

SOME THOUGHTS ABOUT *MERCURIUS*

I would like to pick up a few strands of the story of *Mercurius* the homœopathic medicine and attempt to tie this into an appreciation of its principle or essence. I will be making a few connections within that broader canvas upon which our collective experiences are painted. Hermes and the God Mercury, have an honoured place in the ancient Greek and Roman pantheons. In astrology the qualities of the planet Mercury and the signs which it rules, Gemini and Virgo are well known e.g., duplicity, activity, trading, communication, knowledge, and in Virgo, purity. As a personification and metaphor of the alchemical process *Mercurius* stood for transformation and change, for the principle of life itself. Interestingly, the preparations we use are *Mercurius solubilis* (dissolving, soluble) and *vivus* (living, alive). Mercury is certainly the dissolving metal and it is also fluid and, in this sense, *alive*. The themes of dissolving of forms and death, and its opposite, new beginnings and life are easy to find, as I hope to illustrate.

THE SALTS

Let me say at the onset that, when speaking of rubrics and symptoms, I am making no distinction between the separate provings of *Mercurius vivus* and *Mercurius solubilis*. Both bring out almost identical physical symptoms although certain complementary symptoms of the mind, notably slowness of expression in the case of *Mercurius vivus* and hurriedness in *Mercurius solubilis* (c.f. Allen's *Encyclopaedia of Pure Materia Medica*). People for whom *Mercurius* is the simillimum typically have a deep need to communicate, to talk, to amalgamate, although, should they feel uncomfortable, as they often do (cf. delusion, surrounded by enemies), they may present as incommunicative, and wish to 'get the Hell out of the place'.

Mercurius solubilis Hahnemann is Dimercuro ammonium nitrate and was synthesised by Hahnemann the chemist, before his discovery of the healing art of homœopathy, as a substitute for the corrosive mercurial salts in use at that time. As Clarke explains, 'it (*Mercurius solubilis*) was at once adopted in all countries on account of its much milder and more efficacious anti-syphilitic qualities.' Nitrates are associated with plant growth, they form the bulk of commercially produced fertilisers, they are responsible for lush and rapid growth, and they exemplify a general theme of expansion, their oxidising properties being responsible for the *fire* of most explosives. Gunpowder contains roughly 73% potassium nitrate. The characteristic hurriedness of *Mercurius solubilis*, is probably accounted for by the nitrating of the element as is the speediness, enlargement of imagination, e.g., anticipatory anxieties and enlargement delusions, of *Argentum nitricum*, or the characteristic confusion, enlargement, delusions and sensations, surgings of blood and pulsation sensations in head, heart and throughout the body, of *Glonoinum*, the high explosive, nitro-glycerine.

THE METAL

Mercury the metal is unique in that it is in the liquid state at room temperatures; a feature made use of in the manufacture of thermometers, sphygmomanometers and a host of other measurement apparatus. Kent describes the patient needing *Mercurius* as being a human barometer. Clarke writes: 'There was a fitness in naming this metal after the volatile deity. It provides us with weather-glasses and thermometers, and it turns those who are under its influence into weather-glasses and thermometers likewise. (An electrician, who at one time was required to work with his hands frequently in a trough filled with quicksilver, thereafter could not bear the slightest shock of electricity, though before he could stand very strong ones.)

Herein lies one of the grand characteristics of the remedy: as the thermometer is sensitive to changes either to hot or cold, so is the *Mercurius* patient. Other remedies are predominantly one or the other: *Mercurius* is both – worse by heat and worse by cold.' George Vithoulkas writes: 'the basic idea is that there is a lack of reactive power coupled with an instability or inefficiency of function.' The metal's sphere exhibits many features which are familiar to all, as mentioned by Kent and Clarke the rising and falling of the column in thermometers and, should the bulb be smashed, the scattering property when the mercury falls. We may recall the ensuing scramble on all fours to insure that the myriad droplets are gathered up. We know from clinical experience as well as by analogy that patients for whom *Mercurius* is the remedy cannot keep themselves together when stressed physically and that they undergo mental torment when under real or imagined attack. In the *Synthetic Repertory*, *Mercurius* is mentioned in 55 general rubrics of aggravation and only in 7 of amelioration!

Another legendary aspect of mercury lies in its capacity to amalgamate. This property is extensively made use of in the extraction of gold from low grade ores. Anyone unfortunate enough to have lost a ring of silver or gold to mercury will have observed this phenomenon, as will those who suffer mercury poisoning when amalgam fillings break down. For mercury is one of the most potent inorganic poisons. It has the capacity to enter readily into organic molecules. It frequently gains access to the human organism through concentration in food chains by fish and animals living in polluted environments. It also may be inhaled as fumes – it has already moved out of solid into a liquid state at room temperature and with equal ease it passes into a vaporous state. We may, at this point, recall that the mythological figure of Hermes displayed his character as messenger of the Gods at the tender age of three days, when he transformed himself into a mist, slipped under the door of his room and reformed himself upon the other side in order to steal Apollo's heifers and holocaust them as an offering to the Gods on Olympus.

To return to the theme of the toxic effects of mercury, it destroys life by ulceration and necrosis. When mercury falls upon the surface of another metal with which it has an

amalgamating affinity, it 'eats' into it; the resultant area may firstly become fluid, then it 'ulcerates' and finally it is dissolved. *Mercurius* is the syphilitic medicine *par excellence*. The collapsed nasal septum is well known amongst old syphilitic patients, where from, by means of inner, psychic mirroring, we obtain the symptoms, 'pulls ones nose in the street' and 'takes people by the nose.' Death by necrosis is its fundamental note. Its key pathological process may be summed up by the word decomposition. Clarke writes: 'We of the present generation can hardly form a conception of the havoc wrought by mercury in the days when it was considered necessary to "touch the gums" in all cases for which mercury was prescribed before any good could be hoped for. The motto, "Salivation is Salvation," tells its own tale..... For a graphic picture of a practice which was part of the ordinary routine until recent times, I quote the following from Bransby Cooper's First Lines of Surgery, 6th ed., p. 348:

Mercury acts upon some individuals like a poison (!): they are seized with palpitations of the heart, tremblings of the limbs, oppression of the breathing, and irregular pulse. When such indisposition takes place in a person employing mercury we conclude that this mineral is actually producing a deleterious impression on the system (!). It was noticed by the late Mr. Pearson that every year, when it was the custom to salivate freely, a certain number of individuals thus treated died suddenly in the Lock Hospital. They were first affected as I have described, and, on attempting to make the slightest effort they dropped down dead. Mr Pearson learned from experience (!) that these deaths arose from the deleterious action of mercury on the constitution, and the derangement of the system thus excited he proposed to call the mercurial crethismus.

THE MIND

The mind symptoms bring out this morbidity. *Mercurius* is the only remedy in the rubrics, 'delusions, fancied living things were creeping into mouth at night' and 'living things were creeping into vagina at night', a natural state for the buried corpse in the 'night' of the coffin. Another unique symptom, 'delusion, body made of sweets', may be interpreted in the light of the characteristic sweet and rotting smell of death, and indeed, of sweet things attracting flies. Images of maggots, and/or faeces come to the mind of certain *Mercurius* patients. (*Mercurius* and *Veratrum* are the excrement eaters in the materia medica!) I have had patients who were cured with only *Mercurius* in potencies who have had a pathological horror of such things, or again, have recurrent nightmares focusing upon such imagery. There may be disgust of life and loathing of self in a manner similar to *Lac caninum*. Then escape, actually being 'on the run', or in fantasy, flying on mercurial wings into a dreamscape, may be the survival strategy adopted. One patient, for whom I had, indeed, prescribed *Lac caninum*, which only ameliorated, had suffered abuse from her older, pathologically jealous sibling for the duration of her entire childhood (latterly sexually abused also). For her *Mercurius* proved to be the closer simillimum. She wanted to be a fairy, to fly away out of what she described as 'the dead world of my invaded self.' This state of mind gives us a sense of what Margaret Tyler called, 'the inwardness of drugs.' Even in an early stage of physical *Mercurius* pathology we expect to find symptoms associated with rotting and decay such as excessive

and fetid salivation, offensive perspiration, glandular swelling, ulceration with no tendency to heal, dysenteric, bloody stools and often associated mental symptoms of disgust or hostility. When the psyche is primarily effected, the patient may feel impelled to touch things in order to keep the pervading sense of loathing and evil at bay. Hermes as Psychopompus had the unique capacity amongst the Olympian Gods of entering the underworld and guiding the souls of the dead. His passport into Hades' realm being stamped with the Mercurial marks of the capacity for transformations – in other words Hermes is able to amalgamate with diverse and opposing states and properties, entering into all aspects of life and death with equal ease.

Under Delusions in the repertory there are 70 listed for *Mercurius*; the majority of these relate to crimes, enemies, injuries, dangerous animals, mutilation and thieves, while the rubric, 'escape, attempts to' further highlights the unstable and paranoid state of mind. These internal motifs of persecution and destruction are expressed outwardly as impulses to destroy. This is so because any sustained state of the inner being, any frozen psychological posture, is compensated for by a reciprocal and opposite gesture towards the world. The inner state is protected by the outer opposite activity or façade.

As high explosives began to take over from gunpowder a suitably percussive detonator was sought after, and the fulminate of mercury was found. Recently a small, cigarette packet sized, atomic bomb has been mooted. This would be manufactured with red mercury, an amalgam of mercury and antimony heavily enriched by neutrons, and therefore highly fissile, produced by placing the substance in a uranium reactor. And thus we see that compounds of mercury have entered into weaponry, although, interestingly, not until well after the advent of syphilis in the West. We also note another

	Total	Merc.
	26	
	Rubrics	22
1. MIND; DREAMS; bitten; animals, by		
2. MIND; DREAMS; blood; mangled remains, and		
3. MIND; DREAMS; boars, wild		
4. MIND; DREAMS; dead; bodies		
5. MIND; DREAMS; disgusting		
6. MIND; DREAMS; dogs		
7. MIND; DREAMS; dogs; bitten, by, of being		
8. MIND; DREAMS; drowning		
9. MIND; DREAMS; fire		
10. MIND; DREAMS; flood		
11. MIND; DREAMS; frightful		
12. MIND; DREAMS; hideous		
13. MIND; DREAMS; murdered, of being		
14. MIND; DREAMS; quarrels		
15. MIND; DREAMS; revolution		
16. MIND; DREAMS; riots		
17. MIND; DREAMS; robbers		
18. MIND; DREAMS; shooting		
19. MIND; DREAMS; swallowing pins		
20. MIND; DREAMS; water; danger from		
21. MIND; DREAMS; water; falling into		
22. MIND; DREAMS; water; flood, of a		

correspondence evidenced by the old school use of mercurial salts in the war against that *evil and dirty* disease. (Cf. the new Complete MacRepertory's added rubric, 'Washing always her hands'.) Clarke writes: 'In selecting *Mercurius* as the remedy for syphilis the old practitioners were so far right, but they did not know how to give it. *Mercurius* so far corresponds to syphilis that many undoubted cases of mercurial poisoning have been diagnosed by experts as syphilis. Bones, glands, and skin are affected. Inflammation leads to induration, induration to ulceration. *Mercurius* corresponds accurately to the true Hunterian chancre.'

The *Synthetic Repertory* lists eleven sub-rubrics to the major rubric, 'kill, desire to' in which *Mercurius* appears. Knives and razors figure frequently. In the light of this syphilitic posture, we can appreciate that *Mercurius* is the only remedy listed in bold type in the rubric, 'anarchist, revolutionary.' It also appears in: 'moral feeling, want of; criminal, disposition to become without remorse.' Naturally, this state of mind represents an advanced state of pathological breakdown and it is indeed unusual for patients such as these to come into the consulting room. Yet certain politicians may have needed *Mercurius*. More of this later. Certainly, these trends may be revealed in the troubled dreams which assail such patients. The chart on the previous page shows some of them.

Another feature, often met with in the consulting room, and which may be associated with deepest, *Aurum*-like, self-deprecation, sense of failure and self loathing, is guilt and shame. Witness the following chart of associated rubrics:

	Total	Merc.
Rubrics	11	8
1. MIND; DELUSIONS; wrong; he has done		
2. MIND; DELUSIONS; criminal, that he is a		
3. MIND; DELUSIONS; crime; committed, as if he had		
4. MIND; ESCAPE, attempts to; crime, for fear of having committed a		
5. MIND; ANXIETY; conscience, of		
6. MIND; RESTLESSNESS, nervousness; conscience, of		
7. MIND; REMORSE		
8. MIND; REPROACHES; himself		

And associated with this self condemnatory state is the feeling:

	Total	Merc.
Rubrics	2	1
1. MIND; DELUSIONS; hell; suffers the torments of, without being able to explain		

A patient for whom *Mercurius* proved to be curative described his feelings of desolation and isolation thus, "My worst nightmare is that I will be in hell, totally isolated and condemned, with no one to help me". His deepest horror was of madness. He feared he would go on the rampage and bludgeon everyone to death. His relief came from listening to music. During progress to cure the pathology moved from the psychological level to the physical: he developed a foul mouth and a patchy, dirty tongue. I have had several *Mercurius* patients who described their feelings of isolation. Given the known rubric, 'Delusions, everyone is an enemy', helps us to understand that the only safe haven is to be alone.

As we have stated, the theme of *Mercurius* is associated with its uniqueness as the fluid metal, coupled with its amalgamating propensity. Out of this signature we may easily extract the concepts of instability, mutability, necrosis and decay (the ultimate mutation of life into death). *Mercurius* patients may adopt the survival strategy (in order to keep fluidity, insecurity, attack and decay at bay) of developing precision in their activities, meticulous order in their lives; in short, an overriding need for stability of form. This is exemplified by a fanatical attention to detail in perhaps just one aspect of their lives, for instance, cleanliness and hygiene, or developing perfection of style. This has been reported by one patient, a master in the martial arts, as far more than is necessary for overwhelming an assailant, or indeed, any aspect of extreme *conscientiousness about trifles*.

Mercurius needs to fix its form, and in so doing expresses its homœopathic relationship of *inimical to Silicea*. *Silicea* exemplifies many aspects of form (and the pathology upon which it is prescribed is 'lack of grit'), as do so eloquently, the other elements in its period within the periodic table: Carbon, the four square, structural element of life, of which form the diamond is the hardest mineral and the one which most effectively scatters light into its formed elements, the glittering spectrum of rainbow colours; Silicon, the stuff upon which the electronic images of computer language are written and which as quartz crystal is at the heart of electronic watches and clocks and beats the passing moments of time upon the wrists, and by the bedside, of countless millions of persons. As silicon dioxide it forms the largest proportion of the rocks of the Earth's crust and lends to mountains and valleys an enduring profile. *Germanium*, the original semiconductor and electronic chip (initial proving reports carried out by Jeremy Sherr display crippling dyslexia, a pathology of formlessness, and fatigue); *Stannum*, the most crystalline of the malleable metals, the one which is combined with copper to produce incorruptible bronze and which presence in brass instruments gives them their crystalline brilliance of sound. In pathology this substance is noted for fatigue and weakness, particularly in the chest, the central cavity in the body containing lungs and heart, which associates in alchemy with the planet Jupiter, the figure of beneficence, plenitude and in its central meaning, the ability to transcend the *little self* and find images and forms of divine experience. Finally *Plumbum*, associating with the mythological and astrological figure of the arch restrictor and form provider, Saturn. *Plumbum*, it has been noted, stands at the gateway to the radioactive elements. It is the most dense and non-conductive of metals, absorbing vibrations, heat, sound and the particles of radioactive decay (reminding us that Saturn ate his children in order that the old order and social form should not be usurped and which, in toxic concentrations, reduces neurological conductivity, leading to paralysis and muscular wasting. The tremor which is characteristic of *Plumbum* pathology is almost identical to that of *Mercurius*, both being leading remedies in Parkinsonism.

Patients requiring *Mercurius solubilis* (before pathology leads to paralysis) may feel driven into hurried activity. Here we are reminded of the astrologer's mercury, the *mental quicksilver* which skitters about upon the surface, acquiring

information yet being, of itself, unable to retaining a thought for long enough for digestion and deep comprehension to occur. Often patients report that they feel most alive when the mercurial spark is given full reign, when, for instance, they are able to exercise skill in the moment: rally or track racing, in competitive sports, debating and discussing. As intimated earlier, certain politicians may have needed *Mercurius*. Certainly, it seems appropriate that the positive qualities, as exemplified by Hermes, the mediator and the fair spoken, should be taken up and projected by a spokesman of the people (*Mercurius* the God was associated with tradesmen, with whom the gift of the gab is all important, and *Mercurius* the medicine has an elective affinity for the throat). As messenger of the Gods, such a politician should be a boon to humanity but, as has been said 'power corrupts (an apt word to describe *Mercurius*) and absolute power corrupts absolutely'. It is the height of *hubris* to believe that one is a God!

In *Relating*, Liz Greene has written, 'mercury is the Sun's messenger, and while the sun is the symbol of the essence, mercury is the symbol of that function which enables us to know the essence.' In order to realise a new beginning, to be informed (as we have seen, an astrologically associated feature of the mercurial influence in a chart) a revolutionary must have clarity of vision. If means be violent, as in a revolution when, as it is argued, 'the ends justify the means', then the means do need to serve that new end: the essential 'truth'.

The greatest anti-syphilitic remedy, *Mercurius*, is a perfect homœopathic fit for the planning and the battle phases of conflict (although not necessarily for the effects of the ravages of war, when acute fear predominates and such remedies as *Stramonium* or *Opium* might be more frequently indicated). During hostilities, astrologers will also recognise Martian, Uranian and Plutonian motifs! Out-distancing mercury on the scale of toxicity are the radioactive elements. Uranium metallicum and Plutonium, which are named after the outer planets, have yet to be proved, and will doubtlessly carry some of the *collective* notes of the heavy metals. They are likely to have a place in the treatment of cancer. Should correspondences with astrological symbols be anything to go by then they will, without doubt, prove to be of general relevance in contemporary practice. It is noteworthy that Mercury is the planet closest to the radioactive Sun. Its primary function is as the carrier of the solar, vital force and, in particular, its mental octave, which may express itself in health as inspired vision and in its reverse aspect may express antisocial intent, and be destructive of structure.

To recapitulate, the patient for whom *Mercurius* is the remedy is eaten away within, as is a corpse, auto-digested from the rotting gut outwards towards the periphery; as is a guilty criminal; as is the excrement eater who is filled with disgust and selfloathing, who is in Hell, who is surrounded by enemies, who fights or who flees, who is mentioned in 55 general rubrics of aggravation or – if they are compensated and functioning – do so by adhering to a dogma or a fixed form (I would suggest that *Mercurius* be added to the rubric, *Monomania*). Everything in nature may be viewed from two sides. In the case of *Mercurius* these two aspects are symbolised by the black and white, snake entwining Caduceus of Hermes, the staff which is symbolic of healing. The portrait of *Mercurius*, derived from toxicological and proving evidence, is the pathological down side of the messenger of the Gods, the carrier of the pure light of truth and life, the *Vivus* principle.

Just as mercury corrupts, so it may also elevate, raising the spirit of humanity out of filth into purity – this it can do because of its essentially fluid and amalgamating nature, its ability to experience by entering into the opposing qualities, the two sides of things. Therefore, *Mercurius* people may rise to *act out* the life of the messenger of the Gods of the tribe and be a communicator of life and death principles. As we know from the evidence of practice, *Mercurius* persons may be filled with bubbly enthusiasm for life, desiring to make deep and intimate connections with people and society. They often retain childlike qualities. Hermes is portrayed as a young man with wings upon his heels, whereas other Gods are older and wiser. In Kent's *Repertory*, *Mercurius* is the single remedy in the rubric, *Precocity*. In the presence of *Mercurial* people, acting out of a healthy centre, we are reminded of the winged deity, the messenger making almost instantaneous connections, having precocious cognitive skills and rapid, often mellifluous speech. Such people show great receptivity to all stimuli. Their antennae are always out. They often find a place in the family or in society as entertainers, performers and mimics, taking on many personae with greatest dexterity. These aspects of the *Mercurius* personality are most clearly seen in children (of course, they may also live out the down side, and most especially so in adolescence!).

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