

# **NERVOUS DISEASES AND MAGNETIC THERAPEUTICS**

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Nervous diseases and magnetic therapeutics by James Edwin Briggs

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**JAMES EDWIN BRIGGS**

**NERVOUS DISEASES  
AND MAGNETIC  
THERAPEUTICS**



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## NERVOUS DISEASES.

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To define Nervous Diseases critically, is as perplexing as to explain insanity itself. It is hard to find the proper starting-point and to fix the limit, on one side of which is the nervous complaint, and on the other almost everything else. There is a period in almost everyone's history, when a rigid judgment would set him down as not altogether in his right mind. *Semel insanavimus omnes*. In pathological conditions, the tone of the nervous system is impaired; and the question is at once brought home to the philosophical practitioner, who cannot content himself with a superficial diagnosis, whether the complaint, in whatever form, is not substantially and originally nervous.

The disorders of the nervous system comprise not

only the most formidable which the physician encounters, but their nature and origin are the most perplexing to ascertain. Their pathology and their etiology, to speak more technically, are still among the moot points which writers and practitioners discuss, and have not yet properly determined.

We have, so far, a variety of theories, or perhaps I should say *conjectures*; but they often tend to puzzle, rather than to facilitate enquiry, from their absolute contradiction of each other.

We are, perhaps, approximating truth; but dogma still reigns ascendant. The argument of brow-beating and peremptory assertion is the main dependence of those who aspire to magisterial authority in *Psychological Medicine*.

I will give a cursory glance at the complaints usually characterized as nervous, before making further enquiry into their causes. It cannot be expected or even desired that I should write a book on the subject, but it is proper that prominent and particular symptoms should be adduced for the convenience and benefit of non-professional readers.

The principal nervous disorders are insanity, softening of the brain, hardening of the brain, meningitis,

ataxia, tetanus, hydrophobia, epilepsy, catalepsy, hysteria, chorea, paralysis, neuralgia. I must be excused from extending the list further, or making an exhaustive review of those which I have mentioned. A few of them will suffice ; and when I am not thorough, I must refer those to the text-books and periodicals, who wish to know more.

The modern school of psychologists regard insanity as morbid action of the brain. Prof. W. A. Hammond, late Surgeon-General, propounds the following hypothesis, as covering the whole ground psychologically as well as pathologically : "By mind we understand a *force* developed by nervous action, and especially by the action of the brain. The modifications which this force, in its cerebral relations undergoes outside of the limits of health, as regards excess, deficiency or variation of quality, are embraced under the term *insanity*. \* \* The mind is a compound force evolved by the brain ; and its elements are perception, intellect, emotion and will."

It is not to be imagined for a moment that this famous reasoner would consider, even with common courtesy, any questioning of his postulates. We dogs may bark, but we may hope nothing from the oracle.

Those who profess to hold similar views will hardly be more tolerant of those who differ from them. This is the common attitude even of very many professed *Liberals* at the present time.

Nevertheless, the psychology of Professor H. is easily carried to the *reductio ad absurdum*. If the mind is merely the product of nervous, and especially of brain action, it can be only matter temporarily advanced to the power of self-consciousness. All its acts and manifestations are then substantially automatic, physical, and, I may justly add, mechanical. Spirituality itself could be but refined brain-action; and morality, an improved physiology—nothing more. Love and reason, virtue, truth and justice, intuition of the sense of honor, all that goes to make up a high-toned man—are thus set forth as so many evolutions from the brain and nervous system. Hatred and insanity, vice, error and injustice have a like source, and for all that we need see, are of equal merit and normality. Mental science, as propounded by Dr. Hammond and those who reason like him, is but psychology without soul.

I have no disposition to overlook the magnificent results from the labors of scientists in physiology and *pathology*. They have done rare service in the way of



unearthing knowledge of the physical machinery by means of which we live and act, of its disorders, and methods by which they may be greatly alleviated. We depend upon these men to unfold to us what we can otherwise scarcely hope to know.

When, however, we endeavor to explore the phenomena and causes of mental aberration and commoner nervous disorder, we must be permitted to avail ourselves of the aid of a higher and more comprehensive philosophy. We will pay all due respect to atoms and molecules, conscious of their immense importance in this great universe. *We will venerate, also, the law which determines their motion.* We simply believe that they do not evolve that law; that it is the outcome of a principle greater than they.

I accept, most cordially, the generalization of that great savant, as well as poet, Goethé :

“ All members develop themselves according to eternal laws,  
 And the rarest form mysteriously preserves the primitive type.  
 Form, therefore, determines the animal's way of life,  
 And in turn, the way of life powerfully reacts upon all form.  
 Thus, *the orderly growth of form is seen to hold,*  
 While *yielding to change* from externally-acting causes.”

Sir William Hamilton explains the mind as follows :

“ What we are conscious of is constructed out of what

we are not conscious of." Hæckel is a little plainer : "The forms of organism and of their organs result entirely from their life."

Dr. Blandford, Lecturer on Psychological Medicine at St. George's Hospital, London, candidly acknowledges insanity to be "a mystery not yet unraveled." He goes on with emphasis to remark : "Its inscrutable appearance without assignable cause in a man hitherto sane, and its no less inscrutable departure, are things which we must confess are *not yet explicable by human knowledge.*"

It is very superficial science that has only relations with human phenomena. Religious men are justified somewhat in their hostility to its pretensions of superiority, when its exponents confine themselves so sensibly to effects, and resolutely set aside causes. He is only a sciolist, who can recognize the existence of motion, animation, sensibility and understanding, and refuses to acknowledge or even consider the vital elements that superpose all these, and themselves constitute the real being.

We therefore cannot consider spirit as a form of matter, nor mind as a mere evolution from the brain and *nervous system.* The spiritual nature and origin of

human life must be the starting-point. Man is conscious, in a sense that no animal is, that there is a line of demarkation between himself and his circumstances ; that his soul permeates and presides over all the nerves, organs and sinews of his body. It causes the muscles to expand and contract, the eyes to open and shut, the blood to circulate ; it feels and thinks as of itself. Suppose, eventually, that something goes wrong in its relations. The nerves first perceive the fact, and the will, presiding at the seat of sensibility, makes the endeavor to correct the disturbance. If this is done promptly, all goes on well ; if not, there is disease—a state of non-ease. In this operation, we notice that the nervous system is first impressed by the fact and condition ; the membranes, fibres and other parts follow in its lead.

Insanity is the most conspicuous form of this abnormal condition. It is therefore an appropriate type of the various mental disturbances. They may all be recognized more or less distinctly from their analogous manifestations. It is evidently a mental disorder, but is always associated with functional and other aberrations.

*Hysteria, when we take its peculiar phenomena into*