AN
INAUGURAL DISSERTATION,
ON
Special Ingration
SUBMITTED TO THE
PRESIDENT, BOARD OF TRUSTEES, AND MEDICAL FACULTY
OF THE
University of Nashville,
FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF MEDICINE.

BY
Albert G. Alexander

OF
Mississippi
March 1847

CHARLES W. SMITH,
BOOKSELLER AND STATIONER.
NASHVILLE, TENN.
To
John, M. Watson M.D.
Professor of Obstetrics, and the
Diseases of Woman and Children
In the
Medical department of the University
of Nashville.

My Dear Sir

I venture
to Inscribe the following
Paper to you as a feeble
Testimony of my gratitude for
Your Valuable instruction, and
As an affectionate remembrance
Of a sincere friendship, which
Has been continued through the
Last two Sessions of this Institution

A. H. Alexander
Spinal Irritation

The close relation that Rheumatic affections bear to other disorders having their origin in the great nervous centers, renders a consideration of Spinal irritation, particularly, appropriate.

Disease of the Spinal nerves, producing the symptoms of acute Rheumatism, I hold, bears the same relation to inflammatory action in the nervous radicles, that the highest grade of excitement, seated in the same part which may be called irritation bears to the symptoms constituting Neuralgia or Spinal irritation.

To reverse the proposition, acute Rheumatism has the same relation to inflammatory
action on the roots of the spinal nerves. That various reflected diseases, sometimes called neuralgia, take a form of the same nervous radicles. The great liability that exists to mistake some of the reflected disturbances, produced by disease seated in the spinal nerves, for other, and more serious organic disorders, remote from the source of trouble, renders the consideration of this subject, scarcely less important to the student of medicine, than that of any other topic connected with disease. Scarcely an organ in the body can be named that is not by turns made the scapegoat upon which
these great Nervous Centers pay off
their fantastic representations of
serious organic or functional
disturbances, and thereby misled
the unsuspecting attendant, the expense
to the patient, of a severe course of
Medication, directed to a disease
having its real seat far removed
from the organ manifesting
embarrassment and functional
disturbance. Thus, organic
affections of the heart have
been so closely simulated, and
the symptoms of disease of that
organ have been so fully
developed by disease of the Spinal
Nerves, as to greatly embarrass the most
Careful Observer, and render a solution
of the difficulty only possible by a physical
exploration, which modern science has taught
us to make. Irregularity and palpitation of
the heart, general nervous irritation, loss of
appetite, with gastric derangement and debility, with all the attendant
symptoms of cardiac affections, are
produced by irritation of the spine,
and may be often relieved by measures
adopted to that disease.

Thus, too, various
forms of pulmonary disorders are
so closely simulated to disease in the roots of the spinal
nerves, readily recognized by
pressure on the vertebrae of the spinal
column, as to leave no doubt of
of the fact.
A troublesome, irritating cough, night sweats, rapid pulse, hurried respiration, and all the general symptoms of a rapid consumption. In like manner asthmatic symptoms are frequently produced, manifesting all the urgency and severity of the genuine disease, greatly aggravated by pressure over certain vertebras of the dorsal portion of the spine, which may be promptly relieved by appropriate applications to the seat of irritation or of the disorder. The same may be said of affections of the liver. Pains in the right side extending to the shoulder, scorched tongue, dyspeptic symptoms, and other evidences indicating liver disease may
be observed; yet there will not be the usual
tenderness over that joint, but great
sensitiveness upon pressure on the spine,
and other indication that disease there
situated is the essential cause of all the
symptoms existing in the case. Few diseases
are more frequently met with than dyspepsia
or indigestion, depending often
upon nervous irritation readily tracea-
table to the spinal and sympathetic nerve.
From the same cause, various intestinal
disorders are often developed.

Different

forms of renal affection have, in
many instances, been clearly trace-able
to deficient annervation, or to a
highly irritated state of the spinal
nerve. As for instance, Diabeti, and
And Bright's disease have been often found connected with Spinal Irritation, which facts were proven by the above diseases being promptly relieved, or at least greatly remedied by directing treatment to the irritated nerves. Certain affections of various kinds, or more properly of many different forms especially the various displacements and functional disorders, have so often been traced to Spinal Irritation as to almost preclude the existence of these disorders from any other cause. It is also reasonable to argue that a greater portion of the cases of Chronic Gargogeal diseases that are met with are referable to this very prolific source of the many ailments that this preëd body of ours is heir to.
There is another disease that proves the position we have taken, beyond doubt. I refer to Chronic Ophthalmia, it is known and observed by all practitioners of our profession that this disease is perfectly intractable and unyielding, under any course of medication that may be devised until the proper counterirritation and other appropriate measures are directed to the cervical vertebrae, calculated to relieve the irritation there found in such cases. It may be asked, what relation the eye holds to the nerves either of the medulla oblongata or spinalis, and wherein the local inflammation of the eyes could be connected with irritation of the spine. I answer, that while the muscular nerves of the eyes have their origin directly
from the anterior portion of the Medulla oblongata or top of the Spinal Marrow—the optic nerves also if they do not originate from the Medulla oblongata are yet intimately connected with it as most sensibly to feel and respond to irritation there existing. But lest I should be thought hoyling hot tical in regard to this one source of the several ailments that I have mentioned and their cause I would say that I desire not to be misunderstood in relation to disorders growing out of spinal irritation, for while I have no doubt that all the diseases that I have mentioned and many others are frequently
Simulated by spinal irritation and
some of them wholly referable to
this cause, I do not by any means
wish to be understood as saying
that most of those affections are
not more frequently produced
by other causes in which spinal
disorders play no material part.
Therefore for the purpose of prevent-
ing unnecessary medication in dis-
order where simple and mild mea-
sures are sufficient for the purpose,
it becomes a matter of no small im-
portance to form a correct diag-
nosis in such cases. Although the
general nervous excitement
and changeable character of
the symptoms in disease
Simulated by spinal disorders would mutually suggest the true character of the case yet they are not sufficiently diagnostic to be relied on for a course of treatment. So my mind the main reliance in arriving at a correct diagnosis in these cases is mostly of a negative character, as for instance the absence of the usual physical symptoms that are present in almost all organic affections which a careful examination will rarely fail to detect will be quite satisfactory and conclusive. Thus in diseases of the respiratory organs
produced by Spinal Irritation
The absence of physical symptoms always more or less present in all organic affections of those organs would be conclusive that the disease was not structural but functional. But however you may think those circumstances to be a careful examination of the spine by pressing upon each of the vertebra, or if the spinal column be found unusually stiff and unyielding pressure made on each side of it may thus more readily move the joints and detect the ten-
derne neuro existing at those joints.
For the relief of those most perplexing diseases there are various modes of treatment, and many so called specificis are recommended but the only rational view that can be taken of such cases in our humble judgement is as follows. Besides the indispensable local treatment for spinal irritation, most cases will require some general measures. In regard to those however we should always be governed by the indication, which the state of the general system presents. Such a course of general restorative and tonics as the individual may require. The specifics remedies that experience may teach us are best calculated to relieve the troublesome symptoms.
Connected with the organs manifesting derangement, free bathing and friction and such a course of general exercise as the condition and circumstances of the patient will justify, together with cupping the spine over the point involved are in general the means which will most probably afford the speediest relief in these affections. In any case presenting periodical symptoms as many of them frequently do, the free use of Quinine or Quinin and Iron for a few days will rarely fail to hasten a cure. It appears to me quite impossible for even the most bigoted or ignorant member of our profession to shut their eye to the fact our neglect of anatomical
Uncertainty thrown upon the observation and experience of practical men. A most important change has taken place in the minds of our profession in regard to the pathology of the nervous system. For my own part I believe the time is at hand when all of the rubbish of anomalous cases and intractable and mysterious diseases will be swept from our periodical literature, and when systems of nosology only calculated to obscure the subject which they pretend to illustrate will be left to rot unnoticed, and undisturbed on the most inaccessible shelves of our libraries.
will aware that many of the
prophecy will stick with all
the tenacity of tempests to the
rock of ancient usage and once
these new views and every thing
that goes to support them with
the same virulence and
hostility as if the calm examina-
tion of the claims to attention
or the testing of their accuracy
were to inflict a positive injury
on the dearest interest of soci-
ety. It is unfortunately as part
and parcel of human nature.
Prejudice is the bane of advance-
ment in every department of
human knowledge but in none
close it tell more heavily against.
The need of our common nature than in our profession for never will any man practice it either true dignity or real usefulness till he cast from him every transient wheather of education theory or authority until in short he hears with his own ear see with his own eyes and judge with a perfectly unbiased mind.

Philadelphia Feb 1st 1857

Albert G. Alexander.

January 28th 1857.