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Pott's Spinal Caries: Pott's Paraplegia

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Percivall Pott (1714–1788), surgeon to St. Bartholomew's Hospital, is generally credited with the first detailed account of spinal tuberculosis. He described in 1779 [1] and in 1782 [2] (fig. 1) a triad of paravertebral abscess associated with kyphosis and paraplegia.

References

- 1 Pott P: Remarks on that kind of palsy of the lower limb which is frequently found to accompany a curvature of the spine – London, 1779; in Medical Classics. Williams & Wilkins, Baltimore, 1936, vol 1, pp 271–323.
- 2 Pott P: Further Remarks on the Useless State of the Lower Limb in Consequence of a Curvature of the Spine, Being a Supplement to a Former Treatise on That Subject. London, Johnson, 1782.

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Pott P. Remarks on useless state of the lower limb in consequence of a curvature of the spine, being a supplement to a former treatise on that subject. London, Johnson, 1782.

An adult, in a case where no violence hath been committed, or received, will tell you, that his first intimation was a sense of weakness in his back bone, accompanied with a heavy, dull kind of pain and great lassitude; that this was soon followed by an unusual sense of coldness in his thighs, and a palpable diminution of their sensibility; that in a little time more, his limbs were frequently convulsed by involuntary twitchings, particularly in the night; that soon after this, he not only became incapable of walking, but that his power either of retaining or discharging his urine and faeces was considerably impaired, and his penis became incapable of erection.

Fig. 1. Pott's description of paraplegia in 1782 (above) and 1779 (below); Percivall Pott.