

# Nicholas Culpeper's Herbal Therapeutics

by Graeme Toby, MNIMH

The name of the seventeenth century herbalist and astrologer Nicholas Culpeper (1616-1654) remains memorable due to the continuing availability in print of his most famous work *The English Physitian* (1652), otherwise known as Culpeper's Herbal. Between Culpeper's day and ours, this herbal found its way into many homes because it contained information on herbal healing from the Western tradition in English, rather than the doctors' Latin. It was cheap, having no need of illustrations of the common or garden English herbs that were well known to its audience, and it showed a simple and safe alternative to the heroic chemical medicines which were in vogue in the 18th and 19th centuries. The foundations of Hippocratic and Galenic medicine upon which Culpeper's teachings were built, crumbled only in the middle of the 19th century with the emergence of Virchow's cellular pathology. This, however, was the moment of revival of herbal medicine in England with the arrival of Dr. Coffin from America, where a version of Culpeper's herbal was one of the earliest books printed.

Culpeper was politically and spiritually a revolutionary. He fought for the parliamentarians in the English civil war and believed that the execution of Charles I, in the year of his first publication, was the beginning of a collapse of the world order; the end of the rule of kings and empires over the globe which would usher in the new kingdom of Jesus Christ. Not only would there be no place for Bishops and other lackeys of the Church in this millenarian vision, but the lawyers and the doctors, the other professions that abused the common man, would have to go too. As a trainee apothecary whose studies were interrupted by the civil war, he took it upon himself, in those lawless days, to practice as a physician for the benefit of his suffering neighbors. Culpeper made a name for himself by treating the poor without payment, (for otherwise they would languish for want of money to pay a doctor), and by publishing works on medicine in the vernacular English, so that his fellow countrymen could understand how to treat their own ailments and so have no need of doctors (Toby, 1997, part 1).



Nicholas Culpeper\*

Culpeper's writings contained many criticisms of the Royal College of Physicians. In particular his first book, a translation of the pharmacopoeia of the Royal College of Physicians entitled *A Physical Directory or a Translation of the London Dispensatory* drew much approbation from that quarter. Culpeper showed that there was nothing miraculous in the doctors' prescriptions except the costliness of the ingredients (although even six years after Culpeper's death the College was still maintaining the pretence, when at the restoration of the monarchy, it presented the newly crowned King Charles II with a gift of powdered unicorn horn!). Culpeper subsequently published other original works and translations of leading medical texts of the day, all designed to educate the common man and woman in medical practice.

For the purpose of understanding his herbal therapeutics, I will concentrate here on two key writings, which, read alongside his herbal, provide a simplified approach to the herbal therapeutics of his day: his translation of Galen's *Ars Medica*, entitled *Galen's Art of Physick* (Culpeper 1652) and *A Key to Galen and Hypocrates, their Method of Physick*, which was inserted into the re-issue of *A Physical Directory*, retitled the *Pharmacopoeia Londinensis* (Culpeper 1669). For an underpinning of the medical principles involved, I refer readers to my book and elsewhere (Toby, 1997; Gruner, 1930; Shah, 1966; Chishti 1988).

## Galen's Art of Physick

In Culpeper's version of this medical classic, key passages are translated and commented on to provide easy understanding of medical treatment. He begins with definitions of health, disease, and the neutral state that is no longer health but not yet disease; of elements, humours and spirits and a description of the four temperaments and their compound temperaments. He lists the parts or members of the body (anatomy) and the vital, natural and animal virtues or faculties and their operations (physiology) (Toby 1997 part 2, section 1). The text then examines signs of temperamental imbalance in each organ or part of the body, with the



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*Borago officinalis* (borage)

herbs to restore balance and therefore health to the part. The final section looks at the factors determining how the human body can become altered from a state of health to one of disease.

It was axiomatic in Hippocratic and Galenic medicine that the majority of all diseases did not come from without, like infection or injury, but from within, by a surplus of foodstuffs and what we now call metabolic waste products (Aschner 1943). In his great work *De Contagione* (1546), Hieronymus Fracastorius (1483-1553) had described different methods of infection - by direct contact (via clothing utensils etc.), and at a distance - but these were not followed up for centuries (Guthrie 1945). The Hippocratic concept of *physis*, i.e. the constitution or psychophysical make-up and self-healing power of the organism, persisted into the 19th century. Since the constitution of each individual is unique, so is the related individual resistance or susceptibility to external noxious agents (and, for that matter, predisposition to non-infective diseases). For each constitution, evaluated according to the prevailing temperament with modification by addition of a secondary temperament, a specific regulation of six factors (the 'six non-natural things': quality of air, food/drink, sleep/wakefulness, exercise/rest, normal evacuations from the body and the emotions) was proposed to maintain the organism in health. Disease was said to arise from a combination of external modifications of environment (the six factors as the exciting cause) and internal constitutional factors (the predisposing cause). Injudicious management of the six non-natural things affects the innate heat of the body, car-

ried in the blood and spirits, and consequently the 'fire in the belly' and the ability of the organism to complete digestion and assimilation of nutriment. Less than optimal digestion allows undigested or crude humours to enter the body and to provide a focus where they settle for pathological processes to begin (Tobyn 1997, part 2, section 2).

Mild disease is where an imbalance exists in the **qualities** of the body as a whole or in a specific part or organ; serious disease is where a **humour** has gathered in an organ to excess in either quantity or quality. Manipulation of the six factors - for instance the adoption of exercise, which generates heat in the body, concocts or 'cooks up' cold humours like catarrh and expels them as sweat through the pores of the skin - may be sufficient to correct a mild imbalance of qualities, such as slight coldness. A substantial part of *Galen's Art of Physick* examines signs of alterations in the qualities of parts of the body. Below, the examples of the heart and of the brain are used to illustrate (Culpeper, 1652, chapters 18-21 and 33-36).

### The Heart

The heart is naturally hot and dry in quality. Signs of an afflicted heart may be: difficulty breathing, palpitations, body heat, fevers and shivering, a change of color, fainting and pain. Imbalances of particular qualities, their signs and remedies are:

#### too hot and dry

swift, large and hard pulse; rapid breathing; very hairy chest (recent research has shown that more men with a hairy chest suffer heart attacks than those less hairy); subject is active, hasty, angry, tyrannical.

Rx. *Borago officinalis* (borage), *Lactuca virosa* (wild lettuce), *Viola odorata* (syrup of sweet violets)

#### hot and moist

swift, large but soft pulse; expiration longer than inspiration; chest less hairy than above; quick to anger and action but not so cruel; prone to inflammations and infections

Rx. Sweating and bleeding; *Melissa officinalis* (lemon balm), *Ruta graveolens* (rue), *Angelica archangelica* (angelica), *Borago officinalis* (borage), *Viola odorata* (syrup of violets), *Rosa spp.* (red rose)

#### cold and dry

small, hard pulse; slow respiration if the chest is large; no hair on chest; least prone to anger, but once angered never forgets

Rx. *Rosmarinus officinalis* (rosemary), *Calendula officinalis* (marigold), borage, rose

## cold and moist

soft pulse; body movement slow; fearful mind; has no anger or fight

Rx. *Ruta graveolens* (rue), rosemary, *Crocus sativus* (saffron), lemon balm, marigold, angelica, *Cinnamomum verum* (cinnamon)

## The Brain

The brain is naturally cold and moist and is very affected by either heat or cold. People often need to wear hats, to keep the heat off in summer or the cold out in winter.

## too cold and moist

abundant discharges (e.g. phlegm), worse in winter; increased sleep, lethargic; dulled senses, brain muddled with poor wit and memory

Rx. *Juniperus communis* (juniper), *Stachys betonica* (betony), Chamomile (*Matricaria recutita*), *Foeniculum vulgare* (fennel)

## cold and dry

discharges; affected by cold; face cold, livid, swarthy; sleeps badly; good memory but may be fearful. Rx. conserves of rose, borage, *Malva neglecta* (mallows), *Verbena officinalis* (vervain), violet leaves, betony, *Salvia officinalis* (sage), *Fumaria officinalis* (fumitory), *Humulus lupulus* (hops)

## hot and moist

discharges but well concocted (i.e. not thick, dense); veins standing out on temples; eyes red, hot, burning; dreams a lot, foolish imaginings.

Rx. bleeding

## hot and dry

few discharges; head hot with continual headache; bloodshot eyes; sleeps little, stays up late; sharp-witted, good anticipation and sense of smell

Rx. fumitory, *Salix alba* (willow), wild lettuce, hops, *Nymphaea nouchali* (waterlily), rose, sweet violet, laudanum

These two examples show how some signs relate to the person as a whole and to their behavior, as well as to the physical part affected. From the descriptions of qualitative imbalances of the brain and hence the fluids of the head, important differentials may arise. For example, consider two people both suffering from sinusitis. One has the one with copious nasal discharge thus has a cold condition requiring heating pungent and cutting remedies appropriate to the head, while the

other has few discharges and needs cooling, soothing and moistening medicines appropriate to the head. The various herbs listed above are not interchangeable but require selection according to the totality of signs and the overall presentation of the patient, and with the knowledge of the operations of each herb listed in the table below.

A condition which involves an excessive accumulation of a humour (and very often this is an excess of the cold and moist phlegm humour) is termed a *plethora*. The site of the accumulation may suffer pain or a sense of heaviness, and there may be other more general signs such as lassitude, loss of appetite, a ruddy complexion, tightness of the skin and a full pulse. The excess may be quantitative, leading to obstructions and possibly acute medical emergencies (e.g. stroke, heart attack), or qualitative, where the alteration of normal humours into metabolic waste products maintains a chronic disease.



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*Althea officinalis* (marshmallow)

Historically, the treatment approach for plethoric states, has been via methods of elimination, namely diet (fasting), purging, vomiting, sweating, diuresis, bleeding and draining through the skin (counter-irritants and scarification). These were adopted as medical treatments from observing the way the human body is able spontaneously to preserve itself or correct imbalances. This is seen most easily in the purer bodies of children, who may develop nosebleeds, diarrhea or vomiting to evacuate an unhealthy substance. While we may entertain today the prescribing of fasts, herbal diaphoretics and diuretics, and some use of laxatives, we balk at the idea of vomits, strong purges, blood-letting and blistering the skin. Culpeper takes a very cautious attitude to violent measures in his section on vomits and purges (Culpeper, 1669, pp 298-305). He suggested using vomits as seldom as possible and only for conditions of the stomach, while the old Hippocratic indication for vomits applied to a variety of diseases located above the navel. As for purges, he discouraged the violent and dangerous medicines too often recommended by one patient to another without supervision or too enthusiastically given by doctors. Instead, he recommended gentler remedies for self-medication, and gradual evacuation of the humour either in doses adequate for a purgative effect, or else sufficient for correcting the offending humour to allow the body to do its own cleansing work. His recommendations for herbs to purge each kind of humour, include the following:

**yellow bile (hot and dry)**

*Artemisia absinthium* (wormwood), *Centaureum erythraea* (centaury), *Aloe vera* (aloes), *Humulus lupulus* (hops), mallows, *Prunus persica* (peach leaves and flowers), *Rosa damascena* (damask rose), violets, prunes, *Tamarindus indica* (tamarind), *Rheum officinale* (rhubarb).

**phlegm (cold and moist)**

*Hyssopus officinalis* (hyssop), *Cytisus scoparius* (broom), *Sambucus canadensis* (elder flowers).

**water**

elder flowers, bark or leaves, broom.

**black bile**

*Senna alexandrina* (senna), *Fumaria officinalis* (fumitory), *Cuscuta europaea* (dodder), whey.

Gentle purges for thick phlegm or black bile should be prescribed, writes Culpeper, with pungent, cutting medicines to break up the humour for easier evacuation, while astringent herbs should be avoided. Generally, herbs which strengthen the heart and stomach, and carminatives for the bowels, should be added. The mixture can be taken before bed.



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*Hyssopus officinalis* (hyssop)

**A Key to Galen and Hippocrates**

The details just given on purging medicines are to be found in Culpeper's *A Key to Galen and Hypocrates, their Method of Physick*, appended to the text of the *Pharmacopoeia Londinensis*. Together with Culpeper's treatment of the Cataologue of Simples in the New Dispensatory located in the middle of the pharmacopoeia, these provide information on the qualities or temperatures of herbal medicines, the organs of the body they are appropriated to, and their operations or actions in the body. We will explore the detail of this material presently.

However, Culpeper also added to this publication some astrological material, namely the *Astrologo-Physicall Discourse*. In its *Premonitory Epistle to the Reader* Culpeper relates the seven planets to bodily organs and functions, and gives a basic outline of the three worlds of hermetic philosophy— the elemental (sublunary), the celestial and the intellectual - by which the reader may understand something of the place of astrology in the work of healing. Culpeper's view was that physick (i.e. medicine) without astrology is "like a lamp without oil" (Culpeper (1656)). The way to prescribe medicines is according to their planetary rulers, and both the timing of and manner of 'potentizing' remedies astrologically is mentioned in several places in his herbal, illustrated by use of a horoscope at the back of the herbal. This section has been excised from all edi-

tions I have seen dated after the 1670's. Although the occult or hidden qualities of herbs are briefly discussed below, space does not allow here to explore the astrological approach, and I must refer you to my book (Tobyn, 1997, section 4 and appendices).

### The Manifest Qualities of Herbs

Galen had classified herbs by the action of bringing heat, cold, dryness or moisture in one of four degrees to the body, or a particular organ of the body. Heat and cold are the active qualities that alter dryness and moisture, the passive qualities. The principle of medical treatment is one of **allopathy**, that is, treating with opposites. Thus, for a cold and moist condition, heating and drying remedies are employed, while for a cold and dry condition, a heating and moistening approach is taken. Hippocrates had objected that simply to specify a heating remedy was insufficient. It also had to be stated whether the medicine should be drying (astringent) or bland (moistening).

Physicians considered the human body in health to be hot in the first degree, and naturally moist. This is the temperature and temperament of healthy blood which carries the innate heat and vitality. (Humans are constituted by around 80% water, the "radical moisture" of the body was thought essential to keep the flame of light alive). A focus on preserving "radical moisture" ensured the continuation of health and longevity. Herbs hot in the first degree, mild enough in heat not to have a drying effect on the body, could be used to maintain or restore the innate heat. Milk thistle is one such herb, since it *"cleanses the blood exceedingly: and in Spring, if you please to boil the tender plant (but cut off the prickles unless you have a mind to choke yourself) it will change your blood as the season changes, and that is the way to be safe"* (Culpeper, 1656, under Our Lady's Thistle). Many medicinal herbs shared the qualities of heat (and dryness) in the 2nd degree, the extra degree of heat implying that a cold imbalance of the body needed medicinal correction. Herbs hot in the 3rd degree, such as juniper, rue and angelica, and in the 4th degree such as mustard and garlic, represented much stronger medicines which must be prescribed in smaller doses or for a limited period since just the right amount of heat was to be applied to correct a given degree of coldness in the body. The application of an excess of heat was feared to create a new condition manifesting as excess heat (Tobyn, 1999).

Herbs which induced heat greater than the natural heat of the body necessarily induced an increase in the passive quality of dryness. This was considered beneficial since many illnesses, and certainly chronic conditions,

were due to excess cold in the body and coldness was said to induce moisture, as the cold of night brings the wet dew with it. Naturally, however, the potential of herbal remedies was not rigidly reduced to a straight-jacket of degrees of the four qualities, but each had their unique identity and healing action. For instance, marigold is considered a herb hot in the 2nd degree yet also brings moisture to the body.

Herbs inducing cold in the body are fewer in number, and were needed less often. Many are classified as cold and dry in the 1st or 2nd degree, such as coltsfoot, yarrow and dandelion, while others were notably cold and moist, like sweet violet, chickweed and white pond lily. Herbs cold in the 3rd and 4th degree are narcotic and, if taken in excess could extinguish the natural heat of the body entirely and kill the patient. In this group are opium poppy, deadly nightshade and henbane.

### The Hidden Qualities of Herbs

Culpeper paid particular attention to the occult or hidden qualities of herbal medicines. This attention reflected his interest in Hermetic philosophy, which was very much in vogue in the late 15th, 16th and the first half of the 17th centuries. He laid out the basic tenets of the philosophy in his description of the three worlds: the elemental (sublunary), celestial and intellectual (Culpeper, 1651)

The sublunary world encompassed all life on planet Earth. Everything in it is materially composed of the four elements in varying proportions that determine the manifest qualities which are perceived through the five human senses. It is at this level that the manifest qualities of herbal medicines are also discerned and, when coupled with age-old empirical knowledge of what effects a particular herb can have on the body, leads to a rational and empirical approach to the use of herbs as medicines.

Above the sublunary world, and influencing it, lay the celestial world of the planets and fixed stars. These are connected not by a causal relationship, but one of correspondence and mirroring, according to the Hermetic axiom "as above, so below". A set of occult correspondences linked the seven traditional planets with all matter in the sublunary world as a part of the interconnectedness of all things in the cosmos. Since the human being (microcosm) was an epitome of the cosmos (macrocosm), Culpeper could argue for the presence of a microcosmic Sun, Moon, Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn in the human body. Every herb in Culpeper's herbal is given a planetary 'ruler.' The seat of the microcosmic Sun, for instance, lies in the heart where the vital spirits of the body are created

from blood and pneuma (air, breath). Solar herbs have an affinity for the heart and are restorative to it. This represents treatment by sympathy (or homeopathically), and fulfils the requirement to treat the affected part of the body in any condition with sympathetic remedies. The hidden virtue of a herb is to be 'potentised' by its being gathered at a propitious hour according to the rules of astrology. For instance, *Hypericum perforatum* (St. John's wort), a solar herb, may well be gathered in the hour of the sun on St. John's day (June 24th - midsummer solstice) when the Sun itself is at its maximum declination for the northern hemisphere and most potent in its heat.

The highest of the three worlds is the intellectual. This is the realm of God, of Plato's ideal forms or of our highest spiritual potential as human beings. This realm has influence over the celestial world, according to the maxim "the wise man rules his stars, the fool obeys them". Although we are not blindly controlled like puppets by the movements of the planets and can create our individual destinies through wisdom and self-knowledge, an awareness of the flow of life as represented symbolically by the horoscopic delineation of the movement of planets was also considered important. For example, a tense configuration between Mars and the Sun - a disharmony of the spheres - may augur a tendency for cholera to increase in the body and produce a likelihood of anger and strife during that period. With foreknowledge of this, we may consciously strive to keep our cool. Ignorance of this dimension can lead to becoming the victim of such passions, one who 'obeys' their stars.

### Herbs Appropriated to the Various Organs of the Body

For a given condition, a suitable medicinal herb must be selected not only for its qualitative effects in relation to the nature of the complaint but also for its appropriateness for the part of the body needing treatment. Herbs may heat, cool, dry or moisten particular organs of the body, but in addition may also target and strengthen a particular part through their hidden qualities, as indicated in the table of herbs below. I will use the same two examples again, of medicines targeting the brain and the heart.

#### The brain

Culpeper writes that because of its natural temperature the brain is easily affected by both heat and cold, and often suffers an excess of moisture. Cephalic medicines are used to correct the imbalance. These may cool or heat, the latter being pungent or aromatic herbs that have the power to cut cold and moist humours and

to purge the brain of them. Others strengthen the brain, through a hidden affinity. These are usually herbs of Mercury as listed in the herbal, or else another planet in the zodiac sign Aries (for instance, wood betony under Jupiter in Aries, rosemary under the Sun in Aries).

The location of the symptom, however, does not necessarily indicate the only part of the body requiring treatment. For instance, since the brain is in the top of the body, vapors arising from an overheated organ lower down in the body may be to blame for the brain's affliction. This is one explanation of certain melancholic affections of the mind, and is the origin of the term 'the vapours' relating to transient mental affections in gynaecology. Thus treatment of the brain must begin with the organ at the cause of the problem. Lingard, for example, recommended the addition of the emmenagogue *Tanacetum vulgare* (tansy) to *Cinchona officinalis* (cinchona) and a heart mixture, which included *Gentiana lutea* (gentian), in his tried and tested treatment for menopausal hot flushes (Lingard, 1958).

#### The Heart

Medicines appropriated to the heart are called cordials. They were often prescribed as syrups or conserves, especially of the flowers of borage, viper's bugloss, sweet violet and rose. Sugar was deemed gently hot and moist and thought fitting for pleasing the heart, the seat of the vital spirit whose heat is cherished by the body's radical moisture. Cordials refresh the vital spirits, making them lively and active. They were said to achieve this both as strengtheners of the heart and by keeping back melancholy vapours rising up from the spleen. Depression may arise from the fumes of an imbalanced spleen which naturally ascend, both to the heart - producing a clear disruption to the vitality and a potential spread of disease to other parts of the body - and to the head, to produce melancholy thoughts. An imbalanced spleen and a disrupted flow of the vital spirits can produce the physical symptoms in depression of anorexia, constipation, and lack of libido. Thus the heart needs protection and the spleen correcting, exemplified by such modern and traditional treatments for depression as St. John's wort and borage respectively.

Other cordials strengthen the heart through a hidden (astrological) virtue and preserve it from poison. These are the Alexipharmicals such as rue, angelica and juniper, all herbs of the Sun. Additionally, cordials can work by cooling the heat of fevers and so preserving the heart from overheating.

These two examples show Culpeper's clarification of

the main actions or operations required in herbs to treat these organs.

### The Operations or Actions of Herbs

The third part of Culpeper's method in *A Key to Galen and Hypocrates, their Method of Physick* covers the specific actions (properties or operations) of herbs. In the list below I have not mentioned herbs used to treat external wounds, nor those which increase fertility. Purgative medicines cleanse the body by carrying away the offending humour - differentiating them from dispersing diaphoretics- but not all cleansers are purgatives. Some herbs fight against poison in the body although they are not, in Culpeper's sense, true alexipharmics.

1. **Emollient Herbs** – These correct hardness of a part. Hardness may result either from thick humours congealed by cold, or by distension and stretching of a part full of a humour. In the latter case, since moisture may be the cause of distention, the most appropriate emollient must be drying to consume the moisture. Generally, however, an emollient should manifest qualities of heat and moisture to counter the cold, dry impaction of a humour. Emollient medicines may taste sweet or oily (never sour, salty, rough, sharp, astringent or very hot) and may be prescribed with cutting medicines to aid penetration of the congealed humour.
2. **Loosening Herbs** – These loosen or relax and are similar in quality to emollients, but are used to treat moveable parts of the musculoskeletal system suffering stiffness, spasms and cramps. Most remedies for the brain (cephalics) have a loosening action. They can be identified in Culpeper's herbal as treating 'convulsions' and cramps. There is some overlap between these herbs and today's relaxant and spasmolytic herbs.
3. **Thinning and Thickening Herbs** – Thinning herbs are heating and thin or rarify humours, and open the pores of the skin to allow the release of the harmful part of these humours, (for instance excess heat or of pain-producing 'toxins'). When applied to swellings, they act much like emollient or loosening medicines. Thickening herbs are cooling and are used to 'pin down' a sharp, volatile humour so that the body can work on expelling it. They can also close the pores of the skin, making it more resistant to cold and counteracting the debility of chronic sweats and dissolution of the vital spirits in weak patients.
4. **Vessel Opening Herbs** – These are heating, sharp, biting and pungent and help to open blood vessels to bring more blood to the area or to disperse a stagnant blood humour in a part. Note that herbs must also be drying in order to open passages in the liver. A cold, dry quality would in theory belong to herbs which close off vessels.
5. **Attenuating Herbs** (cutting and thinning) -These herbs are usually heating but not always so, and taste sharp, sour or bitter, dilating rather than contracting the tongue. By their penetration they "cut up" thick humours so that the body can more easily consume and expel them. They are used to open obstructions of the bowels due to tough and viscous humours, to expectorate phlegm from the lungs, and to bring on menstruation. Culpeper recommends a gentle purge before using attenuating herbs, in case their heating effect scatters only a portion of a humour and leaves a remainder in a thickened and more obstructive state.
6. **Drawing and Repelling Herbs** – These are used to draw the innate heat and the spirits to an over-cooled part of the body, or in external applications to draw humours to a place safely away from another. They also draw poisons or corrupt humours out of the body and may be used to help the crisis of a disease. Culpeper deems them hotter in quality than attenuating herbs. Repelling medicines drive away an influx of a humour and are astringent, cooling and thin. A good example is vinegar of roses applied to the head in hot headaches. These can be used at the beginning of treatment to prevent an increase in offending humour, which will be dispersed by diaphoretics towards the end of treatment.
7. **Diaphoretic ('discussing') Herbs** – These are used to expel serous or thin humours and noxious vapours from the body. Once again, for fear of leaving behind a thickened humour, purgation must be carried out first (or venesection if the fault is in the blood). Consequently a strong diaphoretic is usually employed once the disease is in decline as a result of preceding treatment, except in conditions due to heat in the blood, when diaphoretics can be used when the disease is increasing (eg. in fevers). In quality, diaphoretic medicines are similar to attenuating and drawing medicines, i.e., very hot and dry.
8. **Diuretic Herbs** are either hot and pungent with the power to cut and thin the humours being excreted from thickened blood, or else cooling, which open and cleanse the urinary passages. Some of these herbs also have an anti-lithic action.
9. **Emmenogogues** - These herbs are hot and pungent,

## SOME COMMONLY USED MEDICINAL HERBS, THEIR QUALITIES AND ACTIONS

Herb	Quality, Degree & Essence	Organs Targeted Strengthened	Operations or Actions
Agrimony Herb	Hot & Dry 1st, Thin, Gently Astringent	Liver, Spleen, Kidneys, Joints	Cleanses, Opens Obstructions
Burdock Root/Leaf/Seed	Cold & Dry 1st Thin	<b>Womb</b>	Cleanses, Diuretic & Antilithic
Wild Carrot Seed	Hot 3rd, Dry Thin	Liver	Diuretic, Emmenagogue, Anti-Lithic, Carminative For Fertility & Labour
Celery Herb/Seed	Hot 2nd Dry 3rd, Thin	Stomach, Liver, Spleen	Thins, Emmenagogue Opens Obstructions Carminative, Diuretic
Chamomile Flowers	Hot & Dry 1st Thin	Brain, Liver, Joints, Kidneys, Bowels	Thins And Disperses Emmenagogue, Relaxant
Cinnamon	Hot & Dry 2nd Thin	Head, <b>Heart</b> , Lungs, <b>Stomach</b> , <b>Womb</b>	Cleanses, Thins, Softens, Diuretic, Emmenagogue, For Eyesight And Labour
Elecampane Root	Hot & Dry 3rd	Lungs, Stomach	Diuretic, Emmenagogue, Anthelmintic Resists Poison
Fennel Seeds/Leaf	Hot 3rd, Dry 1st	<b>Brain</b> , Liver,	Carminative, Diuretic, Emmenagogue Galactagogue
Feverfew Herb	Hot 3rd, Dry 2nd Thin, Bitter	Head, <b>Womb</b>	Cleanses, Purges Yellow Bile & Phlegm Emmenagogue
Fumitory Herb	Cold & Dry 2nd Bitter, Mod. Astringent, Sharp	Head, Liver, Bowels & <b>Spleen</b>	Opens Obstructions Diuretic, Purges Black Bile
Gentian Root	Hot & Dry Very Bitter	Stomach, Heart	Cuts, Thins & Cleanses, Opens Obstructions, Relaxant, Diuretic, Emmenagogue, Resists Poison
Horehound Herb	Hot 2nd, Dry 3rd Bitter	Lungs, Liver, Spleen	Cuts & Thins, Disperses Cleanses, Opens Obstructions, Emmenagogue, For Labour
Hyssop Herb	Hot & Dry 3rd Thin	<b>Lungs</b> , <b>Liver</b>	Cuts & Thins, Cleanses
Juniper Berry	Hot 3rd, Dry 1st, Thin,	<b>Heart</b> , Stomach, Kidneys, Pungent Mod. Astringent	Cuts & Thins, Diuretic, Eases Pain, Emmenagogue, Bladder, Womb, Brain Carminative
Licorice Root	Hot & Moist 1st Mod. Astringent With Sweetness	Lungs	Soothes Respiratory And Urinary Passages
Marshmallow Root	Hot & Moist 1st Mod. Astringent	<b>Kidneys &amp; Bladder</b>	Cleanses, Emollient
Spearmint Leaf	Hot & Dry 3rd, Thin Pungent Mod. Astringent	Stomach & <b>Womb</b>	Styptic, Disperses
Parsley Root/Leaf/Seed	Hot & Dry 2nd, Thin, Pungent, Mod. Bitter	Stomach, Liver, Spleen	Cuts, Diuretic, Carminative, Emmenagogue Opens Obstructions
Plantain Herb/Root	Cold & Dry 2nd Thick, Astringent	Head, Lungs, Bowels, <b>Kidneys &amp; Bladder</b> , <b>Womb</b>	Cleanses, Repels, Styptic
Purslane Herb	Cold & Moist 2nd Mod. Astringent	Stomach, Liver, Kidneys, Bladder, Womb	Repels Biliou & Hot Fluxes, Styptic
Southernwood Herb	Hot & Dry 3rd, Thin, Bitter Mod. Astringent	Heart	Cuts & Thins, Disperses, Cleanses Anthelmintic Alexipharmic Emmenagogue
St. John's Wort Herb	Hot & Dry 3rd, Thin	Joints	Diuretic, Emmenagogue
Valerian Root	Hot 1st, Dry 2nd, Pungent, Astringent, Mod. Bitter	Heart, Bowels	Carminative, Diuretic, Emmenagogue
Vervain Herb	Hot and Dry 2nd	Heats head kidneys and womb	Opening, cleansing
Wormwood Herb	Hot 1st, Dry 3rd Pungent, Bitter Astringent	Stomach, Liver, Spleen	Cleanses, Purges Yellow Bile, Opens Obstructions Emmenagogue Resists Poison
Yarrow Herb	Cold & Dry 1st, Astringent	<b>Kidneys</b> , <b>Bladder</b>	Styptic



with the power to open blood vessels and thin the blood so as to facilitate menstruation. These remedies need to be given at the right time in a woman's cycle. If this is not known, Culpeper elsewhere suggests it is done in the few days before full moon (Culpeper, 1676, 78). He also advises that if the woman's body is full of undigested humours, these need purging before administering hot emmenagogues, for fear of scattering the crude humour into the blood vessels. A styptic action referred to in the table of herbs includes the power to reduce or stop menstrual blood flow, and mention is made where a herb is useful in labor, to facilitate birth or expel the afterbirth.

It should be clear from the foregoing that a sufficient quantity of an herb must be used to achieve the operation or action on the body that is required. Furthermore, there is a clear sequence of one action to be undertaken before a second and a third operation is pursued. These strategies are fitting for an approach of using simples, one at a time, to achieve in order the different objectives, with each at a sufficient dosage. I believe that consideration of Culpeper's therapeutics not only extends our knowledge of the herbal medicines we use (and of many which are no longer in use!) but also shows us a different approach to herbal treatment. This approach addresses the person who is ill, rather than simply the disease the person is suffering from, and in a way which meaningfully affects diagnosis, prognosis and prescription to provide a complete alternative healing strategy.

### A Table of Herbs

The table to the left lists herbs, their qualities, essence and actions, taken from a 16th century text of *Tables of Simple Medicines* which are in the Works of Dioscorides, Galen and Pliny (Dantz, 1543). The herbs selected have been checked and confirmed as to identity with Parkinson's Herbal (Parkinson, 1640). In the vast majority of cases, these same qualities, essence and actions match those listed by Culpeper in his *Pharmacopoeia Londinensis* (Culpeper, 1669). But Parkinson points out, for instance, that

*"Galen hath erred very much in relating the temperature of Anise seed, saying it is hot and dry in the third degree and burning withall, by reason of the sharpness and bitterness; which as it is well known it hath no such acrimonie therein that it should come near to any burning quality, for the sweetness do so temper the sharpness therein that it doth not exceede the second degree in heat, nor the first in drinesse; but the chymicall oyle drawn from the seed exceedeth much these degrees, the spirits being contracted must needs be the*

*more fierce"* (Parkinson, 1640).

The list of target organs for each herb are taken from the *Pharmacopoeia Londinensis* which, including the *Key to Galen and Hippocrates*, can be found in a modern reprint (Culpeper 1995, 307-393 and 554-583), although the section on purgatives is incomplete. In many cases herbs strengthen the organs they target, and those herbs strengthening target organs by hidden virtue are shown in bold. For the full range of uses of a herb, this table should be read with the relevant entries in Culpeper's herbal (Culpeper 1995), by which any deficiencies of the table may be corrected.

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*Ruscus aculeatus* (Butcher's broom)