

Following Charcot: A Forgotten History of Neurology and Psychiatry

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J. Bogouslavsky Montreux

Following Charcot: A Forgotten History of Neurology and Psychiatry

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*Dedicated to the memory of our colleague and friend
Gérald Devuyst*

Contents

IX List of Contributors

XI Foreword

Barnett, H.J.M. (London, Ont.)

XII Preface

Bogousslavsky, J. (Montreux)

1 Birth of Modern Psychiatry and the Death of Alienism: The Legacy of Jean-Martin Charcot

Bogousslavsky, J. (Montreux); Moulin, T. (Besançon)

9 Jean-Martin Charcot's House Officers at La Salpêtrière Hospital

Walusinski, O. (Brou)

36 The Chair of Mental and Brain Diseases: Charcot's Pupils – Benjamin Ball, Alix Joffroy and Gilbert Ballet

Tiberghien, D. (Garches/Montesson)

52 Édouard Brissaud, Fulgence Raymond and the Succession of Charcot

Tatu, L. (Besançon)

61 Great Careers: Cornil, Bouchard, Bourneville and Proust

Paciaroni, M. (Perugia); Cittadini, E. (London); Bogousslavsky, J. (Montreux)

71 Keeping the Fire Burning: Georges Gilles de la Tourette, Paul Richer, Charles Féré and Alfred Binet

Walusinski, O. (Brou)

91 Renewing the Fire: Joseph Babinski

Poirier, J. (Paris); Philippon, J. (Lamorlaye)

105 Paul Sollier: The First Clinical Neuropsychologist

Bogousslavsky, J. (Montreux); Walusinski, O. (Brou)

115 Pierre Janet, Sigmund Freud and Charcot's Psychological and Psychiatric Legacy

Pérez-Rincón, H. (Mexico City)

125 Jules Bernard Luys in Charcot's Penumbra

Parent, M.; Parent, A. (Québec, Que.)

137 Hysteria after Charcot: Back to the Future

Bogousslavsky, J. (Montreux)

162 Jules Joseph Déjerine versus Pierre Marie

Paciaroni, M. (Perugia); Bogousslavsky, J. (Montreux)

170 Neurology Outside Paris following Charcot

Moulin, T. (Besançon); Clarac, F. (Marseille); Petit, H. (Lille); Broussolle, E. (Lyon)

187 Birth and Death of Charcot's Scientific Journals

Poirier, J. (Paris); Ricou, P. (Orléans); Leroux-Hugon, V. (Paris)

202 Author Index

203 Subject Index

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Foreword

In the 19th century, two major centers devoted to understanding neurological disease were created in Europe. In both, the focus was on clinical observation, describing neurological entities and attempts to localize cerebral function. Teaching was an important component in both institutions.

With their Anglocentric bias, the school best known to North American and UK students is the British school centered in Queen Square, London. Bedside clinicians became iconic in their field: Gowers, Jackson and Holmes. Later, these were succeeded by Kinnier Wilson, Symonds, Walshe and Critchley, among others. Greenfield left the clinic and went on to become a pioneer in neuropathology.

Meanwhile, across the Channel, at the Pitié-Salpêtrière Hospital in Paris, great strides were being undertaken by such prominent scientists as Babinski, Pierre Marie, Guillain, Déjerine, Foix, Gilles de la Tourette and many others. The central figure among the French neurologists at this time was Jean-Martin Charcot, often and not inappropriately described as a ‘father of neurology’. Probably no other neurologist has had his name eponymically attached to such a variety of disorders. He left several volumes of clinical observations, and as a talented artist illustrated a great deal of his own work. His influence spread to most European scholars of his era who were concerned with the human brain, including Sigmund Freud, who is known to have respected him. Charcot was not just influential in nurturing the beginnings of

modern neurology, but also the science of psychiatry, as well as having a huge impact upon 20th century neurological leaders in Europe and beyond.

The neurological world is deeply indebted to Prof. Bogousslavsky for drawing attention to so many aspects of the life and work of this distinguished pioneer’s pupils. Indeed, modern students of neurology should reflect with humility and wonder that Charcot and his followers accomplished so much before X-ray, ultrasound, lumbar puncture, CT, MR, electrophysiology, blood chemistry, neurosurgery, effective pharmaceutical therapy and many other bright lights that guide us today.

Henry J.M. Barnett, London, Ont.

Preface

The recent appearance of several articles on the history of neurology in scientific journals is a sign that this particular field is becoming increasingly popular among neurologists. A few encyclopedia-style books have also recently appeared, and despite meeting with varying degrees of success, they are good examples of how it may be useful and necessary to delineate the historical roots of today's medical practices. The history of psychiatry has stronger antecedents, but the paths common to neurology and psychiatry at the turn of the 19th century have not been well explored.

Jean-Martin Charcot perhaps remains the most famous and celebrated neurologist in the world, and despite strong and independent schools of neurology in the USA, UK and Germany, his Salpêtrière school has become the symbol of the early development and rise of neurological practice and research in the 20th century. Unfortunately, there is a plethora of books and articles on Charcot which have repeated facts without verification; thus, errors and misbeliefs have been perpetuated over decades. A good example is the succession of Charcot himself, which has repeatedly been presented as a 'political intrigue'. In fact his older *interne* Fulgence Raymond was easily co-opted by the college of professors over other candidates that were often reported as more intelligent and while he himself was ridiculed as the 'veterinarian' (because of his past studies in animal medicine). Moreover, Charcot's own concepts of diseases have often been simplified or truncated, hysteria being

perhaps the best example. A careful follow-up of Charcot's ideas and the relationship with his colleagues shows a surprising modernity – in contrast to the 'killing' of his 'old-fashioned' theories that were supposedly perpetuated by his faithful pupil Joseph Babinski. In psychiatry, Henri Ellenberger has taught the importance of data verification using original documents, but neurology has not been quick to take up this advice.

This book, for which each author is to be commended for their contributions, is an attempt to present a fresh look at the relatively recent origins of medicine for nervous system diseases. The fate of Charcot's school and pupils – with special emphasis on previously unknown chapters on early developments in neurology in parallel to mental medicine (still called alienism) – is described in detail. These events indicate that Charcot should not only be considered as the father of clinical neurology, but the organizer of what would become academic and scientific psychiatry – which would be dominated by his direct pupils for the next 40 years – in spite of his supposed lack of interest in this field.

Julien Bogousslavsky, Montreux