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IGNATIA AMARA

St. Ignatius bean, *Strychnos ignatii*

Natural order: Longaniaceae (Strychnaceae). Genus: *Strychnos*

Tincture and trituration of the seeds.

Active ingredients: Strychnine, Brucine.

THE ESSENTIAL FEATURES

Ignatia is a remedy which is often indicated in today's society, especially since the advent of the women's movement. In my experience, Ignatia is prescribed much more frequently in women than in men, the ratio being approximately 15:1. Often other deeper remedies will be required to complement and complete the action of Ignatia. The remedies most frequently indicated after Ignatia are Apis, Natrum muriaticum, Sepia and Sulphur. Very often Ignatia will be required to ease a grief reaction overlying a constitutional Natrum muriaticum state. Whereas before the grief - producing shock Natrum muriaticum would have been the appropriate prescription, now, in light of the grief response, Ignatia is indicated. One always must focus his prescription upon the uppermost remedy image.

The constitutional Ignatia picture corresponds to the thin, sensitive, nervous, intelligent woman who possesses a high degree of **romanticism** and **idealism**. Sensitivity and romanticism are natural in women, of course, but in Ignatia these two qualities are exaggerated to a pathological degree. They become primary factors which predispose to illness once the patient encounters the harsh realities of life. The Ignatia individual is aware of her **emotional vulnerability**, but she feels pressurised by modern concepts to prove herself in the world, to achieve something, to compete. She feels compelled to correct social injustices, to work for a noble cause. She is quite capable of accomplishing a great deal. Ignatia is usually highly intelligent, capable, artistic and clever; thus they often perform very well

and feel great pride in their achievements. But then, **frustration** or **grief** becomes a factor. She tends to impose more tasks upon herself than her constitution can tolerate. She becomes over - strained to breaking point; then she encounters reversals, **disappointments**, or grieves that are common to everyone's experience. In Ignatia, however, these frustrations conflict with her sensitive, idealistic, romantic nature.

The result of this conflict is an **irrational, unpredictable, hysterical state**. Her initial reaction is one of irritability and impatience. Ignatia doesn't easily show her true inner feelings and disappointment; instead these feelings manifest outwardly as anger. When others fail to meet her lofty expectations, she bursts out suddenly with, "Oh, stupid, you don't understand!". She is inwardly disappointed and angry at the world for failing her. After a while, since she is also disappointed with herself, she may withdraw, become moody, sulky and guilty. Eventually, the **conflict between** her **idealism** and frustrating **reality** brings about a crisis. She may experience disillusionment with her lover, or a co - worker may criticize her or fail to meet her expectations, or her supposedly perfect child may get into trouble in school. Whatever the final episode, it generates in this already overwrought woman a kind of **hysterical collapse**. She may experience spasms in her body or a peculiar kind of **mental** or **emotional spasm**. It appears as if she is in shock. The blood seems to drain from her face. She becomes pale and lies on the couch taking **deep, involuntary breaths**. She may say illogical or seemingly insane things such as threats or offensive remarks to loved ones or mumbling disjointed words or phrases. She seems unable to comprehend what others are saying to her. She is immune to sensible entreaty and too caught up in her emotional state to respond to rationality.

In spite of this seeming paralysis of her outward behaviour, her mind is racing trying to explain her situation and this discrepancy between her idealistic notions of the world and the way it actually operates. Her mind is desperately trying to resolve the conflicts that drove her

to this extreme. But she is simply **overwhelmed by her emotions**. They are no longer controllable and she cannot view her situation objectively. Eventually she goes into her room, slams and locks the door and breaks down into uncontrollable sobbing. This crying is not the sweet weeping of Pulsatilla, flowing easily and ameliorating the patient; rather, it is rather a **spasmodic sobbing** which is punctuated with deep catching breaths, a convulsive sobbing which racks the entire body and is agonizing to the patient. In a relatively short time the spell passes, and the patient regains her former control. She looks back on this episode with dismay, feeling silly or ridiculous. If she does not relieve herself of the pressure which led to this breakdown in the first place, more such episodes come and go until finally a more continuous state of pathology results.

Basically, the Ignatia patient is a sensitive woman who maintains a **controlled** and **rational exterior**, in keeping with her ideal self image. When she becomes over - strained, everything becomes too much for her. Her emotions take over in spite of her attempts to suppress them, and she becomes **hysterical** and **irrational**. This state is not one of true hysteria (Moschus, Valeriana, Liliun tigrinum). True hysteria represents a punishment of one's self and others; it is an intentional state, much like a temper tantrum. In Ignatia, the patient genuinely wills herself to maintain control, but she simply cannot do it. She possesses an idealistic image of her lover, co - worker or child, and she is incapable of resolving this image with the other person's actual behaviour. She brews and sulks awhile, keeping her disappointment inside; her brain works itself into a feverish pitch trying to reconcile her internal conflict. Finally, thoughts seem to crowd into her mind until she can no longer control herself, and she breaks down into this **unpredictable** and **paradoxically contrary behaviour**.

Having this image of the Ignatia essence in mind, it would be useful now to review the evolution of the various stages of Ignatia with regard to age.