

PLAN

INAUGURAL DISSERTATION,

ON

*Spinal Irritation*

SUBMITTED TO THE

PRESIDENT, BOARD OF TRUSTEES, AND MEDICAL FACULTY

OF THE

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FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF MEDICINE.

BY

*Albert G. Alexander*

OF

*Mississippi*

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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 instructions, and  
as an affectionate reminiscen-  
-ce of a sincere friendship which  
has been continued through the  
last ~~two~~<sup>two</sup> sessions of this insti-  
tution

A. G. 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 less 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, in the roots of the Spinal nerves,  
 that, various reflected diseases, sometimes  
 called neuralgia, has to Irritation of  
 the same nervous radicles. The great  
 liability, that exists, to mistake some  
 of the reflected disturbances, produ-  
 ced, by disease seated in the  
 spinal nerves, for other, and  
 more serious organic disorders,  
 remote from the source of trou-  
 ble, renders the consideration of  
 this subject, scarcely less impor-  
 tant to the student of medici-  
 ne, than that of any other topic  
 connected with disease. Scarcely  
 an organ ~~in~~ the body can be  
 named that is not by turns ma-  
 de the scapegoat upon which

these great nervous centers pay off  
 their fantastic representations of  
 serious organic or functional  
 disturbances, and thereby mislead  
 the unsuspecting attendant, <sup>to</sup> 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



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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 <sup>on the</sup> vertebra of the spinal column, as to leave no doubt of the fact,

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A troublesome, iritating cough, night  
sweats, rapid pulse, hurried respi-  
ration, and all the general symp-  
toms 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 vertebrae of the  
dorsal portion of the spine, which may  
be ~~promptly~~ promptly relieved by  
appropriate applications to the seat of  
irritation or of the disorder. The same  
may be said of affections of the  
liver, pain in the right side, extend-  
ing to the shoulder, furred tongue,  
dyspeptic symptoms, and other evi-  
dences indicating liver disease may

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be observed; yet there will not be the usual  
tenderness over that viscus, but great  
sensitivity 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 dys-  
pepsia or indigestion, depending often  
upon nervous irritation readily trace-  
able to the spinal and sympathetic nerves.  
From the same cause, various intestinal  
disorders are often developed.

Different  
forms of renal affection have, in  
many instances, been closely trace-  
able to deficient innervation, or to a  
highly irritated state of the spinal  
nerves, as for instance, Diabetes, and



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And Brights 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. Uterine 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 Laryngeal diseases that are met with are referable to this very prolific source of the many ailments that this frail 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 hold 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 eye 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 imme-  
 -diately connected with it as most  
 sensibly to feel and respond to irrita-  
 tion there existing. But lest I should  
 be thought hobby hoptical 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 dis-  
 -eases 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-  
-orders 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 diseases

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Simulated by Spinal disorders  
would naturally suggest the true  
character of the case yet they  
are not sufficiently diagnostic  
to be relied on for a course of  
treatment. To 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 struc-  
 - tural but functional. But how-  
 - ever you may think those  
 circumstances to be a careful  
 examination of the spine by pres-  
 - sing upon each of the vertebrae; 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-  
 - derness existing at those joints.



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For the relief of those most perplexing diseases there are various modes of treatment, and many so called ~~specifics~~ -  
-al view that can be taken of such cases in our humble judgement is as follows, Vesicles, <sup>the</sup> 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 Specific remedies that experience may teach us are best calculated to relieve the troublesome symptoms

connected with the organs manifesting  
 derangement, foot bathing and friction and  
 such a course of general exercise as the con-  
 -dition and circumstances of the patient  
 will justify, together with cupping the  
 spine over the point found involved are  
 in general the means which will most  
 probably afford the speediest relief in  
 these affections. In any cases pre-  
 -sented periodical symptoms as many  
 of them frequently do, the free use of  
 Quinine or Quinine 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 <sup>fact</sup> that our <sup>the</sup> insight of an anatomical

certainty thrown upon the observations  
 and experience of practical men.  
 A most important change has  
 taken place in the minds of our  
 profession in regard to the pathol-  
 ogy of the nervous system, for  
 my own part I believe the time  
 is at hand when all of the rub-  
 -bish 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 <sup>inaccessible</sup> ~~inaccessible~~ shelves  
 of our libraries, nevertheless I am



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well aware that many of the  
proprietors will stick with all  
the tenacity of limpets to the  
rock of ancient usage and meet  
these new views and every thing  
that goes to support them with  
the same virulence and  
hostility as if the calm examina-  
-tion of their claims to attention  
or the testing of their accuracy  
were to inflict a positive injury  
on the dearest interest of soci-  
ety This unfortunately is part  
and parcel of human nature.

Prejudice is the bane of advance-  
ment in every department of  
human knowledge but in none  
does it tell more heavily against

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The weal of our common nature  
than in our profession for  
never will any man practice  
it <sup>with</sup> either true dignity or real  
usefulness till he cast from  
him every trammel whether of  
education theory or authority  
until in short he hears with  
his own ears sees with his  
own eyes and judges with a  
perfectly unbiased mind.

~~Albany~~ ~~the~~ ~~the~~ 1857

Albert S. Alexander.

January 28th 1857.