

Willis Alonzo Dewey



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1899 - Lathyrus sativus

History and Description of Effects.

The Lathyrus is a vetch, and a member of the leguminosae family growing in India. This remedy, which produces a perfect picture of certain spinal affections, has been known for over a century. In Christison's Toxicology it is stated that it causes paraplegia, dragging gait, turning-in of the toes, stiffness and semi-flexion of the kneejoints.

The attention of the homeopathic profession was directed to the drug as a possible remedy in paraplegia in the British Journal of Homeopathy, Vol. III. Here is found an account of a wheat famine in India, where the peas of the plant were substituted for wheat and used as a food. Those who subsisted on it were taken suddenly, even during sleep, with sudden paralysis of the lower limbs; this occurred without warning, in young men more than in young women, and was never recovered from. Another observer records fifty cases who had eaten the Lathyrus bread and all stated that they became paralytic during the wet season of the country, that they went to bed quite well and awoke with stiff legs, unsteady gait, and aching, but no severe pain. The upper extremities were free.

Another who saw the disease in Algeria and described the symptoms found in ten cases observed that they came on suddenly, in damp weather, with some pains in the loins, trembling, motor paralysis and exaggerated reflexes. He attributed these phenomena to an acute transverse myelitis with degenerative changes in the cord.

A German writer states that the drug produces disturbances of nutrition of the muscles of the lower extremities, paresis, and that the muscles of the trunk and neck and face remain unaffected. Sensation remains normal. It seems to produce a sclerosis of the pyramidal tracts of the cord.

In animals the same condition is found; namely, paralysis of the hind legs. Pigs drag their hind legs and horses give out.

Aggregated Symptomatology.

From all the sources which I have been able to find the following seem to be the symptoms caused by the drug:

Sudden loss of power in the lower extremities, from the waist down.

Tremulous, tottering gait.

Great exaggeration of the reflexes.

Stiffness and lameness of the ankles and knees.

Excessive rigidity of the legs; flexion difficult; spastic gait, the legs becoming interlocked, and walking is difficult or impossible.

Sudden onset of the trouble, and apparent aggravation in cold and damp weather.

Emaciation of the gluteal muscles also observed.

Those having taken it walked on the metatarsophalangeal articulation, the heel not touching the ground.

Impossible to stand steady; swayed from side to side, but closing the eyes had no effect. This with the exaggerated reflexes would exclude its use in locomotor-ataxia.

Debility and tremors of the legs.

Rigidity of the adductors of the thighs.

Staggering gait, with eyes fixed on the floor.

Could not extend or cross the legs when sitting.

Sensibility unimpaired.

Correspondence to Spinal Disorders.

From these symptoms it will be seen that the effects of the drug correspond to many spinal symptoms, but more especially to what is known as spastic paraplegia. Indeed, Struempel

asserts that it produces a perfect picture of this disease.

It is not so often that such a perfect picture of a disease can be had as in this instance. The disease itself is easily recognized by the stiff, spastic gait; the spasm of the adductors, causing the knees to strike each other, or to become locked, causing the patient to fall; the shuffling of the feet; the excessive muscular rigidity and the other well-known symptoms of paraplegia. Therefore, reasoning from our law we would expect the drug to be of service in such cases, and although our pathogenesis of it is coarse we may be permitted to apply it to a disease whose symptomatology is of the coarse order; for it is often difficult to elicit any fine and characteristic symptoms in diseases like ataxic and spastic paraplegia.

It has been recognized as a remedy by but few of our writers on nervous diseases. O'Connor finds that marked benefit follows its use in old cases of myelitis with marked spastic symptoms. Bartlett, in Goodno's Practice, recommends it in excessive knee-jerk and rigidity. Hart speaks of it as a remedy in locomotor-ataxia, but the absence of sensory symptoms and the presence of exaggerated reflexes would seem to contra-indicate it in this disease. He also speaks of it in spinal anemia, giving as symptoms, "Numbness, followed by pain in the lower extremities; sensation of a band around the body; unable to step or to distinguish one limb from another" - symptoms which I am unable to find that the remedy produced. Elliott also speaks of it.

Clinical Resume.

The clinical record of Lathyrus. though very meagre gives great hope that it may prove useful in numerous cases of bed-ridden paraplegiacs and in infantile spinal paralysis, as well as in certain forms of myelitis.

The following is a resume of all that I can find published:

- I. Case of spinal paraplegia, relieved.
- II. A case of multiple sclerosis in a young man of twenty-eight who had been ill seven years and unable to walk for six years was greatly benefited by Lathyrus 3x.
- III. Case of paraplegia, could walk after taking the remedy for some time.
- IV. Case of paraplegia, no improvement.
- V. Rheumatic paralysis, with stiff knees, could walk after use of Lathyrus. (Clarke, Homeopathic World.)
- VI. In a case of a clerk with loss of power of the lower limbs, reflexes exaggerated, knee jerk violent, locomotion difficult and unsteady, probably a case of transverse myelitis, Lathyrus 3x, night and morning, gave most satisfactory results. The patient could walk a mile without assistance. (Simpson, Homeopathic Review.)
- VII. In a man aged fifty-two who had been unable to walk for six years, the paraplegia coming on after a "stroke" from exposure to wet, Lathyrus 3x practically cured in eight months. He had been tied to a chair for six years, and at the time he stopped treatment he was walking four miles daily. (Blake, Homeopathic Review.)

From the fact that the Lathyrus disease occurs frequently in certain mountainous regions of Asia it has been remarked that it is akin to Beri-Beri, which has been traced to eating the Lathyrus bread."

(W. A. Dewey, M.D., Ann Arbor, Michigan, Lathyrus sativus, Medical Century vol. 7 (1899), p. 44-45)