

**MYSTERIES OF THE VITAL ELEMENT IN
CONNEXION WITH DREAMS,
SOMNAMBULISM, TRANCE, VITAL
PHOTOGRAPHY,
FAITH AND WILL, ANAESTHESIA, NERVOUS
CONGESTION AND CREATIVE FUNCTION.
MODERN SPIRITUALISM EXPLAINED**

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Mysteries of the Vital Element in Connexion with Dreams, Somnambulism, Trance, Vital Photography, Faith and Will, Anaesthesia, Nervous Congestion and Creative Function. Modern Spiritualism Explained by Robert H. Collyer

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ROBERT H. COLLYER

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MODERN SPIRITUALISM EXPLAINED.

BY

ROBERT H. COLLYER, M.D.

REGISTERED BY THE COUNCIL OF MEDICAL EDUCATION.

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Discoverer of Electro-biology, Author of *The Physiology of the Brain and Nervous System*;
Graduate of the Berkshire Medical College, Massachusetts; Member of the Massachusetts
Medical Society; formerly Student of the London and Paris Schools of Medicine; late Principal
Physician to the Cholera Hospital, Mexico.

"Divinum est opus sedare dolorem."—HIPPOCRATES.

"Dr. Collyer, to our minds, is the true modern pioneer, after all—the man who ran first."
LANCET, June 11th, 1870.

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PREFATORY REMARKS.

IN presenting to the medical profession a second edition of "The History of Anæsthetic Discovery," it is with the conviction that it will be received with the same indulgent and liberal spirit which characterized the reception of the first imperfect edition, published in Bruges 1868.

That the development of modern Anæsthesia should have been closely associated with that condition of insensibility induced by the mesmeric process or "nervous congestive state of brain," cannot excite astonishment when it is remembered that the first authentically recorded anæsthetic surgical operation was performed as early as April, 1829, by the eminent French surgeon, Jules Cloquet, who removed the cancerous breast of a lady who had been rendered unconscious, in view of the operation being painless. It was the knowledge of this fact which induced me to repeat in 1841, the nervous congestive or mesmeric comatose state in a child only twenty-two months, so that a fungus, involving the globe of the eye, might be extirpated painlessly. The entire success of this wonderful operation at the time, on a child of such tender age, put the question of producing an anæsthetic state beyond the possibility of a doubt, and encouraged further research. Prior to this, in December, 1839, I had reduced a dislocation of the femur, in a negro who had been rendered anæsthetic by the INHALATION of the vapours from alcohol. In 1835, I, when a student at the London University College, was rendered unconscious by the inhalation of ether, in the chemical lecture room of Dr. Turner.

It was the combination of these facts which eventually led to the discovery of anæsthesia, by the inhalation of narcotic and stimulating vapours. Important documentary evidence confirmatory of the first surgical operation, in December, 1830, and also of the first experiments in producing unconsciousness by "*the inhalation of narcotic and stimu-*

lating vapours," were lost in Mexico in July, 1848, when the author was attacked by banditti in the Sierra Madre Mountains, and in San Francisco, at the great fire of May, 1851. These documents form the basis of the letter published in the *Critic*, April 10th, 1847 (No. 119), where these words are used:—"Had I not been prevented in consequence of illness, I would long since have visited London with my publications."

The official certificates from the Mexican authorities, attesting to the loss of the documents referred to, are now in my possession, the copy of which will be found in the Appendix.

Sufficient evidence has, however, been preserved to put all contending claims out of court, as the existing documents of 1842 and 1843 antedate all others by several years.

If the reader deems the contents too personal, too much of self, or too severe, he must remember that for nearly a quarter of a century I have been *defrauded* of my just rights as the original discoverer; every species of misrepresentation and special pleading has been resorted to to deceive and mislead the public. These proceedings will be thoroughly exposed; and if the parties implicated are severely dealt with, I hope that in so doing I shall never deviate from the strictest path of truth.

When the rival claims of Horace Wells, W. T. G. Morton, and Dr. Charles T. Jackson were presented to the Committee of the House of Representatives, Washington, in 1851 and 1852, I was in California. I, however, sent sufficient proof to some leading members of Congress, as to my priority, which defeated the claims of the contending parties.

The Hon. Truman Smith, in his "Modern Anæsthesia," says, "Shall imposture be permitted to usurp the place of merit? Shall ignorance and presumption over-top the emanations of true genius, and all promptings of a generous self-sacrificing spirit? Shall artifice, chicanery, and mendacity stand before sincerity, rectitude, truth, and honour?"

When these pages have been carefully read and the dates noted, the reader will be in a position to answer these questions with an unbiased mind.

Dr. Richardson having published a lecture on the "Nervous Atmosphere" in the *Medical Times* of May 6th, 1871, I am particularly anxious, as a stranger, to impress on the public mind that my ideas relative to the nervous fluid have not been copied, or in any way prejudiced by the publication of Dr. Richardson. In fine, we both treat the matter *originally*.

The manuscript forming this volume was in the possession of the

publisher, Mr. Benshaw, in February, 1871. In the original, the whole theory of the *nervous atmosphere* is propounded.

It is at all times a most onerous and distasteful task to be necessitated to vindicate one's self in relation to being a discoverer, after a lapse of years has been allowed to pass, during which time the palm has been justly or unjustly accorded to others. It is most difficult to turn the channel of thought when once established in the public mind. This conviction has caused personal details to be discussed with which I am familiar, in order to substantiate the facts which prove incontrovertibly who was the original discoverer of the anæsthetic process. Circumstances of an exceptional and peculiar character have been the cause of the *apparent* neglect, in allowing so important a discovery to be awarded to others. I have, however, persistently from 1847 to the present date, taken every opportunity through the medium of the press in the United States and Great Britain, of publicly maintaining my claim to priority.

In fine, no great discovery has been made without its having to contend against all the prejudices and bigotry of the age. When once, however, recognised, there are not wanting men who would fain take the merit to themselves, or who, on the principle or law of nature having been established, are not slow to render themselves distinguished at the expense of the original discoverer.

It should not be forgotten that both Dr. Jackson and Mr. Morton have always *denied* the anæsthetic properties of nitrous oxide even as late as 1862. It is not asking too much of the profession now, in 1871, to consider if I had not known of its properties, as published in the *Critic*, in April, 1847, to produce anæsthesia, how was it possible for me to have arrived at so *definite* a conclusion, which is stated without any reserve, had I not made the experiments at a prior date? *Vide also London Critic*, January 6th, 1847.

In conclusion, I ask of the profession and the public the strictest justice and impartiality, as to awarding me the honour of having been the original discoverer that the inhalation of narcotic and stimulating vapours produced an anæsthetic state so that surgical operations could be painlessly performed.

If any one can produce a publication anterior to that made by me in 1843, then all controversy must cease, but until then I claim the undivided right of being recognised as *the discoverer*.

It was not originally intended that this publication should have comprised other matter than that of the Anæsthetic Discovery. It has, however, been found, as the investigation necessarily involved