

**ON THE NATURE
AND PROXIMATE
CAUSE OF INSANITY**

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On the nature and proximate cause of insanity by James George Davey

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PREFACE.

THE reason for publishing the following pages is,—that I consider the importance of the subject such as to demand the widest publicity. I am moreover prompted thus to present these views, on the *nature* and *treatment* of an important disease, to the attention of my medical brethren, in the hope and expectation that they will be so far interested in the subject treated of, as to afford it some share of their attention; and without which, of course, very little, if any, practical good can be anticipated. The principles of *pathology* and *therapeutics*, herein set forth, it will be seen (on perusal of the following pages) were first published by me in 1842, in an essay entitled '*On the Pathology of Insanity*,' and these have since that time been unceasingly insisted on, (as will appear in the sequel,) both orally and in my published writings; and what is more *practically*

carried out both in my public and private capacities. I would beg in all kindness and sincerity, to call the attention of *Dr. Henry Munro* to the above statement, inasmuch as that gentleman published in 1850 a small book, in which not only are the same *views* advocated, but of which he has, strange to say, claimed the parentage, or first authorship. It may be added, that *Drs. Crichton, Cullen, Good, and Willis* deserve to be mentioned as having, *in some degree*, anticipated both Dr. Henry Munro and myself; but of their several writings on *Insanity*, I must confess myself to have remained in very considerable ignorance, until very lately, *i. e.* until a period long subsequent, even, to the preparation of the following remarks read at the London Medical Society.

J. G. D.

Northwoods, Bristol;

March 10, 1853.

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In the investigation of either the healthy or disordered manifestations of *mind*—*i. e.* the physiology or pathology of the brain—it is no longer the practice of the psychologist to waste his time, or that of his hearers or readers, as the case may be, by discussing the relative merits, or more properly *demerits*, of those of the metaphysical school. *We* have the privilege of living in a new era—one essentially practical and inductive. The school to which we belong recognises facts rather than fiction—things, not mere words. It demands of those who would enter its portals an acute perception, a facility of reasoning power, and an earnest desire for *truth*: to these qualifications, the “*thick-coming fancies*,” the vain speculations, and facile inventions of a Berkeley, or a Leibnitz, or a Cousin, *et hoc*

genus omne, must succumb; and what is more, fade ere long from the memory of man,—or, if not quite forgotten, but registered as a series of facts in the psychological history of our race.

Those of my readers who have devoted their time and attention to the cerebral physiology, will not have failed to notice the slow and hesitating pace by which the present 'vantage ground of our science has been reached; in the course of their studies they will have remarked how the doctrine of innate ideas, first shaken by the comparatively crude and feeble opposition of such men as Hobbes, Locke, and Condillac—each of whom advocated the dependency of the mental, or rather the cerebral impressions, on the use of the external senses, became in the severer, because more able, hands of Priestley, Lawrence, and especially of Gall, steadily yet certainly extinguished. The doctrine of the duality of the brain, as taught in the last century by Boerhaave, Van Swieten, Haller, and Bichât, though it led to the speedy extinction of the former crude and vulgar errors held in relation to cerebral physiology, was destined, though not exactly to give place to, yet to prepare the way for the more ready comprehension and reception of Gall's imperishable discoveries. The anatomical correspondence of the two hemispheres of the brain very plainly suggested their individuality of action—*i. e.* in a state

of health; but Dr. Gall was the first to perceive that this—the doctrine of the duality of the brain—was plainly imperfect and insufficient to account for the many and complex mental phenomena which his large and varied experience furnished; and to him, therefore, we have become indebted for a science of mind of the deepest importance, not only to the physician, but to the jurist.¹

¹ It will be in the recollection of my readers that the late Dr. Wigan, in 1843 or 1844 wrote a book to prove the *dual* nature of the *mind* (brain), and that the medical public, including too a goodly proportion of the medical press, were struck not only with what they were pleased to consider the *novelty*, but with the apparent truthfulness of the doctrine. It is, I conceive, a singular fact in the history of medical (psychological) literature, that the able author of the '*Duality of the Mind*' should have been in 1843 so ignorant of the rise and progress of cerebral physiology and pathology, as not to have known that this same doctrine had been both recognised and taught for the preceding 100 years; and what is more that Hippocrates even had expressed himself favorable to a precisely similar psychology. The following quotations from Van Swieten, Bichât, and Spurzheim prove, and incontrovertibly, the justice and truth of the foregoing remarks. Van Swieten writes thus:—"as the consciousness of impressions in two similar organs is single, as, for example, in the two ears, two eyes, &c., so *mental consciousness* generally is single, though the brain be double."

Bichât in his interesting work entitled '*On Life and Death*,' (the first three chapters of which are devoted to the elucidation of Dr. Wigan's views) has these words:—"the functions of every organ of the animal life are immediately connected with the resemblance of the organ to its fellow on the opposite side if double; or if single, to its similarity of conformation in its two halves; from hence the influence of organic changes upon the derangement of the functions may be well conceived. But this assertion will become more sensible when I shall have pointed out the relations which exist between the sym-

The investigation of the abnormal states of the mind (brain), their nature and cause, like to that

metry and the irregularity of the organs, and the harmony and discordance of their functions."

Bichât then proceeds to treat of the *external senses*, and having demonstrated how much their healthy condition depends on the symmetry of the organic structures concerned on either side of the body, and contrariwise, he passes on to the "*duality of the MIND*," the healthy manifestations of which he makes dependent on the synchronous action of the two hemispheres of the brain, and its diseased conditions to result from their want of harmony; and finishes the argument thus,—“I now conclude myself to have proved, that with inequality of action in the hemispheres there must be confusion of intellect. I have also pointed out some states of disease in which such confusion is evidently the effect of inequality of action so occasioned. Here we see the effect and its cause; but may we not from analogy infer a similar cause where we see a like effect? when the judgment is habitually incorrect, and all the ideas wanting in precision, may we not be induced to believe, that there does exist a defect of harmony in the action of the two hemispheres of the brain? We see inaccurately if nature have not given to both eyes an equal power; we perceive and judge inaccurately, in like manner, if the two sides of the brain are naturally dissimilar. The most correct mind and the soundest judgment presuppose in the hemispheres a perfect harmony of action; and what a multiplicity of shades do we not behold in the operations of the understanding! It is probable that they all of them correspond to so many varieties in the proportions of power in the hemispheres.”

Spurzheim writes,—“The two hemispheres of the brain, and the *individual parts or organs of each*, may be in different and quite opposite states, and produce different affections. . . . In giving the histories of cerebral injuries, the duplicity of the nervous system has very generally been forgotten; but one half of the brain may be destroyed, and the various faculties still be manifested by the other of the opposite side, just as one of the optic, auditory, or olfactory nerves may be destroyed, without our being blind, deaf, or deprived of our smell. It is well known, too, that the two hemispheres of the brain may be in very different states of health.” Spurzheim cites