

**THE DYNAMICS OF LIFE: AN  
ADDRESS, DELIVERED BEFORE  
THE MEDICAL SOCIETY OF  
MANCHESTER OCTOBER 3RD,  
1894**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649342242

The Dynamics of life: An Address, Delivered Before the Medical Society of Manchester October 3rd, 1894 by W. R. Gowers

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.  
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

[www.triestepublishing.com](http://www.triestepublishing.com)

**W. R. GOWERS**

**THE DYNAMICS OF LIFE: AN  
ADDRESS, DELIVERED BEFORE  
THE MEDICAL SOCIETY OF  
MANCHESTER  
OCTOBER 3RD, 1894**



Definitions of Life.  
The Philosophy of Religion.

THE  
DYNAMICS OF LIFE

AN ADDRESS

*Delivered before the Medical Society of Manchester  
October 3rd, 1894*

LANE LIBRARY

BY

W. R. GOWERS, M.D., F.R.S.



PHILADELPHIA  
P. BLAKISTON, SON & CO.  
1012, WALNUT STREET

1894

M.

F341  
G72  
1894

## PREFACE.

---

THE following Address, delivered in a condensed form, is reprinted from the pages of the *Lancet*, with minor alterations and additions. The only other word of preface needed is a statement of the fact mentioned in the early part of the Address, that no novelty is assumed for the conceptions here presented. Their form seemed, to those to whom the Address was given, to possess some freshness, and thus they may be of use to others. The fundamental conception may be open to question, but, even so, it may promote a clearer perception of the truth.

W. R. GOWERS.

LONDON; *November, 1894.*





## THE DYNAMICS OF LIFE.

---

GENTLEMEN,—At Manchester—second in England only to the metropolis as a medical centre and source of knowledge—it is, I conceive, superfluous for me to apologise for taking a theoretical subject for such an address as that which I have the honour to give to-night. I need hardly remind you that between what we term “theory” and “fact” the transition is gradual; that much of that which we regard as fact is only fact to our thought. Observation alone is certain—observation pure and simple. The interpretation of observation introduces uncertainty in proportion to the extent to which inference is involved; to this we are often blind—blind sometimes to its existence, generally to its amount. But there is a region in which we must recognise hypothesis as absolute. It is the region below the surface whence no reflected light can pass, but whence all observed phenomena proceed. Here we must either accept indirect perception, or we must be content with no perception of the causes of that which we observe.

Where we can have no certainty we must be content with probability, or relinquish all attempts to know. We cannot limit knowledge to the certainty of actual observation. The help that even pure hypothesis can give is too great to be despised. If it enables us better to discern that which is in sight, to discover more of its details, to see its relations more clearly, to grasp its character more firmly, the result is surely worth an effort. These considerations prevent me hesitating to ask your attention this evening to some considerations which are hypothetical. I fear I must add that I shall be compelled to ask for your close attention. I regret that it should be so—I should prefer to discuss some simple practical subject. But there is sometimes a compulsion in the selection of a subject against which it is not wise to strive. That which I now submit to your consideration has, for some time, pressed on my thought too persistently to permit me to use this opportunity in any other way.

In thus availing myself of the occasion, however, I shall be a trespasser. I shall have to pass into regions where I have no strict right to be, but into which I go because from them come the streams that water our own province. I wish to tell you how they appear to a stranger and sojourner in the land, and to tell you not in the language of the country, but in our own simple tongue. But the account may be useful because it will, I hope, make us think more of that which underlies many of our practical problems. Disease belongs to life as health does. We pass from

one to the other in knowledge as in experience. But in our thoughts of abnormal action we are often thrown back upon our conception of normal action; we are thus made to endeavour, more earnestly, to perceive that which underlies both, because in the one, we have more need than in the other. Hence the general subject—the process by which energy is manifested in the animal body—we may usefully connect with the most obtrusive manifestation of energy we encounter, either in health or disease—an epileptic fit. But I ask you to do this especially because the attempt will bring before us, in an effective way, the limitation of our efforts in the presence of life, and also the way in which disease, as such, in its essential nature, is distinct from the process of its manifestation. Many phenomena of disease take us directly to the mysterious relations of energy to life which underlie all we observe, and are in their nature beyond our direct scrutiny. They raise at once the problem of their nature. We cannot contemplate such disorders as epilepsy without being compelled to wonder what is their actual nature, and how their manifestations are produced. And we cannot do so apart from the consideration of similar processes in health. Their reflected light makes some features of normal life more conspicuously important and compels their closer study. They often make us ask more questions with greater persistence. Disease puts before us the processes of life in more startling aspect, and therefore often with more effect, than do the normal phenomena with which we are so familiar that it needs more effort