months, but two years after starting treatment he reported “the best summer I've had for 15 years”.

A man of 60, a bronchitis with emphysema subject, complained of very severe cough in paroxysms with inability to raise the sputum for the last six days. He was worse after midnight, and had to sit up or actually get out of bed in search of relief. The attacks left him utterly exhausted. Two weeks after treatment with Arsenicum he reported the cough as very much better and when seen again in four weeks time reported himself as “feeling fine; not an ache or a pain in the world”.

A woman of 63 had complained of severe dyspnoea and palpitation on effort for about six weeks, and especially when walking uphill. She was active, restless, better when occupied and excessively tidy. She was given three doses of Arsenicum 1M and three weeks later reported that the palpitation was better

and she was feeling quite normal. When she was seen four months later, the improvement was maintained.

A woman of 71 complained of severe pain behind the sternum on walking uphill, the pain radiating to the back and occasionally the left arm. The pain was burning in type and accompanied by a sensation of constriction. The heart was slightly enlarged; there was a rough mitral systolic bruit. She was given Arsenicum 30, a weekly dose. A month later, she reported herself very much better. At a visit after a further three months, she reported having been upset when caught in a thunderstorm but had had “no recurrence of that dreadful pain in my chest”.

Nervous system

A woman of 28 had suffered from right-sided trigeminal neuralgia for 12 months. An attack occurred every 14 to 21 days. The onset was sudden and aggravated by exposure to cold wind. The pain was described as of a knife stabbing in the right parietal region and downwards into both upper and lower jaws. It was so unbearable as to cause the sufferer to bang her head against the wall. An attack would last about two days and was accompanied by restlessness and prostration.

The patient was inclined to worry over trifles, was excessively tidy, very active, and sensitive to any stimulus. The attacks had started after a car accident when an x-ray revealed a slight fracture of the skull. On this history she was given Natrum sulphuricum 10M, two doses.

However, a further attack occurred. She was then given Arsenicum 200, two doses. From then on there were no further headaches. Seen a year

later on account of a different complaint, she reported that “the neuralgia remains entirely absent”.

A woman of 37 presented a three-year history of brachial neuralgia. Terrible pain in the right arm would come on not long after retiring, described as stabbing, shooting, burning, and forcing her to get out of bed and walk around for about two hours. The overall picture suggested Lycopodium; but this remedy did not prevent a recurrence. She was then given Arsenicum 1M, three doses, when she related that a very severe attack had come on at 1.30am and driven her out of bed. This proved effective and an occasional dose of Arsenicum was called for to maintain relief during the next three years, namely five times in all.

Of course, instances such as those mentioned above could be multiplied ten thousandfold. Arsenicum album, that merciless homicidal agent, altered by potentiation and employed homeopathically becomes a curative medicine of immense value and amazingly wide application. Its use as a poison should decrease in view of the skill in detection now known to forensic science; its value as a remedy cannot be too highly praised.



**First published
in *Homoeopathy*,
November 1971**