A HUNDRED YEARS AGO

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COUNTER-IRRITATION, BY BLISTER OR PERCUSSION, IN SPINAL THERAPEUTICS

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MANY YEARS AGO Harkin, of Belfast, drew attention to the beneficial results obtained from applying counter-irritation over the spinal cord in certain conditions. Among these were vomiting, neuralgia, and pruritus pudendi, when occurring in pregnancy, dysmenorrhoea, facial paralysis, and other morbid states.

He was unable to explain the exact rationale of the treatment. The part of the spine to which the counter-irritation is applied, is that covered by the bodies of the fourth and fifth dorsal vertebrae. Being desirous of obtaining from a leading neurologist a scientific explanation of the co-existence of this limited area of latent hyperaesthesia with nerve disorder in remote organs, Harkin wrote to Brown-Séquard, requesting his opinion. He replied that he did not know, but could say that, "The morbid sensibility of the spine at the level of the fourth dorsal and the seventh cervical is a sign of anaemia and hysteria, and persons in health are free from it."

The following cases, which have come under my observation, are of interest as bearing on the subject.

Counter-irritation by blister

M.H., 28 had been a great sufferer from dysmenorrhoea from the commencement of menstruation at the age of 14. So great was the pain that she had invariably to retire to bed for several hours during the first day of the period. Eight years ago dilatation of the cervix was performed, but the relief resulting was transitory. For three days before the expected onset of the flow a blister was applied; the whole period was quite painless.

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Mrs W., 39, 8-para, four months' pregnant, had been troubled with severe facial neuralgia for three weeks. After a blister had been applied over the spinal area referred to for six hours, the pain entirely disappeared and never returned.

Mrs S., 21, 2-para, was attacked with nausea and vomiting in the seventh month of pregnancy. The latter was persistent for two days, during which period only some milk was on occasion retained. The application of a blister was followed by immediate relief, the vomiting ceasing and not recurring.

Mrs R., 33, pregnant for seven months, had suffered severely for three weeks from pruritus pudendi. After a blister had been applied for a few days, the irritation completely and permanently disappeared.

Among patients treated with counter-irritation over parts of the spine different from the foregoing was a man aged 60, who had suffered for several days from very distressing hiccough. A blister over the cervical spine, so as to affect the phrenic, produced a complete and lasting cure in a few hours.

Counter-irritation by concussion of vertebral spines

The following cases, treated by concussion of the vertebral spines as recommended by Abrams of San Francisco, are, I think, also worthy of record:

M.B., 22, had suffered from trench feet in January, 1916, for which he had been in hospital for six months. He applied for treatment last summer on account of pain in his feet describing his condition as if he were "walking on hot plates." The pain would generally last for half an hour to four hours, though occasionally it might be present for a whole day. After a few séances of percussion of the seventh cervical spine, complete freedom from discomfort ensued.

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W.H., 78, had been suffering from osteoarthritis of the right shoulder joint. The pain was so acute that little sleep was obtainable. After three weeks' daily percussion of the sixth and seventh cervical and first dorsal spines decided relief was felt, and in five more weeks little discomfort remained.

The method of treatment for various pathological states is described by Abrams in his *Spondylotherapy*, a book replete with interesting and valuable information, which deserves a much wider circulation in this country than it seems to have had.

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