

AN
INAUGURAL DISSERTATION

ON

Neuralgia,

SUBMITTED TO THE

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FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF MEDICINE.

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Neuralgia.

The definition of neuralgia as given by Dr Dunglison, is;

"A generic name for a certain number of diseases, the chief symptom of which is a very acute pain, exacerbating or intermitting, which follows the course of a nervous branch, extends to its ramifications, and seems therefore to be seated in the nerve".

You will see that the term neuralgia, as defined above, does not indicate the nature of the disease, - or rather its anatomical character - but is simply a symptom of diseased action.

The nature of the disease is, among Physicians as yet unset

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tled, - but I am disposed to agree with Dr Wood, "that it is purely functional or nervous," and may be extended so as to embrace all cases of pain, not spasmodic, and which can not be traced directly to vascular congestion, inflammation, or other organic lesions.

Symptoms; - The pain is of every possible degree, and variety of character, tho' tis generally severe, some times it is darting, or lancinating, some times, aching, burning, and piercing; it generally approaches without any premonition, either beginning moderately, with a sensation of aching, or by darting suddenly through the part, with intensity; the pain

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is generally continuous, varying in intensity, - but it some times consists, of a succession of very violent paroxysms, with comparative ease in the intervals.

The paroxysms are some times attended with flushing and vascular turgescence.

The duration of the disease is indefinite. The patient may have only one attack, which may last only for a few hours, - or he may have several attacks and the disease afterward disappear, or he may be affected for years or even during his whole life.

Seats of the disease; -

It may attack any portion of the body where there are

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nerves distributed, tho. some portions of the body are more liable to be attacked than others, and these have received distinct designations, as Neuralgia of one side of the head that of Hemispheric, neuralgia of the heart that of Angina Pectoris, that of the stomach Gastralgia &c.

Causes; - These may be divided into predisposing and exciting causes. The most general predisposing causes are those having a tendency to produce a debilitated state of the Constitution. This fact is very evident from the nature of the disease, it being purely nervous, for it is well known to pathologists

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that in an enemic or debilitat-
ed state, irritation is peculiar-
ly disposed to seat its self in
the nervous tissue.

The exciting causes are very
various. It may originate in some
other morbid affection either
local or general, beyond or con-
tiguous to the seat of the pain,
or in some modification of the
nerves immediately affected.

One of the most frequent
sources of neuralgia may be
found in a diseased condition
of the spinal column, which
may be detected by tenderness
or pressure at the point af-
fected.

Some times the disease is pr-

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duced by a tumour, situated in the course of a nerve; or by the deposition of osseous matter; or by the roughness of a bony canal through which a nerve passes.

Rheumatism, and Gout, are also frequent sources of the disease.

There are a great many external causes, such as Cold especially when combined with moisture; Wounds &c. Intemperate eating or drinking; the excessive use of tobacco; the sudden removal of cutaneous diseases &c. are all frequent causes of the disease.

Diagnosis;— This division

of the subject I would gladly avoid, on account of its obscurity, there being no pathognomonic symptom; and join its self the characteristic feature of neuralgia, being a symptom of almost every other disease. and again, the disease is often complicated, with other diseases, such as gut rheumatism &c, and consulting the different Authors but renders the subject more perplexing.

Let us take Dr Woods, practitioner, and compare his views of rheumatism, and neuralgia, and with these views as his guide see if any one could form a diagnosis.

We can divide diseases, only

accorded to their seats, or
 tissues they occupy; - thus inflammati-
 on of the pleura is called Pleuri-
 tis, of the Stomach, Gastritis &c.
 And Dr Wood accordingly seats
 Rheumatism, in the Muscular, Ser-
 ous, or fibrous tissue, - but so
 soon as he speaks of Nervous Rheu-
 matism, he changes his position
 and obscures or confounds his sub-
 ject. It is plain a disease may
 commence in one tissue, and extend
 by sympathy of contiguity, or func-
 tion, to an other organ or tissue,
 and thus become complex, - but
 still if you would avoid confu-
 sion, you must not loose sight
 of the tissue, or confound a dise-
 ase proceeding from the same

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cause and affecting one organ
or tissue, with a disease of a
different organ, tho. proceeding
from the same cause; - thus ma-
ny say pleurisy of the head, (I
mean the uneducated) - tho. th-
ere is no pleura in the head,
they mean a disease proceeding
from the same cause - viz Cold -
thus confounding two diseases,
but if Rheumatism is a disease
of one tissue, and neuralgia a
disease of another, are not the
terms Nervous rheumatism &c, as
improper as pleuritic Gastritis,
and does not such language lead
unavoidably to confusion.

The Nerves are the seat of Neu-
ralgia primarily and mainly, -

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tho' this disease may affect secondarily other tissues, thus a neuralgia of the Portio-dura, may affect secondarily the Serpiginous Membrane, producing irritation of, with a discharge from the membrane, - or one of the intercostal nerves may be affected, and we may have, Cough pain on breathing, - and mucous expectoration. Here several tissues are affected - the Nervous - Mucous - and may be the Serous, - but shall we call it a Nervous Bronchitis, or pleuritis. Examine along the spine and the course of the nerve and you will find the parts tender. and from the fever, flushed face, and

quickened pulse, there may be inflammation, nay it may even continue until Bronchitis proper - viz the Mucous surface, - and the nerves going to it are inflamed.

tho. it might perhaps be with propriety, designated as Sympathetic Bronchitis, - yet to call it nervous would have a tendency to confuse.

If we say then that Neuralgia consists in the irritation of a nerve, I think we have as clear an idea of the disease as we have of the term irritation, and the disease only becomes obscure obscure when other tissues become involved, and it is plain that more or less obscurity may exist

when any other disease becomes
complex, and all we can do in
such cases, is by close investigation
to find out the primary disease &c

Treatment; — It is not surpris-
ing that men confounding the
diseases, should compound the tre-
atment, and that those means,
which are alone of service in
Rheumatism, should be used in
Neuralgia, and vice-versa, and
is not this a fact, though
the same treatment to a certain
extent is required in all infl-
ammations, whether of Nerves, Mus-
cles, or blood vessels, — yet it is not
the same in all respects, and
that man is not skillful who
does not know the peculiarities

of each, - and again there may be only irritation or cleavage-ment of function, and this mistaken for inflammation, - thus you may be called to a man with sharp pain, or stick, in the side, the pulse may be rapid with cough, &c, now to treat this case as a pleurisy might endanger life, for on examination of the spine, you may be at once convinced that the disease is not a pleurisy, - the history of the patient, the pressure along the nerve aiding you in the diagnosis, and whether irritated, or inflamed, the bold treatment required in pleurisy would not be required here.

If the disease arise as it most frequently does from a debilitated state of the constitution, or from a Rheumatic or Gouty diathesis, these several conditions should be corrected and the affection will disappear.

If the disease arise from the pressure of a tumour or foreign body, the only remedy is their removal. and cases resulting from the inflamed or irritable state of the spinal column, are most frequently relieved by the application of a blister over the affected spot.

The Narcotics are generally indispensable in the treatment of this disease, and opium

in some form is generally given, - but the treatment is so various that it would be impossible for me to give all the indications.

The local remedies are almost as numerous, but I will only mention a few of the most important, among which the narcotics stand first. Laudanum may be employed by lotion or by cataplasm, care being taken that it is not absorbed.

Chloroform, has been used locally with great benefit.

Blistering, rubefacients scotons issues &c, are beneficial in the treatment.

of this disease, Some times
all these remedies fail and
recourse has been made in se-
vere cases, to excision.

E. A. Porter

January 29th 1859

UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF MEDICINE

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