

MEMOIR  
OF  
CHARLES EDOUARD BROWN-SÉQUARD.  
1817-1894.

BY  
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## BIOGRAPHICAL MEMOIR OF CHARLES EDOUARD BROWN-SÉQUARD.

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CHARLES EDOUARD BROWN-SÉQUARD was born at Port Louis, Mauritius, on the 8th of April, 1817. He died at Paris on April 2, 1894. He was a posthumous child of a Philadelphia sea captain named Brown and a French lady, born at Mauritius, named Mlle. Séquard. Little is known of his early life, except that during his childhood his mother supported herself and him by the work of her needle. At fifteen years of age he was employed as clerk in a large colonial warehouse. During this period of his life he made some excursions into the domain of literature with considerable local success, and when in 1838 he embarked with his mother for France he took with him a manuscript novel and a letter of introduction to Charles Nodier. Nodier discouraged the youthful aspirant for literary honors and advised him to devote himself to a pursuit by which he could earn his living. It is a curious coincidence that Brown-Séquard's illustrious predecessor, Claude Bernard, had a similar experience when, bearing the manuscript of a five-act tragedy, he presented himself before Saint Marc Girardin. It is interesting to speculate whether letters have lost as much as physiology has gained in this change of career of two eminent men of science. Disappointed in his hope of acquiring literary fame, Brown-Séquard devoted himself to the study of medicine, but was much delayed in the prosecution of his studies by a dissecting wound, which interrupted his work for many weeks, and by the death of his mother, to whom he was passionately devoted. This latter event produced such a profound impression upon him that he was for a long time absolutely incapable of work. At this period he began the wandering life which has always been so characteristic of him, and which is without parallel in the life of any scientific man. It was not till 1846 that he obtained the degree of Doctor of Medicine. His thesis was on the physiology of the spinal cord, a subject to which he has always devoted a large amount of attention. Shortly afterward we find him employed in the military

hospital of Gros Caillou during the cholera epidemic of 1849. About this time he became one of the founders of the Société de Biologie.

Having fought for the liberties of the citizens at the time of the coup d'état of 1852, he naturally feared that he might be molested by the authorities, and he therefore embarked for America in a sailing vessel, trusting that the length of the voyage would afford an opportunity of learning the English language. It is difficult and unnecessary to follow the steps of Brown-Séguard's erratic career for the next sixteen years. Suffice it to say that he was continually crossing the Atlantic ocean, each time apparently hoping to establish a home for himself in the city of his choice. During this period he practiced and taught his profession in Richmond, New York, Boston, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Dublin, London, and Paris. Wherever he lived his ardor for research and study never slackened; even on his voyages he continued to devote his time to the investigation of the objects around him.

In 1878 he was called upon to succeed Claude Bernard in the chair of experimental medicine of the Collège de France. From that time until his death he remained in France, active in the prosecution of his chosen science. How great was his activity during this period of his life is amply proved by the pages of the Comptes rendus de la Société de Biologie and by those of the Archives de Physiologie, in which most of his researches were published.

Although Brown-Séguard was active in nearly all departments of physiology in the course of his lengthy career, his most important work was neurological. Among the problems to the solution of which his work was especially directed may be mentioned: the course of the motor and sensory channels in the spinal cord, the influence of the vaso-constrictor nerves over the blood-vessels, the artificial production of epilepsy and the inheritance of the same. His work upon the so-called "Elixir of life," which was received with so much incredulity by most physicians, gave an important stimulus to the study of the internal secretion of glands, a branch of physiology which gives promise of leading to important advances in therapeutics.

A tireless collector of facts, if his reasoning power had equaled his power of observation he might have done for physiology

what Newton did for physics. He, however, lacked the gift of philosophic analysis and the power of estimating at their true value the various observations made by himself and others. He taught that the connections of the central nervous system are such that every part may produce in every other part either an increase or a diminution of its activity. With regard to vision, for instance, he maintained "that a disease in one-half of the brain can produce hemiopia either of both eyes or one and in the corresponding or the opposite halves of the retinae, or a complete amaurosis of either of the two eyes or of both together." The extreme complexity of the phenomena manifested in the central nervous system goes far toward justifying these views, but theories of this sort can, of course, never be fruitful, for they destroy all hope of making physiology a basis of diagnosis and treatment of disease.

Although Brown-Séquard made many important discoveries, it is perhaps not too much to say that one of his strongest claims to remembrance rests upon the stimulus to research which flowed from his activity in the various medical communities in which he resided and on the enthusiasm for pure science which he imparted to all who came into personal relations with him.