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T. J. W. Burgess

**MEMORIAL NOTICE.**

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*Richard Maurice Bucke, M. D.*

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*By T. J. W. Burgess, M. D.*

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RICHARD MAURICE BUCKE, M. D. \*

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*By T. J. W. Burgess, M. D.*

Rarely has the news of the death of one of our professional brethren come with a greater shock, or occasioned more profound sorrow, than that of Dr. R. M. Bucke, medical superintendent of the Asylum for the Insane, London, Ont., and the genuine regret expressed thereat in all sections of the community, in which he was widely known, leaves no doubt that his merit and devotion to public duty were appreciated in a degree commensurate with their just claims. His splendid physique, buoyant spirits, and correct habits bespoke for him much more than man's allotted span of years, but alas! no physical strength can safeguard against accident, and to accident was due the loss of this truly valuable life.

Dr. Bucke, who was apparently in the best of health, had just driven home from the city, about eleven o'clock in the evening, and, preparatory to retiring for the night, had walked out alone on the veranda of his house situated on the asylum grounds, as was his usual custom, to enjoy the beauties of the moonlit winter night. A few minutes later his family heard the sound of a fall, and, hurrying out, found him unconscious, he having evidently slipped on a piece of ice, and, in stumbling, struck heavily on the back of his head. He was immediately lifted and carried into the house, but life was already extinct. Drs. MacCallum and Beemer, who had been summoned without delay, found death to have been caused by concussion of the brain and hemorrhage.

Richard Maurice Bucke was born at Methwold, Norfolk, England, March 18th, 1837. On the side of his father, an English church clergyman, the Rev. Horatio Walpole Bucke, he was

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descended from Sir Robert Walpole, first Earl of Orford, his mother, prior to her marriage, being a Miss Clarissa Andrews, of Milden Hall, Suffolk. When he was only a year old, the family removed to Canada, where they settled upon a farm near the then village of London, in what was the Province of Upper Canada, within a few rods of the spot where in later days was to be erected the asylum which, for nearly twenty-five years, he so ably superintended.

Schools at that time were few and inferior, and the early education of Maurice and his brothers was conducted by their father, who was a graduate of Trinity College, Cambridge, a fine linguist, and the possessor of a large and varied library to which the lads had free access. Subsequently, he attended for a short time the London Grammar School.

In 1853, when but sixteen years of age, having lost his father and mother, he left home, and made his way to California overland, on foot, returning by the Isthmus of Panama in 1858. During these five years of wandering through the middle, southern and western states, he worked on farms, railways, and steamboats, saw much wild life in the placer mining districts of Nevada, and underwent many hardships. Crossing the continent, on the Humboldt river, midway between Salt Lake and California, which was their destination, he and his party fought for their lives half a day with the Shoshone Indians, nearly died of thirst, and afterwards were well nigh starved to death, owing to the loss of all their supplies in the conflict. Later, in the fall of 1857, with a single companion, he was lost in the Sierra Nevadas. They had been unavoidably delayed in starting to cross the mountains, and when half way over were caught in a blinding snow storm. For nearly a week they were shut up in a little valley in the heart of the mountains, and had to kill their pack-mule for food while waiting for the storm to cease. At last they forced their way across the divide, but were again arrested by the snow, and having missed the trail, wandered aimlessly along, endeavoring to follow the course of a small stream downward. After five days and four nights, stumbling through the deep snow, without food or fire, and badly frozen, they struck a small mining camp in the mountains. Here his companion died from exhaustion, the result of the privations he had undergone, while Maurice himself escaped

only with the loss of one of his legs and a part of the foot of the other, which had to be amputated by the kindly miners who had succored him. For months the stricken man lay in that mountain cabin, tended only by rough, yet gentle, hands, and there it was that he first had time to think. "I was born again," he once said in speaking of this period of his life, "it cost me my feet—yet it was worth the price."

On his return to Canada, through a small sum of money left him by his dead mother, he was enabled to enter upon the study of medicine at McGill University, Montreal. His mind, after lying so long fallow, absorbed ideas with extraordinary facility, and he graduated therefrom as first prizeman, in 1862. The following two years were spent in additional professional study in England and France, after which he made a second trip, of nearly a year's duration, to California in the interest of the Gould and Curry Silver Mining Company, as witness in a suit pertaining to the celebrated Comstock lode.

Returning again to Canada, in 1865, he settled at Sarnia, Ontario, where he was married, the same year, to Miss Jessie M. Gurd, of Moore, Ontario, who, with four sons and two daughters survives him. Here he continued the practice of his profession up to 1876, when he was appointed medical superintendent of the Asylum for Insane at Hamilton, Ontario. The succeeding year, on the death of Dr. Henry Landor, he was promoted to the superintendency of the London Asylum, of which institution he continued in charge up to the time of his death, February 19th, 1902.

In appearance Dr. Bucke was one of the most picturesque personalities in the ranks of the American Medico-Psychological Association. His commanding presence, his massive head, his keen, searching eyes and prominent nose, his face, every line of which carried the stamp of intellectual force, his flowing beard covering the negligée woolen shirt, his silvery locks showing below the broad-brimmed, gray, slouch hat, and his gray tweeds made him a strikingly conspicuous and original figure. His manner was plain but dignified, his language clear, and in speaking he attracted the attention of his hearers no less by the matter of his remarks than by his personal appearance.

During his asylum career, Dr. Bucke evinced wonderful ability in the management of the insane, his constant endeavor be-

ing to care for the interests confided by the Province to his charge intelligently, faithfully and economically. As an administrator he had few superiors, and those who knew him will ever bear witness to his singularly clear judgment in all relating to hospital affairs. He had long been regarded as one of the leading authorities on the subject of mental disease, and his services as an expert were sought in most important cases where sanity was in question. In these his wide knowledge of medicine and of human nature always showed to advantage, his opinions ever commanding the attention and respect alike of judge and jury. His confrères' appreciation of his abilities as an alienist was evinced by his selection, in 1897, to preside over the Psychological section of the British Medical Association, which met in Montreal, and by his election, in 1898, to the Presidency of the American Medico-Psychological Association. He also held the professorship of mental and nervous diseases in the Western University at London.

To Dr. Bucke is due the introduction into Canada, in 1883, of the absolute non-restraint system, which is now the accepted principle in the treatment of the insane throughout nearly all American institutions. This fact is of special interest and worthy of record, inasmuch as at that time nearly every superintendent on the continent regarded the doctrine of absolute non-restraint as purely utopian, and to be ridiculed accordingly. Today scarce one is bold enough to advocate the use of mechanical restraint, except for surgical or other very exceptional purposes.

Another important reform in Canadian asylum management inaugurated by Dr. Bucke was the discontinuance, as a beverage for the patients, of all beer, wine and spirits. In this step he was largely influenced by the precepts and teachings of his friend Sir Benjamin Ward Richardson. In recent years, too, he had devoted much time and thought to the benefit of systematic gynaecological surgery in the treatment of insane women, a large proportion of whom he maintained were sufferers from uterine or ovarian disease that could be benefited by operation. His published results in this respect show the urgent necessity for always removing physical disease, where it exists, as a step toward the possible relief of mental alienation.

Dr. Bucke was a man of scholarly tastes and habit, and the proud possessor of one of the most extensive libraries in Canada, a man of wide cultivation and grasp of mind, a man in whom were united intellectual and moral forces not often found combined. A realist as regards all the details incident to the proper discharge of his official duties, he was nevertheless deeply tinged with mysticism and lived in a world of his own mental creation. The natural powers of a strong mind were in him refined by literary culture, his work never preventing his devoting a certain portion of the day to reading. In this way he kept in touch with all that was going on in the world, and had an intimate knowledge of most of the new works in literature and science. The wielder of a facile pen, he was one of the original Fellows of the Royal Society of Canada, having been chosen by its founder, the Marquis of Lorne, Governor-General of the Dominion, now the Duke of Argyle, as a representative on the English Literature Section.

In addition to his earliest work, "Man's Moral Nature," published in 1879, wherein he traces the development of the moral nature and contends that its physical basis is the great sympathetic nervous system, Dr. Bucke was the author of a large number of papers dealing directly or indirectly with the subject of mental evolution. Throughout all of them is maintained the opinion that the human mind has been slowly evolved by a species of unfolding, or growth, extending over millions of years, and that, in process of time, new faculties, even new senses, will probably be evolved.

His latest work, "Cosmic Consciousness," published in 1901, Dr. Bucke inscribed in touching terms to his eldest son, Maurice, a young man of great promise as an essayist and mining engineer, to whom he was tenderly attached, and whose accidental death in Montana, in 1899, was a great shock to him. This dedication forms an excellent index to the heart and mind of a very remarkable man. The volume is an epitome of the Doctor's many writings on mental evolution—the product of thought and work extending over a period of nearly thirty years. In it he describes and traces the origin of a new faculty, now in course of development in the human race, to which faculty he gives the name "Cosmic Consciousness." As he himself puts it, the object of the work is to show, "That the human mind is now in the very act

of making this supposed step; is now in the very act of stepping from the plane of self-consciousness to a higher plane, which I call 'Cosmic Consciousness.'" The nature of the new faculty is thus described, and contrasted with the simple consciousness of the higher animals and self-consciousness, by the possession of which man is distinguished from the brute creation:

"Cosmic Consciousness is a third form (of consciousness) which is as far above self-consciousness as is that above simple consciousness. With this form, of course, both simple and self-consciousness persist (as simple consciousness persists when self-consciousness is acquired), but added to them is the new faculty so often named and to be named in this volume. The prime characteristic of cosmic consciousness is, as its name implies, a consciousness of the cosmos, that is, of the life and order of the universe. There are many elements belonging to the cosmic sense besides the central fact just alluded to. Of these, a few may be mentioned. Along with the consciousness of the cosmos there occurs an intellectual enlightenment or illumination which alone would place the individual on a new plane of existence—would make him almost a member of a new species. To this is added a state of moral exaltation, an indescribable feeling of elevation, elation and joyousness, and a quickening of the moral sense, which is fully as striking and more important both to the individual and to the race than is the enhanced intellectual power. With these come what may be called a sense of immortality, a consciousness of eternal life, not a conviction that he shall have this, but the consciousness that he has it already."

Among the many possessors of the new faculty enumerated by Dr. Bucke, the following thirteen, he says, "are so great that they can never fade from human memory," Gautama the Buddha, Jesus Christ, St. Paul, Plotinus, Mohammed, Dante, Las Casas, John Yepes, Jacob Behman, William Blake, Balzac, Walt Whitman, and Sir Francis Bacon. Bacon, be it borne in mind, is, with Dr. Bucke, synonymous with Shakespeare. In these, as in all other cases of cosmic consciousness, there were certain phenomena connected with the on-coming of the new faculty, the most striking of which was a sudden sense of being immersed in flame, or in a brilliant light, this occurring entirely without warning or outward cause. From among those blessed

with the new consciousness I might cite the following as typical of individual experience with regard to this peculiar light, on which the Doctor lays so much stress:

Paul (in his speech to Agrippa) said, "As I journeyed to Damascus I saw on the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun." Then he heard the voice.

Dante gives an account of the on-coming of the cosmic sense in these words, "On a sudden, day seemed to be added to day, as if He who is able had adorned the heaven with another sun."

Whitman describes it thus—

"As in a swoon one instant,  
Another sun, ineffable, full dazzles me,  
And all the orbs I knew—and brighter unknown orbs;  
One instant of the future land, Heaven's land."

Of other literary products of the pen of Dr. Bucke, the most notable is his biography of Walt Whitman, published in 1882, which is still the standard work on the subject. No one could have been better fitted for such a task than Dr. Bucke, who had been a life-long friend and companion of the "Good Grey Poet," one of whose literary executors he was, and who was the possessor of the largest and best Whitman collection of books and manuscripts in the world.

Dr. Bucke was also an ardent partisan in the Bacon-Shakespeare controversy, and claimed to have discovered absolute proof of the Baconian authorship of the Shakespeare plays within themselves. This proof he had expected very soon to publish in extended form.

Take it for all in all, where shall one seek for a life of greater usefulness than that the loss of which we now mourn? Sadly shall we miss the sight of his picturesque, Whitmanic garb, and face full of strong character, the sound of his bluff, cheery voice, and the hearty grasp of his hand—and not one of us but will fervently echo the wish—

"O, for the touch of a vanished hand,  
And the sound of a voice that is still."

Through the death of Dr. Bucke a man of "light and leading" has been lost to the medical profession generally and to psychiatry in particular. By his demise Canada has lost one of her foremost minds, this Association one of its most valued



members, and saddest of all, his family a devoted husband and father. Peace to his ashes.

"He rests from his labors, and his works do follow him."

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*From the American Journal of Insanity.*

On the 19th February, 1902, Richard Maurice Bucke, M. D., one of the most striking personalities in the American Medico-Psychological Association, died under particularly sad circumstances. About eleven on the evening of the 18th, he went out on the veranda of his residence, as was his custom, for a short walk, before retiring. He was apparently in the best of health and no one had the slightest premonition of the impending calamity. His family heard him fall, and going to his assistance at once, found him unconscious. He never rallied, and in a few hours died.

Richard Maurice Bucke was born on March 18th, 1837, at Methwold, Norfolk, England. In 1838 his family emigrated to Canada, and settled on a farm in London Township, Co. Middlesex. Here the lad remained until he was sixteen, when he began to long to see the world. Even at this age the problems that occupied his mind to such a great extent had begun to attract his attention, "The Vestiges of Creation" giving, as he himself said, "a meaning to the little I knew about the world. Later when I read the incomparably greater works of Darwin, he only seemed to enlarge and deepen an impression already made, rather than to teach me anything new, or to sway men in a direction different from that already entered upon."

His first experience of life was in the United States, and in his anxiety to see the world, he accepted any chance that came, working on farms and on steamboats, even acting as deck hand, so long as he gained his desire. He drifted south, via the Mississippi. In the spring of 1856 he went west with a cattle train, acting in the capacity of cook to the party. The destination was Salt Lake City, but of course this was merely a starting point for the adventurous spirits bound for the Pacific coast. At Salt Lake City he joined a small company setting out for California, a hazardous undertaking at that time, particularly as the party had determined to walk the whole distance, although their supplies were carried in wagons. The inevitable happened,

and in a desperate fight with Indians three of the little band were killed, the wagons and supplies captured, and the survivors forced to attempt the remaining three hundred miles without resources of any kind. A pitiful story it was, and of the fifteen who set out, only four reached their destination, and these were almost starved, when the journey was over. So great was their need of food at times that they were forced to feed on seeds and small frogs to keep body and soul together. When poor Bucke reached the Humboldt he was almost dead from thirst.

He next appeared in California, and during the winter of '59-'60 was again the victim of tragic circumstances, being the sole survivor of a mining party. He was very badly frozen while in the mountains, and if it had not been for his wonderful vitality and indomitable will power, would never have reached a settlement, or pulled through the long and terrible illness that followed his exposure. The injuries received on this memorable trip across the mountains made walking somewhat difficult for him, so he returned to Canada via the Isthmus of Panama in 1860, and commenced the study of medicine, graduating with high honors in McGill University, Montreal, in the spring of 1864. His thesis won the first prize. After graduation he sailed for Europe, spent eighteen or twenty months in the London and Paris Hospitals, and on his return went to California for eight months as a witness in the Gould and Curry silver mine suit.

He settled in Sarnia, Ont., where he practiced for ten years, when he was appointed Medical Superintendent of the Hamilton Asylum for the Insane, and after a year's service there was given the Superintendency of London Asylum, an office he retained until his death, just twenty-five years after his appointment.

On his return from California he was married to Miss Jessie M. Gurd, who survives him.

Dr. Bucke received many honors from his medical friends, was President of the Medico-Psychological Association in 1898 and was regarded as one of the foremost men in medical circles in Canada.

Dr. Bucke was a man of striking personality, as suggested at the commencement of this notice, and it is impossible to judge him by ordinary standards, so great a part did individuality play in his make-up. There were so many sides to his character that

we must be content to refer to him chiefly as an alienist, and leave others to speak at greater length regarding his claims to recognition in literary and philosophical circles. What ever this remarkable man did, he did with his whole soul and no one ever dreamed of attacking his sincerity of purpose, no matter how violently he differed from his conclusions. Some are inclined to think he was a faddist, but this word scarcely expresses the truth. Enthusiast Dr. Bucke certainly was, but not a faddist in the sense that he rode a hobby for a time, and then dropped it. He pursued certain ideas with a pertinacity only possible to a person of his mental vigor, and he never failed to make out a very strong case for what he contended, whether it was the undoubted right of Walt Whitman to occupy the very highest niche in the Temple of Fame, or the existence of such a sense as Cosmic Consciousness.

As an alienist he was eminent, and his name will be associated with such reformers as Joseph Workman, when the history of the insane of Canada is written. He it was who in Canada first accepted non-restraint as something better than a fad, and in his institution the non-restraint system was first adopted (1882), although this lead was promptly followed by Kingston and Toronto. It marked the beginning of an era of better things for the insane of Ontario, and Dr. Bucke's energy was a stimulus to many of the juniors in the service. His views on the abuse of alcohol in the treatment of insanity, and his reports of extensive investigations in gynæcological surgery among the insane, are too well known to discuss at length, but after all, Dr. Bucke's views regarding the latter were never quite as extreme as sometimes represented. Carefully analyzed, his views, after he had followed this line of investigation for several years, were, that a large proportion of insane women suffered from uterine and ovarian diseases, which could be benefited by operation. The improved physical health resulting implied a better state mentally. That this was good common sense all agree, the point at issue being the ability, or want of ability, of the majority of specialists to decide which are the cases to be operated on. After all, in these days of marvels in surgery one hesitates long in deciding which are the chronic cases to be denied the surgical chance. Regarding the acute cases there is probably a more debatable ground than the Doctor would admit.

Dr. Bucke was an ideal superintendent, loved both by his patients and employees, and had a deep sympathy for the old and infirm, a sympathy becoming rarer and rarer in these days of hurry and rush, and his warm heart won him lifelong friends wherever he went. His library was one of the most extensive in Canada, and the Doctor was an untiring student, reading widely and deeply, particularly along the lines suggested by his remarkable books on Man's Moral Nature and Cosmic Consciousness. How these books must rank as probable solutions of questions which have worried the greatest minds since the world began, time alone can tell. It is too soon to sit in formal judgment on them.

Dr. Bucke's friendship for Walt Whitman, his doughty championship of the Good Grey Poet's right to recognition as one of the remarkable men of the nineteenth century, was an admirable thing, and the fact that some of the best minds of the day agree with this estimate of Whitman, is significant. When Dr. Bucke was elected President of the Medico-Psychological Association in 1898, all Canadians felt the compliment, and were pleased that the honor had been conferred on one so worthy and so well able to assume the duties of the position.

In person Dr. Bucke was of striking appearance, of splendid physique, and carrying the stamp of intellectual force in his face. He dressed much after the style of Whitman, and would be remarked in any assemblage as a man of originality. In daily life he was simple, direct and honest, and loved nature as such a man is likely to do. The happiest days of each year were those spent at his summer retreat at Gloucester Pool in Muskoka. This good man is deeply mourned by a large circle of friends, who loved him for his sturdy honesty, his warm heart, his intellectual force, but most of all for his noble qualities as a man.