Samuel Jones Gee (1839-1911) and stereotypic movements caused by apomorpha

Hughlings Jackson provides an interesting and possibly the first account of what we would now regard as a dopamine driven movement. He refers, without the full reference, to Lauder Brunton’s work on: “the representation of the systemic sensori-motor processes concerned in vomiting in centres so high as the corpus striatum and optic thalamus.”

When any irritation exists in the right cerebral hemisphere it will occasion vomiting more readily than irritation in the left cerebral hemisphere, and according to Budge, this is actually the case” (Lauder Brunton, Practitioner, December 1874). Dr Brunton, the author of an experiment by Gee on a dog (Clinical Society Transactions 1860). Gee injected a large dose of apomorpha (2 grains*) into a dog. The dog vomited, and in two or three minutes began to course round the room in which the experiment was performed in a curiously persistent methodical manner. Brunton (op cit) says: “This effect of apomorpha points to an action of the drug on the nervous centres, and is all the more interesting when we remember that Budge placed the cerebral centre for the stomach in the right thalamic opticus.”

This paper of Samuel Gee is dated by Legg as 1869. Jackson uses this experiment to illuminate the peripheral differences, chiefly of the autonomic nervous system, in determining consciousness in the highest centres; he does not comment on the stereotypy so plainly portrayed. Gee was almost certainly the first to take the drug himself, initially doubting its emotive properties.

Samuel Jones Gee was one of the great scholars-physicians of the 19th century. His father, a businessman, had marked literary tastes, frequented the British Museum, and was prone to pilgrimages to “Cromwellian holy places”. Gee attended University College School. He obtained gold medals in every subject in his medical studies at University College Hospital. Legg deemed his medical knowledge “encyclopaedic”, his learning “prodigious”. He became assistant physician to St Bartholomew’s Hospital in 1866 working in the skin, anatomy, and pathological anatomy departments. His lectures were “impressive, clear, well thought out”, but he was inclined to archaic expression. His aphorisms became well known to students, who mimicked his mannerisms, but probably

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