

A CONTRIBUTION TO THE SURGERY OF THE SPINAL CORD

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A contribution to the surgery of the spinal cord by William Thorburn

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WILLIAM THORBURN

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THE SPINAL CORD**

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TO THE
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BY
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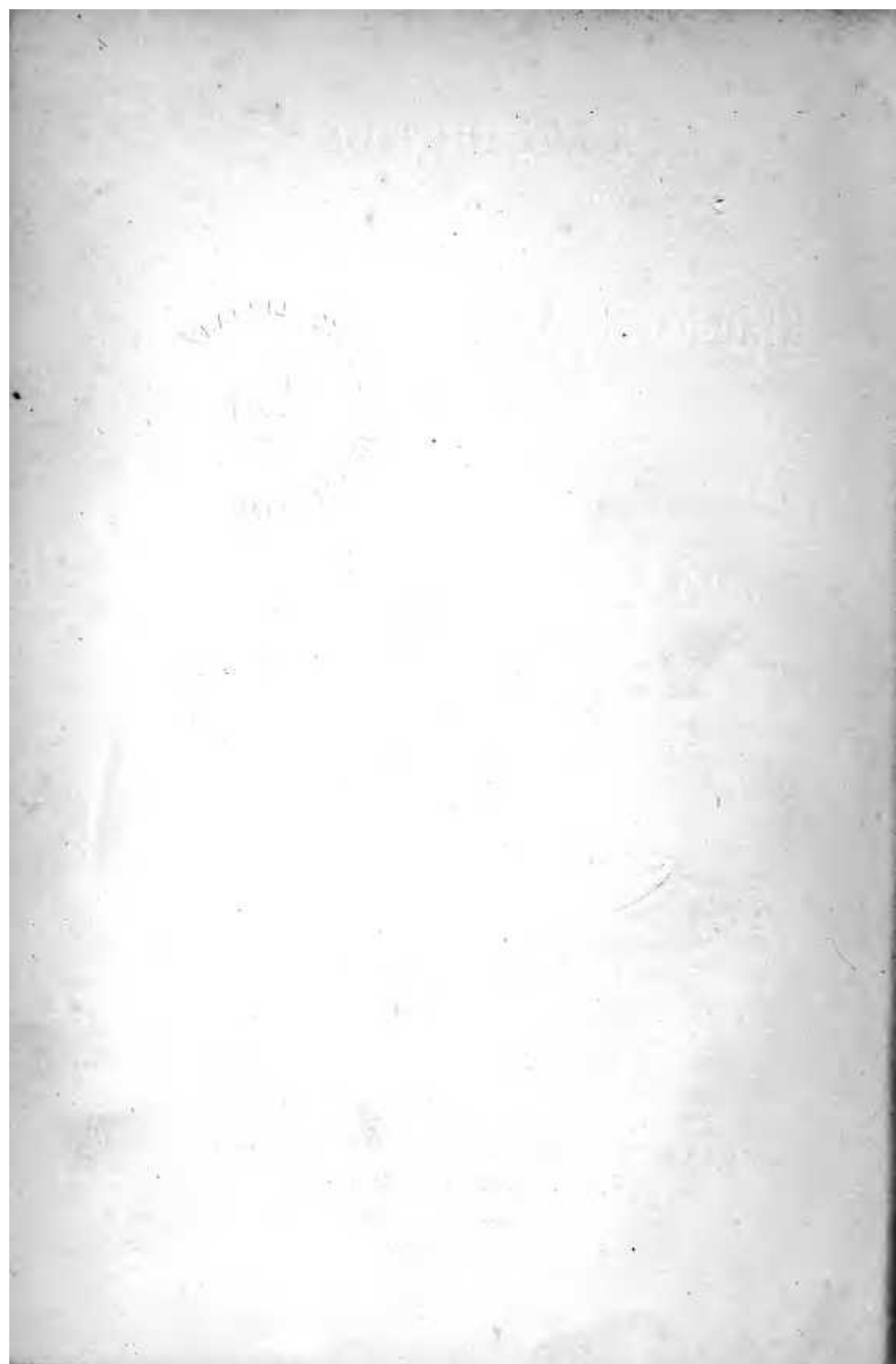
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INTRODUCTION.

IN the following pages will be found recorded a number of clinical observations, chiefly upon injuries of the spinal cord, and certain other traumatic affections, formerly supposed to be of organic and spinal origin, but now generally attributed to a totally different form of nervous disturbance. Although many of these observations have been already published in various medical journals, yet the present book is by no means a mere reprint, inasmuch as the arrangement adopted, and the connecting links of thought here supplied, not only render the result an extension of previous work, but give to it a coherence and unity which was not attempted in the original papers. It is, however, hardly necessary for me to say that the work lays no claim to be a systematic treatise, or even an exhaustive monograph, upon the above important subjects, but that it is merely a record of personal observations and deductions.

Two considerations have chiefly led to the production of this book. In the first place, it must be generally admitted that, until very recent years, the published descriptions of the symptoms of spinal injuries have, except in the hands of a few such observers as Ollivier and Mr. Jonathan Hutchinson, been so vague and indefinite, as to be almost valueless for the purpose of throwing light upon the more obscure questions of spinal pathology and physiology, or even of permitting an accurate diagnosis of the cases themselves. And yet we have in such injuries a perfect mine of wealth, which, properly utilised, can hardly fail to advance our knowledge of the normal and diseased action of

this portion of the nervous system: and there cannot be a doubt that the "experiments" provided for us by traumatic lesions of the spinal cord must, in their turn, illuminate those other branches of physiological and pathological science to the growth of which they owe the attention now bestowed upon them.

The second consideration to which I refer is that, acting under strict antiseptic precautions and aided by modern knowledge, surgeons will probably, in the near future, open the spinal canal with as little danger and as little hesitation as they now operate upon the cavity of the cranium; but that in order to permit of such an extension of therapeutic art it will be necessary still further to increase the accuracy of our diagnostic methods.

On these grounds, then, I feel that no contribution, however slight, which may aid in the elucidation of the points referred to, ought to be withheld from the medical public, and the only question with me is whether the importance of the following observations is sufficient to justify their collection in the present form. Whether this is so or not must now be left to the judgment of the reader; but, whatever this judgment may be, at least I cannot plead that my opportunities for undertaking the work have not been ample. Having entered upon my medical education just at the time when the diseases of the nervous system began to be studied in Manchester, with an enthusiasm which has made itself widely felt, I have from the first been thrown under the influence of teachers and friends for whose assistance and advice I cannot sufficiently express my gratitude; and further, during the last four years my position as Surgical Registrar to the Manchester Royal Infirmary has given me access to an almost unrivalled field for clinical observation, in which I have had the singular good fortune to work under a staff, who have not only afforded me every opportunity for observing their cases, but have also given me permission to publish them as freely as if they were my own. To the large-minded generosity of these gentlemen—the Physicians and Surgeons of the Manchester Infirmary—I am unable adequately to express my obligation.

If, where I have received so much and such general kindness and assistance, any selection be permissible, I would tender my

especial thanks to Dr. David Little, whose ready assistance in controlling my observations upon morbid conditions of the optic discs endows them with the stamp of his high authority. But above all, I am indebted to two gentlemen, whose constant assistance and advice have been of an absolutely inestimable value to me—my former teacher, Dr. James Ross, to whose inspiration must be attributed whatever is of value in this book, and my colleague, Mr. Alexander Wilson, who has ungrudgingly lent me his aid in the preparation of the work for the press.

W. T.



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