The Proving of *Aquilegia Vulgaris*, the Common Columbine

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During July, *Aquilegia caerulea* thrives in the Colorado Rocky Mountains and covers the alpine meadows and mountain slopes with its brilliant blue color. The breath-taking beauty of Columbine, Colorado’s state flower, inspired me to explore the proving of this plant.

Only one species of Columbine, *Aquilegia vulgaris*, is listed in the materia medica. It is generally identified as the common, wild or garden Columbine. Because of its extensive historical and mystical associations, its threat of extinction in many countries, and its existence in the homeopathic materia medica as an unproven remedy\(^1\), I chose to prove the common Columbine, *Aquilegia vulgaris*.

**Methodology**

The proving was conducted with 33 provers (25 female, 8 male) in three different groups during 2003, 2004, and 2005 at the Homeopathy School of Colorado. The remedy was given in the 30C and 200C potencies. Each prover was assigned a supervisor who spoke to his/her prover on a daily basis. Baseline data were collected for each prover by recording pre-proving symptoms for one week prior to the proving. During the proving, provers logged symptoms on a daily basis until symptoms subsided. Standard Homeopathic Pharmacy of Los Angeles, California prepared the remedy according to the Hahnemannian method in January of 1985. The pharmacy originally purchased the mother-tincture from Boericke and Tafel in 1978. Potencies used were hand-succussed.

**Name Origination**

Over the centuries, common or garden Columbine has developed many names and descriptive associations. Many relate to its appearance (e.g., birds and bird’s feet):

- *Aquilegia*, Latin for eagle, the flower’s spurs resemble an eagle’s talon.
- *Aqua*, Latin for water and *lego* to collect, referring to the nectar holding spurs.
- Culverwort from the Saxon *culfere* meaning pigeon and *wyrt* for plant, the petals resembling a gathering of pigeons.
- *Columba*, the Latin word for dove, relating the flower petals to a circle of doves (in some cultures associated with love).
- Other names include: Meeting Houses, Venus Plant, Jack-In-Trousers, Mary’s Bells, Granny’s Bonnet, and European Crowfoot.
- German common names of the plant can be translated into Fairy’s Glove, Venus Carriage, Women’s Little Shoe, and Love Plant.

\(^1\) *Dictionary of Practical Materia Medica*, J.H.Clarke
Botanical Description
Columbines belong to the family Ranunculaceae (buttercup family) that includes Aconitum, Cimicifuga, Clematis, Delphinium, Helleborus, Hydrastis, Pulsatilla, and Ranunculus. German botanists named this family Hahnenfuss-Gewaechse, rooster foot plants, a description related to the flower’s likeness to a bird’s foot. Columbines also compose the genus Aquilegia that contains about 8000 species of perennials.

The common Columbine grows 30 to 60 cm (1 to 2 feet) high and about 45 cm (1½ feet) wide. The flower is usually of an intense blue color; variations of pink, white or blue flowers with a white rim are also common. The blossom is arranged into two concentric circles; the inner five sepals assembled around gold-colored multiple stamens, the outer five petals tapering into narrowing trailing spurs. The rolled spurs at the back of the flower reach upward, resembling an eagle’s talons. A bluish-green color is characteristic of the plant’s leaves. The leaves grow on long stems and are divided into three parts, each forming a scalloped three-petal leaf with a slight resemblance to cloverleaves.

“Our Columbine is at all times and in all places one of the most exquisitely beautiful of flowers.”
John Borroughs

Habitat
Originally a hardy common plant growing in moderately dry sunny spots and in rock piles on the edges of forests and forest clearings in Europe, North Asia, North-West Africa, and North America, Aquilegia vulgaris is losing its habitat of calcium-rich soil. Increased traffic in wilderness areas as well as increased ranching and agricultural land-use threaten the plant’s habitat. Its vivid coloring has also made it a desirable and over-picked flower. In 1985, to draw attention to its endangered status, Aquilegia vulgaris was declared Flower of the Year in Germany. It has also been added to the Red List of endangered plants in Switzerland. Many garden varieties are now cultivated worldwide.

“Nothing is daintier or more beautiful than the color effect of this graceful blossom among the gray rocks of a hillside pasture.” F. Schuyler Mathews

The Columbine’s susceptibility to extinction is increased by its limited ability to be pollinated. Only bumblebees with appropriately long tongues can reach deep down into the bottom of the spurs to pollinate the flower. Short-tongued bees and scavenger wasps bite holes into the spur at the back of the
flower to get the nectar, not pollinating it. The plants vulnerability is increased by the fact that bumblebees are also a threatened species in a number of countries.

Aquilegia vulgaris at Grand Lodge gardens, Grand Lake, CO

**Chemical Composition**

New chemical compounds of *Aquilegia vulgaris* are still being discovered. It contains cyanogenic glycoside, flavonoid c-glycoside malonate, isocystoside (antioxidant and antimicrobial activity, hepato-protective effect), flavonoid emulsin, tannin, aquilegine, vitamin C, an uncharacterized alkaloid, and sphingolipid desaturase.

Despite the fact that the wild or common Columbine has been ingested as tea and in salads, it is considered a poisonous plant. The consumption of approximately 20 grams of leaves has caused poisoning symptoms of nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, breathing difficulties, heart pains, absent-mindedness, stupefaction, and confusion. Its toxins, however, are destroyed by heat and drying. Modern medicinal use of the plant has not been established. Little is known about cyanogenic glycoside, which is contained in the plant and may have cancer-causing properties.

“The [plant’s] anti-microbial activity was tested by the method of series dilutions against different Gram-positive, Gram-negative bacteria and also fungi. The results show that the extracts, sub-extracts, and isocytoside inhibit growth of all studied micro-organisms, revealing Gram-positive the greatest activity against *Staphylococcus aureus*, *Staph. epidermis*, and the mould *Aspergillus niger.*”

**History**

Held in high esteem by Northern European populations, *Aquilegia vulgaris* (German: *Akelei*, Swedish: *Akileija*) was dedicated to the Norse goddess of love and fertility, Freya. According to mythology, Freya lived in a beautiful palace where love songs constantly played. Among her magical possessions was a coat of bird feathers that gave her the power to change into a falcon.

“In this dream I was building a palace and then resting in it. I was so relaxed it was amazing.”

Dreams: Prover #805

Earliest accounts of the medicinal use of the plant are reported in Hildegard von Bingen’s (1098-1179) work *Physica*. Used as an aphrodisiac during medieval times, Tabernaemontanus suggested in his

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*Neuw Kreuterbuch (new herb book)* published in 1588 that applying the pulverized seeds to a groom’s palms would instantly arouse the bride. He also recommended drinking tea made from the roots and seeds to break the evil spell of impotence. The plant itself was mixed into straw-mattresses to cure infertility.

The earliest reference to the wild or common Columbine as a garden plant (1410) is made in the painting, *Paradiesgaertlein* (Little Paradise Garden), painted by an unknown medieval master. Among the first botanical books, the *Hortus Eystettensis* recorded 12 cultivated varieties of the common Columbine in 1613. Around 1800 the North American Columbine became increasingly popular in Europe’s gardens. By 1900, the common Columbine was considered old fashioned and lost its place in fancy gardens. However, *Aquilegia vulgaris* can still be found in European gardens as often as the hybrid plants of North American varieties.

**Symbolism**

Originally, the Columbine was dedicated to the goddess Freya, the patron goddess of crops and birth. She was the symbol of sensuality and was called upon in matters of love. She loved music, spring, flowers, and elves and was the most gracious and beautiful of all the goddesses. Old symbolism relating the plant to love and fertility has been preserved in paintings exhibiting sexual imagery, secret love and seduction, inconsistency and fickleness, desertion, and folly. For example, in the 17th century it was considered a *faux pas* to give a young woman a bouquet with *Aquilegia* because of its sexual symbolism. Another example includes, Ophelia in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* giving a bouquet containing Columbines to King Claudius for his ingratitude and infidelity.

“*An older lawyer was having an affair with a younger woman. The woman asked to be provided with an apartment, he asked for 24-7 access.*” Dreams: Prover #1005

“*Masturbating in the restroom of a grocery store, boyfriend was shopping, another woman laughing, because she knew I was masturbating in the next stall.*” Dreams: Prover #205

Over time, Christianity adopted the symbolic associations of *Aquilegia* with the goddess Freya and love. Elements of the plant’s original mythical symbolism were transferred to the Virgin Mary. For example, a 16th century painting depicting the flight to Egypt includes a Columbine growing at the feet of Mary’s donkey. Later Christian symbolism relates the plant’s seven blossoming flowers to the seven cardinal virtues of Christianity: faith, hope, charity, justice, temperance, prudence and fortitude. The plants perfect geometrical composition (according to the Golden Mean) and its number of flowers and petals (3, 5, and 7) relate it to divinity in paintings of Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

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3 La Columbine, Francesco Melzi; Portrait of Margherita Gonzaga, Pisanello, Louvre; Leonardo da Vinci placed *Aquilegia vulgaris* next to Bacchus and next to Leda and her children, drawing at Windsor Castle.
Healing and Herbal Applications

By 1606, over 270 medicinal applications for Columbine were described. They include:

- Astringent juice to heal wounds
- Various plant parts to heal gum loss and jaundice
- Crushed seeds to facilitate childbirth and to alleviate labor and menstrual pain
- Crushed leaves to cure cancer
- Spring shoots prepared like asparagus to prevent cancer
- Entire plants used to protect young couples from bad magic (impotence and infertility)
- Triturated juice of the leaves to heal skin rashes

“A woodland walk, a quest for river-grapes, a mocking rush, a wild rose or rock-living columbine, salve my worst wounds.” R. W. Emerson

Traditional folk medicine has used the common Columbine as an astringent, depurative, diaphoretic, diuretic, narcotic, and parasiticide. It has been used to treat:

- Inflammations of the pharynx and the throat
- Liver (obstructions of openings, jaundice), spleen and gallbladder diseases
- Diarrhea
- Stomach complaints
- Kidney stones
- Dropsy
- Measles and small pox
- Nervousness
- Easily angered people (sedative qualities)
- Pain during menses and childbirth
- Uterine bleeding
- Eye diseases
- Rheumatic aches and pains
- Head lice (repellant)
- Ulcers (used in a poultice); sores of mouth and throat
Modern flower essences containing *Aquilegia vulgaris* are said to provide insight into one’s true identity and highest purpose. It has also been used to assist the uncertain or those who are bewildered by life’s choices.

**Discoveries of the Proving**

Many proving symptoms coincide with historically recorded symptoms of poisoning with *Aquilegia vulgaris*. Poisoning reports and the current proving data both include mental symptoms consisting of difficult concentration, slowness, confusion, difficulty in decision-making, and deep calmness. It is interesting to note that early folk medicine used the plant to calm easily angered people and provers experienced states of unusual calm and/or agitation. Consequently, the remedy may assist in treating overly reactive states.

Physical symptoms experienced by a majority of provers clearly point to the use of the remedy to treat nausea (especially in the morning), loss of appetite, stomach problems (especially at 10 AM), frequent and profuse diarrhea, headaches (especially right-sided and around 10 AM), restlessness, waking at night (especially around 3 AM), and menstrual problems. The proving also yielded throat pains, the lump sensation included in *Clarke’s Materia Medica*, and rash-like skin conditions.

Dreams of provers reflect some mythological aspects of the goddess Freya: dreams about helping and saving children and infants; sexual dreams; and dreams about flowers, gardens, and mystical landscapes. Some dreams included environments similar to the habitat of the wild plant and some may have related to the structure of the plant (“meeting houses”). Strangely enough, there were many dreams about cars and car accidents. These dreams had colors of cars matching the colors of *Aquilegia*.

It is worthwhile to compare *Aquilegia vulgaris* with *Helleborus, Pulsatilla, Sepia, Ignatia,* and *Natrum muriaticum*. Columbine may be helpful in the treatment of pregnancy-related nausea, menstrual conditions, a variety of headaches, and constrictive respiratory problems. The plant’s historical use for preventing and treating cancer as well as its content of cyanogenic glycoside may associate it with the cancer miasm.

**Mental Themes**

**Disconnectedness**

Indifference to other’s feelings
Mind-chatter; internal dialogue; intolerable inner thoughts
Mind separated from body; as if possessed by a second personality
Like a witness; spectator to events
Sense of distance; isolation
Desire to be alone; better alone

**Irritability**

Irritable like PMS, irritable over small things, impatient with people
Easy to anger (driving, throwing things, short fuse)

**Alternating States**

Exuberant - sluggish
Irritability - good mood
Mind-chatter - serenity
Alert - lack of concentration
Positive States
Exuberant; elated
Energy up; feeling high
Centered; very present
Relaxed; serene; peaceful

Hypersensitivity
Emotionally over-reactive; weeping easily
To odors, heat, music, touch, taste, and noise
Visual acuity

Restlessness
Restless but too weak to move; restless at night
Driven to get things done; need to clean

Mental Clarity
Alert; awake; clear
Aware; focused
Creative; expansive

Difficulty Concentrating
Foggy, groggy, and fuzzy thinking
Slow reading; slow thinking
Absentminded; forgetful
Difficulty making decisions
Spacey; empty headed
Disoriented; no sense of time

Lethargy - Slowness
Sluggish; need to move slowly, slow in responding
As if in slow motion, heavy like lead
“Will vomit if I move fast”
Averse to doing anything; unmotivated
Extreme tiredness, tiredness after rising

Themes in Dreams
Magical Dreams
Nature, landscapes, beautiful herbs and flowers; coves and caves; magical monsters; an unworldly
garden “like paradise”; and a peaceful palace.

Sexual Dreams
Masturbating in a public bathroom; sexually hyperactive and glamorous; having sex with a stranger;
having a lot of sex; necking in a parking lot; mother sexually abusing brother; lawyer having an affair;
threat of sexual abuse; naked in public; sex and donuts.

Beauty and Grace
Costumes; make-up for wedding; beautiful dresses; fashion show; people in horse costumes (“striving
for grace”).
Gatherings and Groups
Gatherings with friends and family in restaurants; social gatherings; weddings; conferences; groups of workmen, a group of energy beings with overlapping bodies; organizing events.

Meeting Places
Restaurants (mostly Italian); hotels; large houses; parking lots; classrooms; apartments; a camp; ski-lodge; amphitheatre; concert hall; atrium, movie theatre, cruise ship, bus.

Steeple Areas
Cliffs; house on a hill; hiking to steep hills with lots of small buildings; hiking through a steep area to get to new building.

Violence to Women
Rape; women being roasted alive like turkeys; women disappear; physically abusive affair; fleeing from being set on fire.

Violence
Being murdered; being shot; being held hostage; being choked; gun-shot wounds; blood and bleeding; copious amounts of blood; machine guns.

Animals
Bears, dogs, wild animals, snakes, frogs, horses, earthworms, mosquitoes; protecting people from desert animals; pursued by animals.

Cars and Car Accidents
Red Corvette; convertible car; blue van; blue striped Semi-truck; white car; blue Camaro; blue Corvette, truck loosing control; eight-car crash with Semi-truck; car switching lanes causes accident; hot-air balloon smashed against a cliff.

Cleanliness and Cleaning
Dirty apartment; nasty bathroom; old food (chicken); clean city; cobwebs; particles falling from ceiling; carwash; neatly arranged house; cleaning out purse; cleaning windows; Goldie Locks cleaning up and leaving.

Other themes identified include: Cooperation/coordination, helping others and rescuing, Open spaces (openness also reported as a physical sensation), forces of nature, Parts of buildings (including corroding materials), pregnancy, racing, trusting others/ being trustworthy/loyalty, watching myself, water.

Symptoms
Mind
Some provers experienced contrasting symptoms over a few days' time. For example, mind chatter would alternate with quiet and calm; tiredness with lots of energy; inability to focus with unusual alertness.

Emotionally oversensitive, temperamental 105, 205, 405, 1003, 305
Sad, weepy, crying, sobbing 205, 405, 1003
Anxious, without reason 305, 404, 603, 605

Prover numbers
Impatient with people, short fuse
Irritated, agitated, cranky
Mentally tired
Exhausted, sleepy
Lethargic, move in slow motion, sluggish
Brain foggy/fuzzy/dopey
Slow processing/thinking/responding
Hard to focus, difficulty concentrating
Want to be left alone, quiet
Averse to talking to people
Indifferent to other's feelings
Restless
Strong desire to clean, obsessive cleaning
Alert/awake/clear/thinking clearly
More optimistic, patient, positive (more)
Exuberant/high energy
Hypersensitive to odors
Spacey, empty headed
Chatter in head, can't stand inner thoughts
Second personality taking over

Times
10:00
17:00

Sleep
Restless, tossing and turning
Woke from physical discomfort or pain
Woke from thirst
Woke from beautiful dream
Sensation watching myself in my sleep

Times
03:00

Generals
Sleepy, could not stay awake
Body feels heavy
Body tingles, buzzes (like on speed)
Shakiness (body/hands)
Feverish, raised temperature, warm
Cold, chilly and chills
Dryness
CC: Thirstlessness with cotton mouth

Modalities
> eating

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5 Only pre-dominant times are reported in this article, provers also experienced symptoms at other times.
6 Concomitants
> cold and fresh air  
Chilled > warm clothing

**Times**
- 10:00  
  1104, 705  
- 12:00  
  205, 404, 603, 1005  
- 15:00  
  204, 705, 1104  
- 17.00  
  305, 1103

**Head**

**Sensation**
- Pressure, pressing as from a cap  
  103, 205, 503, 803  
- Dull pain  
  1403, 405, 705, 504, 403, 603  
- Stabbing pain  
  603, 103, 601, 603, 705  
- Electric shock  
  504  
- Pulsing  
  103, 104, 503, 1303  
- Tingling  
  503, 704  
- Sensation as if suctioned  
  1303  
- Light-headed/empty-headed  
  104, 904, 1103  
- Head opened/expanded  
  503, 803  
- Hot, warm, flush of heat  
  504, 1104, 1204, 503, 603  
- Tingling temples  
  503  
**CC:** HA + flatulence  
  1303

**Location**
- Parietal  
  105, 803  
- Top of head  
  705, 1403  
- HA R side  
  405, 503, 504, 603, 705, 1005, 504, 601, 603  
- Moved L to R  
  105, 503  
- HA moved to center  
  405, 1403  
- HA forehead  
  605, 705, 603, 1303, 1403  
- HA over left eye  
  305, 103, 1403

**Modalities**
- < bending over  
  305  
- > hot bath  
  104

**Time Progression**
- Rapid onset and demise  
  105, 705, 1005, 504, 103

**Times**
- 10:00  
  904, 503, 1403, 405, 605, 705, 104, 504  
- 11:00  
  105, 104, 603, 1103

**Vertigo**

**Sensation**
- Dizzy  
  405, 704, 503  
- Off balance to left  
  705  
- Circles spinning in head  
  204  
- Dizzy with pressure on crown of head  
  503  
**CC:** Dizziness, tingling in upper head  
  704
Modalities
< movement 204

Eyes
Sensation
Dry 305, 805
Gluey 1403
Eye strain, R eye 405
Pressing pain on eyeball 305
Twitching left lid 305, 404
Eyes don't focus 305
Must press to close eyes 805
CC: Dry eyes and mouth and L stiff neck 305

Ear
Sensation
Loud noises hurt ears 203
L ear dull pain 603
R ear plugged 603, 605
Itching/alternate itching in both ears 203, 603
Pulse in ears racing 603

Location
Left 203, 603
Moving R to L 203

Time
15:00 503, 603, 1303

Mouth
Sensation
Thirstless, cottonmouth 305
Chapped lips 204, 603, 1003, 1403
Lips dry, parched 403, 404, 603, 1403
Metallic taste 803, 904, 503, 1303
Tingling sensations 503, 803
CC: Metallic taste with heartburn/burping 904

Times
10:00 503, 503, 503

Throat
Sensation
Sore 205, 305, 603, 1104, 403, 803, 1003, 1205
Burning, raw 305, 603, 1204
Dryness 705, 603, 1104
Tickling 304, 403
Scratchy 1104, 403
Lump 403, 603
Tonsils feel enlarged 1104, 1003

**CC:**
Swollen glands L, tingling chin/forehead 503

**Location**
- Back of 305, 603, 705, 1204
- Right 605, 1204
- Left 304, 503
- Upper 403, 603

**Modalities**
- > sipping cold water 304, 1204

**Times**
- 07:00 705, 803, 803
- 08:00 205, 403, 503, 603

**Stomach**

**Sensation**
- Appetite decreased 205, 605, 504, 403, 805
- Hungry, empty feeling 1003, 404, 705, 1003
- Thirsty 605, 503, 603, 904, 1403
- Heartburn 103, 904, 1003, 1005
- Nauseated 104, 103, 403, 603, 605, 503
- Vomited 3 to 4 times 403
- Stomach gurgling 403, 1003
- Burping with metallic taste 904
- Hiccup 404, 1103
- Painful hiccup, as if stabbed 1104
- Burping 904, 1003, 1103

**CC:** Heartburn, metallic taste/intense thirst 904

**Modalities**
- Nausea > after lunch 104
- Gurgling gas, burping, leaning forward, agg. 1003

**Times**
- 10:00 104, 503, 503, 603, 603, 1103, 1403
- 12:00 404, 503, 603, 1003

**Chest**

**Sensation**
- Heaviness, difficult breathing 205, 503
- Pressing sensation with shortness of breath 703, 603
- Constriction/tightness 603, 703, 705
- L breast tender as if before menses 705
- Swollen breasts as if before menses 1005
- Lymph glands L breast/armpit feel tender 503
- Stabbing chest pain, 1" above sternum 103, 205
Modalities
< motion, deep breathing, > pressure 1003

Time
10:00 205, 705, 705, 603

Neck
Sensation
Tingling neck to head, radiated to cheeks 704
Buzzing in neck moving to head 704
Zigzag jolt left side neck 705
Stiff, left side 305
Nerve pain L neck shooting to occiput 603
Deep chill back of neck 704

Modalities
Stiff neck > after eating 305

Female
Sensation
Sex drive increased 205, 504 (14 days), 503, 603
Menses one week early 205, 305, 403
Uterine cramping without menses 104, 603
Menses light, not as painful 403
Menses, no pain, discomfort 503
Cycle was shorter, less blood 603

Modalities
Cramps as if menses, > rubbing, rest 104

Two months after taking the first dose of this remedy, Prover #1303 experienced a return of female symptomatology experienced during 1995 to 1998, including intense vaginal burning, suppuration of vaginal skin, and spotting during ovulation.

Back
All provers with back symptoms indicated that symptoms lasted/recurred for two or more days.

Sensation
Lower back achy/weak (as before period) 305
Ache moving to lower back 705
Pain, hot, vibrating in spine, radiating to R 1303
Lower back sore, as if menses 104

Rectum
Stool
No bowel movement 3-4 days 205, 603
Pellets, like deer droppings 605

7 During the proving women experienced back pain similar to pains experienced during menses, without having or expecting a menses.
Increase of BM’s/day 705, 1204
Urgent 705, 1204
Loose 705, 204, 1204
Profuse 705, 204
Sulphur odor 1204
CC: Diarrhea with pain perineum 705

Times
08:00 705, 705, 204, 1204

Selected Rubrics
Mind
Delusion is an island, enjoying tranquility
Delusion, possessed, that he or she is
Delusion, identity, errors of personal identity
Fastidious
Irritability, husband, toward
Senses, acute
Spaced-out feeling

Head
Pain, 10 AM
Dull, morning
Dull, temples, right
Dull forehead
Heat, flushes of

Taste
Metallic

Throat
Pain, sore
Lump sensation

Chest
Pressed in, as if
Constriction, morning, 10 AM

Stomach
Appetite, diminished
Nausea, eating after

Female
Sexual desire, increased
Menses, frequent, too early, seven days

Rubrics listed are based on symptoms experienced by three or more provers, symptoms of unusual intensity or extended duration.
Sleep
Restless
Waking, 3 AM

Generals
Shocks, electric-like
Open air, ameliorates
Morning, 10 AM, aggravates

Words of Appreciation
My special thanks go to our homeopathic heroes, our provers and their supervisors, taking time in their busy lives to contribute to the body of homeopathic knowledge. I would like to thank Amy E. Lockwood, MS, CHom, homeopath, and homeopathic writer/editor in Fort Collins, CO (amy_lockwood@peakpeak.com) and Dorothy Simoni, PhD, Professor Emeritus, Cal Poly Pomona, and aspiring homeopath in Boulder, CO (dsimoni@sugarloaf.net) for their relentless attention to detail and their dedication to this proving.

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