**Abstract**

When neurology began to develop as a specialty, Russell Reynolds was one of the first Neurologists appointed to the Hospital for the Paralysed and Epileptic, Queen Square.

Of many contributions his work on epilepsy was influential, espousing many new concepts. He followed and developed Hughlings Jackson’s original ideas about positive and negative neurological symptoms. His approach to patients was holistic at a time when more objectively defined notions of illness dominated medicine. He wrote on vertigo, and about neurological symptoms. His approach to patients was holistic—long before it was made a baronet in 1895. He was President of the Royal College of Physicians.  

**NEUROLOGICAL SIGNS REFERENCES**

Medical works

Russell Reynolds is often remembered for his descriptions of epilepsy, eclamptic convulsions, and febrile convulsions in children.\(^5\)\(^6\) He also used electrotherapy in various nervous diseases.\(^7\)

Interestingly, he is widely quoted for commending the "great value of Cannabis indica" in migraine, epileptic conditions, depression, and asthma. In 1890 he prescribed a cannabis tincture for the menstrual cramps suffered by Queen Victoria. He noted in The Lancet:

> When pure and administered carefully, [cannabis] is one of the most valuable medicines we possess.\(^7\)

Of greater import was his 1861 paper (Figure 2) that espoused the concept of positive and negative neurological symptoms.\(^5\)\(^8\) Positive symptoms were abnormal behaviours that included not only clonic jerking and abnormal movements but also hallucinations and paranoid delusions.

Some symptoms are negative, i.e. they consist in the negation of vital properties. Of this kind are paralysis, anaesthesia, and the like... Other symptoms are positive, i.e. they consist in excess or alteration of vital properties. Of this kind are spams, pain, convulsions and the like... (p.912-28)

Unfortunately he failed to write further on this theme. Like Jackson, Russell Reynolds shrewdly noted that the lesion did not directly cause the symptoms observed.

The origins of positive and negative symptoms were inextricably intertwined with Herbert Spencer’s ideas of dissolution and evolution of the nervous system.\(^8\) Hughlings Jackson extended Spencer’s idea to patients’ symptoms, both positive and negative. Jackson believed that negative symptoms related to dissolution of neural function while positive symptoms resulted from excitation or the release of lower levels from higher inhibitory control.

Speaking of the physical side, there are degrees of loss of function of the least organised nervous arrangements with conservation of function of the more organised. There is in each reduction to a more automatic condition; in each there is dissolution, using this term as Spencer does, as the opposite of evolution.\(^9\)

Russell Reynolds wrote his first book on Vertigo. In 1856 he examined legal pleas for insanity in his Criminal Lunatics: are they Responsible? He believed that epilepsy could be a distinct or ‘idiopathic’ disease, a controversial view well expressed in The Diagnosis of Diseases of the Brain, Spinal Cord, Nerves and their appendages in 1855 (dedicated to Marshall Hall).

This was later contradicted by Kinnier Wilson who stated that all epileptic events were symptoms, whether or not any underlying pathology could be demonstrated.\(^11\)

Always inclined to a broad approach he described the interictal symptoms of 62 patients with idiopathic epilepsy. He found about one third had mild impairment of recent memory and a similar proportion had moderate to severe psychopathological findings. His interpretation of epileptic activity (well described by Eadie)\(^12\) was in large measure approved by Hughlings Jackson.

He edited and wrote many chapters in A system of medicine (London: Macmillan, in five volumes from 1886 to 1879), a major text rivalled only by John Cooke’s Treatise in Nervous Diseases, published in two volumes, in 1820 and 1823, the second volume of Bright’s Reports of Medical Cases 1831, and Romberg’s Manual of the Nervous Diseases of Man 1840.\(^2\)

Russell Reynolds practised at a time when neurology was in its infancy. It relied on clinical description and elementary pathology. In this morass of evolving knowledge Reynolds formulated a classification of neurological diseases that remains the kernel of modern systems. His work in neurology linked the highly original physiological and clinical works of his mentor Marshall Hall to Hughlings Jackson’s intellectual explorations of the brain’s complex functions and hierarchies, and to the more systematic descriptive neurology of William Gowers.\(^12\) His students included Charlton Bastian (1837-1915) and Sir William Gowers (1845-1915), whose writings often reflect his influence.

Legacy

He was well versed in poetry, philosophy, art, and music. He was married, first, to Margaret Ainslie, and, secondly, to Frances Crespginy, but left no children. He died aged 68 of ‘pulmonary congestion’ at his home in 1896. The scholarship and clinical advances made by Reynolds can be seen as important influences on contemporary and also later notable Neurologists at the National Hospital.

He bridged the eras of Victorian neurology with that of the dawning 20th century. He was noted as:

> A man of scholarship and wisdom, in his Presidential address in 1894, in a spirit of prophecy he warned the subject-ridden student of to day of the danger of becoming entangled in the net of an ill-considered and misunderstood technical phraseology, and of juggling with words when he ought to be dealing with concrete things.\(^2\)

And Eadie characterised him as:

> A most eminent, scholarly and influential physician who was greatly respected and admired by his contemporaries... the sort of man whose ideas would not readily be discarded because it might almost seem disrespectful to do so unless a better alternative could be clearly demonstrated to exist.\(^11\)

* So-called dissenters (Catholics, Jews, and Quakers) were denied permission because their religious beliefs prevented their taking an oath to adhere to the 19 articles of the Anglican Church. This was abolished by the Universities Tests Act in 1871. Women had studied at Oxford since the 1870s. But until 1921, they were not entitled to claim the degrees they had earned. Cambridge followed in 1947.

REFERENCEs

10. Reynolds JR. Therapeutical uses and toxic effects of Cannabis indica. The Lancet (1890) 1639.