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Selections: Medicine.

SPINAL IRRITATION.

BY JOHN E. LOCKRIDGE, M.D.

From a long and varied experience in the management of this protean complaint, denominated "spinal irritation" by such writers on the practice as recognize it as a separate disease, I have long since come to the conclusion that it is a disease *per se*, if not indeed *sui generis*. The name is apt enough, it is true, to call attention to the seat of the trouble; but when we come to enumerate the symptoms and manifestations of the disease, we will find that the spine is just about the last part of the economy that we would suspect of being in arrears in its physiology. But, inasmuch as a name intelligibly expressive of both the pathology and accompanying phenomena of the complaint must needs be paraphrastic, I will content myself at this place with a retention of the old appellation, and when treating of the nature and symptoms of the disorder attempt to elucidate some points hitherto doubtful; and will close this paper by annotating a few cases in point.

The symptoms of this disease are as numerous almost as there are organs and parts in the body whose functions can be disturbed by alterations from health in the spinal centre, from which in part they derive their life and control. These disturbances will occur from above downward, as the so-called irritation may happen to be located in the cervical, dorsal, or lumbar vertebrae. I will enumerate some of them. Beginning with the organs of digestion,

I have seen, amongst others, dysphagia from paralysis or tonic spasm of the gullet; apparent stricture of the same; gastralgia, spasm of the stomach, nausea and vomiting, and almost every variety of dyspeptic symptoms. In the respiratory and circulatory organs I have often met with aphonia, spasm of the glottis, asthma, a kind of nervous cough, singultus, and an inability to take a full inspiration; palpitation of the heart, and bellows murmur of the same, intermittent pulse, and feigned cardiac disease of divers kinds and degrees. There are also pains and sensations, either fixed or fleeting, in different parts of the body—in the neck, chest or abdomen. These symptoms will persist in spite of the ordinary rational treatment; or after having been relieved, will recur time and again.

If now the practitioner examine the spine, which is not complained of or suspected, to his surprise he will find a point tender on pressure; the patient will start up as if electrified, and complain of the heart or stomach, or be thrown into an attack of asthma, or palpitation, or gastralgia, or colic, as the case may be, or as the organ is under the control of nerves sent out from the point irritated. The pressure should be made very carefully with the index finger downward between the spinous processes, and laterally between the same, as well as between the arches of the vertebrae; and if the patient be over-sensitive to touching, or if there be any doubt in the mind of the practitioner, as to the real existence of tenderness, he should dip a sponge in hot water and pass it slowly down the column, and if tenderness exist at any point the patient will surely give some