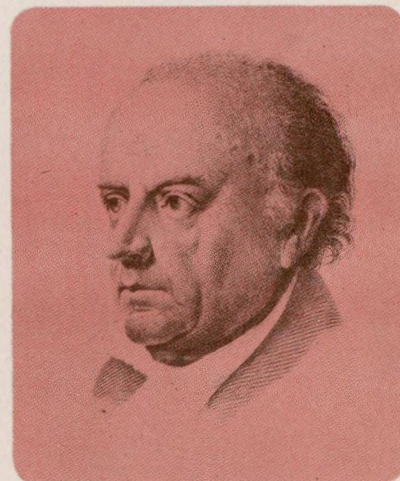
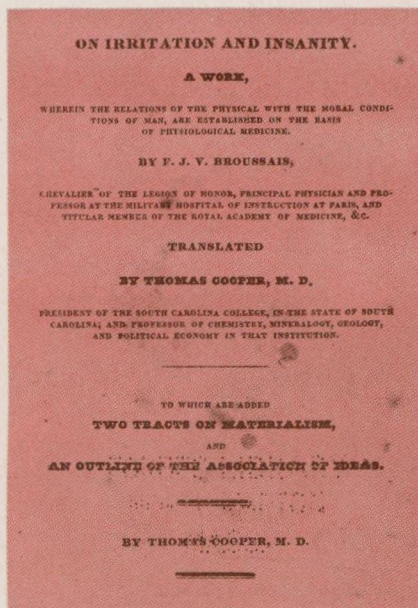




F. J. V. Broussais



Thomas Cooper, M.D.

MEN AND MEDICINE

François-Joseph-Victor Broussais was born at St. Malo in Brittany on December 17, 1772. His father was a physician, and he brought him up according to the standards of his class. Years after François-Joseph-Victor had become famous Chateaubriand recalled their schooling together. *Chateaubriand's Memoirs* (translated by Robert Baldick) says "M. Broussais, my fellow townsman, studied with me at Dinan. The students were taken bathing every Thursday, like the clerks under Pope Adrian I, or every Sunday, like the prisoners under the Emperor Honorius. Once I was nearly drowned; on another occasion M. Broussais was bitten by ungrateful leeches, which failed to foresee the future. (In later life Broussais became one of the foremost advocates of the use of leeches for bleeding.)"

Broussais's life was naturally af-

fected by the events of the times. He fought as a sergeant in the army of the French Republic in 1792, and later, in accordance with his Breton heritage, he served at sea. However, he turned his mind to medicine and graduated in 1803, after which he was an army surgeon with Napoleon for three years.

His first medical work was published in Paris in 1803. Its title was *Recherches sur la Fièvre Hectique* and it was dedicated to Philip Pinel, professor in the Medical School of Paris, and physician-in-chief at the Salpêtrière. Both its dedication and its contents indicated the future direction of much of his medical theorizing. As regards the contents, this book is noteworthy in that it foreshadowed the drastic therapeutic methods that Broussais came to recommend, methods which killed thousands of people. His therapeutic theories were derived from those of

Asclepiades of Bithynia, a physician of the second century B. C. Asclepiades believed that the Hippocratic theory which ascribed disease to an imbalance of body fluids was wrong and that disease was actually due to an abnormally constricted or relaxed state of the solid components of the body. This so-called doctrine of "*strictum et laxum*" survived for centuries as the doctrine of tonic and atonic conditions. Broussais based his so-called "irritability doctrine" on these ideas. He believed that irritation of some organ—usually the stomach but occasionally the heart—caused all disease. (He had the utmost scorn for pathologic studies, referring to them "as diseases served on a platter.")

The regimen recommended by Broussais comprised almost complete starvation and the application of nu-

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MEN AND MEDICINE

continued

merous leeches. In 1833 over 30,000,000 leeches were imported into France in contrast to the year 1824, in which between only 1,000,000 and 1,500,000 were imported. His ideas were widely adopted in France and in Great Britain. (Pierre-Charles-Alexandre Louis, best known for his work on phthisis and on typhoid fever, should also be recognized as the man whose work and polemics finally destroyed Broussais's influence by the late 1830's.)

Broussais's early admiration of Pinel was followed by a persistent interest in mental disease. His early work on mental disease, *De l'Irritation et la Folie* published in 1828, was deservedly successful; it was translated into English in 1831 by Thomas Cooper, M.D. Like some of his contemporaries he adopted phrenologic ideas. (Many psychiatrists of the early nineteenth century were phrenologically oriented.) His ambitious book *Cours de Phrenologie* was written in 1836 but it could not compete with the brilliant clinical writings of Esquirol, Guislain, and other French psychiatrists of that great era. On the other hand, his *Irritation and Insanity* went into an enlarged second edition in 1839. Its most interesting contents comprise a critique of some of Freud's ideas many years before Freud was even born. (The other outstanding early criticism of Freud's dogmas was published by Maudsley in 1860, when Freud was 4 years old.)

Broussais' book contained remarkable discussions of the concept of the Ego and of its values and drawbacks when introduced into clinical psychiatry. He warned emphatically against setting up a hypothetical abstract entity as the executive agent in a functional process. As regards the use of free-association and the advice that we must "listen to ourselves alone and think," he wrote, "It will be impossible to assert, after this inspection of the interior, a single fact that will not require to be verified by the senses." This mild comment was followed by a much more vigorous attack on those who used introspection for studying the mind. Like Freud (and dozens of authors before and since then) he emphasized the importance of sexual factors in hysteria.

Broussais received many honors during his lifetime. He was physician-in-chief and professor of medicine at the Military Hospital at Val-de-Grace, professor on the Faculty of Medicine at Paris, inspector general of the Council of Health of the French Armed Forces, member of the Legion of Honor, etc. Nevertheless his death was the occasion of some decidedly ambiguous obituary notices. One that appeared in an American newspaper in 1839 said:

"Lately. At Paris, aged 66, M. Broussais, Professor of General Pathology of the Faculty of Medicine, and a Member of the Academy of Moral and Political Sciences.

"Broussais for upwards of thirty years has been the Sangrado of the medical profession. As the author of the work entitled 'Examen des Doctrines Medicales,' and the promulgator of the system designated by its admirers 'Medicine Physiologique,' he has acquired a celebrity for good or evil which has fallen to the lot of few men. This great patron of bleeding, and leeches, and cold water (in many cases), without the dangerous adulteration of a portion of toasted bread, has for many years contrived to divide the profession into two camps, each of which pursued a treatment diametrically opposite in its nature, and in myriads of cases no less opposite in its results, so that the unfortunate creature labouring under typhus fever in presence of two physicians from the opposing camps might say, with the strictest truth, 'My bane and antidote are both before me.'"

Broussais was one of the last of the outstanding dogmatists of internal medicine and one of the first of modern psychiatry. Because he was a dogmatist he neglected to apply to his own ideas the standards with which he criticized the ideas of others. If he had been content merely to criticize the poorly-founded ideas that pervaded the medicine of his time he would have come down in history as a great reformer. Certainly his critique of psychoanalytic ideas half a century before they were supposed to have been invented would later have evoked wonder at the qualities of his mind. As it is he is remembered today as the greatest bloodletter since Tamerlane. ■