

Robert Thomas Cooper - An Introduction to his Work

by Ian Watson

An introduction to the work of Dr. Robert Thomas Cooper (1844-1903), with particular reference to the treatment of deafness and diseases of the ear.

The Cooper Club

In the preface to his Dictionary of Practical Materia Medica the author, John Henry Clarke, M.D., gives due acknowledgement to some of the authorities he consulted in the compilation of his work - Allen, Hering, Lippe & Guernsey being among them. He goes on to mention "sources inaccessible to the general reader, being scattered up and down the periodical literature of Homoeopathy, and throughout the writings of original workers, among whom I may name Dr. James Compton Burnett and Dr. Robert T. Cooper as pre-eminent, each in a line of his own."

Burnett needs little introduction today - his quaint little booklets having introduced many new remedies (and new uses for old remedies) into every day use - Bacillinum , Urtica urens , Chelidonium majus , Ceanothus , to name but a few. Cooper on the other hand, for the most part remains buried in numerous journal articles, a few published booklets long since out of print, and scattered throughout the text of Clarke's Dictionary. A cursory browse through the latter will reveal the initials R.T.C. countless times, and a fair number of remedies are listed as having been introduced into homoeopathy by the same Dr. Cooper, among them being Agraphis nutans , Arbutus andrachne and Lemna minor. Polycrests none of them, but clinically useful remedies none the less.

Clarke certainly had great respect for Cooper, such that when he formed a materia medica study group in 1905 - two years after Cooper's death - he named it "The Cooper Club". At the opening meeting Clarke recalled how Cooper, Burnett and himself had dined together regularly once a month between 1893 to 1901 to share their experiences, and how he (Clarke) would record the proceedings on a menu card to be written up later that night. The result, to a large extent, was Clarke's Dictionary of Materia Medica . "Be it understood", said Clarke, "it was Robert Thomas Cooper who began the movement, and who was the life and soul of the movement all the time. That is why this association, so long as I have anything to do with it, must bear Cooper's name."

Cooper's work

In his day, Cooper found himself unpopular among many of his professional brethren, and took great pains in his articles, letters and speeches to defend his methods and to emphasise the results of his treatment. To his credit he was as willing to publish his failures as he was his successes. That some were jealous of his success seems probable, especially outside the homoeopathic fraternity, but many of his fellow homoeopaths took issue with him also, mostly over his use of unproven remedies and arborivital tinctures. Be that as it may, he was certainly an observer of the highest

calibre, a gifted naturalist and a meticulous recorder of remedial action.

Cooper certainly contributed much to homœopathic materia medica and therapeutics, and his major contributions were threefold:

1. The introduction and clinical testing of a range of remedies applicable to ear diseases, in particular chronic deafness.
2. The introduction and successful employment of numerous remedies in the different types of cancer. He gained a reputation among many as "the one doctor who actually cures cancer".
3. The development of a new branch of homœopathy named "arborivital medicine", employing single-drop doses of plant mother-tinctures, prepared from fresh living specimens and exposed to sunlight where possible - 30 years before Edward Bach!

Deafness and diseases of the ear

In this article I shall mention some of the remedies Cooper used in ear diseases and deafness. Having spent over seventeen years as Physician for Diseases of the Ear (which he labelled as "the most obstinate and despairing department of medicine") at the London Homœopathic Hospital, he was well-qualified to write of his experiences in this department. In an article published in 1897 entitled *What can be done for the treatment of chronic deafness?** he wrote: "The question which heads this paper has been before my mind for some eighteen years, during all of which time it has been the subject of unceasing consideration.....as I am dealing (in this paper) only with the chronic diseases of the ear, I ask the question, what are we doing for these? If, gentlemen, you are satisfied, well and good; but do not insist that others must be in a similarly happy and quiescent state." His cases in this context often refer to "watch-hearing" - referring to his use of a pocket-watch brought gradually nearer to the patient to determine the degree of impairment on either side. The sign ØA is the one used by Cooper to denote a plant mother-tincture prepared by the arborivital method.

*H.W. Jan 1 1897 pp 9-17

Agraphis nutans

Considered by Cooper to act especially upon light-haired persons with a tendency to catarrh from any of the mucous membranes. It has a strong affinity for the adenoids and has cured deafness with adenoid involvement.

Case: Ellen H., aged nine, deaf for three years from measles, and subject to psoriasis, had four doses of Agraphis ØA from December 10, 1892 to February 4, 1893. Cured by March 11th, not only of the deafness, but of the psoriasis also. The membranes had been perforated in this case.

Calendula Officinalis

Used extensively by Cooper in many types of obstinate deafness. Generally he used the mother tincture and low potencies, sometimes employing lactose powder soaked in the tincture and taken as a snuff as an additional local measure. Between 1890-91 he published details of seventy-seven cases where Calendula was used in the treatment, whatever the outcome. He makes no secret of its failures, but the number of cases of differing types of chronic deafness which responded to Calendula is remarkable. Among his verified indications for Calendula are "ear complaints and deafness after bathing, especially from diving," and "impaired hearing < in damp or

cloudy weather." Below are a few examples.

Case 7: Miss S., 36. Buzzing in ear; singing voice weak. Catarrhal deafness left side for two years. Calendula Ø, gtt.5 t.d.s. Result: hearing became decidedly clearer without affecting other symptoms.

Case 23: Miss M.S., 30. Old standing (12 or 14 years) and very obstinate vascular deafness with nervo-catarrhal symptoms. Calendula Ø, 7 drops over a fortnight, with 3rd decimal snuff. Followed by improvement in hearing and in general health, and the ears from feeling cold had resumed their natural warmth.

Case 31: Henry S., 28. Deaf both ears for 14 years. Seen Oct. 1889, watch-hearing on contact only. Constantly taking cold with tinnitus and vertigo. General health good. Calendula Ø, 3rd of a drop t.d. until December 1889, when he left quite well. Watch-hearing now right 40in, left 30in.

Case 73: Charles P, 18. Vascular deafness with catarrhal symptoms pointing to middle ear. Membranes suffused, thickened. No symptoms but deafness. Calendula Ø from January to August, attended with continuous improvement. Watch-hearing improved from 8in and 3in to 30in and 5in.

In a later article Cooper concludes that "the deafnesses curable by Calendula are characteristically middle ear deafnesses."

Cheiranthus Cheiri

Cured many ailments in Cooper's hands, deafness among them, the keynote concomitant symptom being the *cutting of wisdom teeth*.

Case: Male, aged twenty, deafness and otorrhœa of left side. Cutting three wisdom teeth. Watch heard on contact only. Single dose of Cheiranthus ØA on April 30th 1892, improved him up to June 11th. A second dose given June 25th "seems to have cured him, for we find the watch-hearing is now 25 inches, and hearing in every way satisfactory".

Kali hydriodicum

A favourite of Cooper's in tinnitus and "noises in the head." (Named Kali iodatum in Clarke). He devoted a whole article to a remarkable case of a 43 year old woman with singing in the ears and deafness. On these and other indications he gave Kali hyd. 30 t.d.s. for 10 days, then once nightly. The patient was relieved but not cured. Other remedies were tried and failed and a further course of Kali hyd. did nothing. Cooper then gave the same remedy in the same potency in a single dose, and the case was rapidly and permanently cured. Cooper's observation from this and similar cases was that repetition of the correctly-selected remedy will tend to produce palliation, whilst a single dose of the same, "allowed time to expend itself in the system, will tend to secure the complete curative effect."

Veratrum viride

Found to be the (external) remedy par excellence for acute inflammatory diseases of the ear, simple earache included. After much experience he came to rely upon a mixture of seven drops of the mother tincture to half an ounce of equal parts glycerine and water. Of this he added a drop or two to a teaspoon of hot water, and applied a little to the outer surface of the auricle, the temperature being regulated as necessary to be most comfortable to the patient, ".....no dipping of the finger into water, or thermometrical testing can determine this; the effect of contact upon the external portion of the ear alone ought to be our guide"; in other words, if it hurts, it

is probably too hot! Having thus found the optimum temperature, he would proceed to pour the remainder gently into the meatus. He writes of this formula: "Over and over again patients have testified to immediate and positive relief given by these drops..... I do not remember to have once found it fail to give relief."

Viola odorata

Cooper considered this remedy to act specifically upon the middle ear, retina, lateral sinus and the inferior cerebellar veins. He found it especially suitable for dark-haired, anaemic or neuralgic (or both) patients, and credited it with the peculiar property of restoring an otorrhœa which has been suppressed by cold, fever, or other morbid condition.

Case: Deafness of both ears, left the worst, of six years' duration, dating from influenza, in a pale, young woman of twenty. Roaring in both ears, frequent headache through temples and behind the eyes, anaemic, tympanic membranes. Watch-hearing right 1in, left on contact. After seven doses of Viol-o. ØA, given between May 21st and December 3rd, 1892, the conversation-hearing became good and the watch-hearing improved to right 9in, left 4in.

Conclusion

By its very nature, chronic deafness presents a difficult challenge to any therapy, the absence of adequate prescribing symptoms and modalities being a prominent feature of many cases. Cooper was none the less adamant that they are as curable by homoeopathy as anything else, and it was only after having tried and failed many times with the polychrests that he turned to lesser-known and in some cases obscure remedies, some of which are outlined above. Quite from where he obtained his original prescribing indications is often unclear, but the results speak for themselves and the indications he has left us appear to be well-verified and reliable. Cooper himself was happy to claim the highest authority in support of his methods..... "I believe that in giving single doses of our common plants, often with no proving whatever to guide me, I am in the main acting in accordance with Hahnemann himself in the early days of investigation."

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