

Men and Medicine



Wilhelm Griesinger

The name Wilhelm Griesinger means nothing to all but a few American physicians despite the fact that Griesinger's observations and ideas have had as great an influence on American clinical practice as those of any nineteenth-century physician.

Griesinger was born in Stuttgart in 1817 and began his study of medicine in 1834. He distinguished himself by his independence of mind, his absence from classes, and his interest in the most up-to-date medical literature. He received his degree in 1838, traveled in France for a year, and then spent two years in psychiatric study in Germany. He soon became an instructor in medicine at Tübingen and the editor of the *Archiv für physiologische Heilkunde* (physiologic therapy). However he continued his interest in psychiatry; he was assistant physician at the asylum of Winnenthal. In 1845, at the age of 28, he published his textbook of psychiatry; this book had a greater effect on American psychiatry directly and indirectly than any other book on the subject before or since.

In addition he made other notable contributions. His writings on malaria and on typhus, typhoid, and relapsing fevers (1857-1864) did much to clear up the confusion concerning these diseases. In 1866 he established the relation between hookworm infestation and anemia. The condition which up until then had been called miners' anemia, bricklayers' anemia, St. Gothard

tunnel anemia, or Egyptian or tropical chlorosis, became known for a time as Griesinger's anemia. (His studies were carried out in Egypt.) During this period he was professor of medicine and director of the University Clinic at Zurich. He also described Griesinger's sign—edema of the mastoid tip in patients with sinus thrombosis; *pulsus paradoxicus*, which was called Griesinger-Küssmaul's sign; and pseudohypertrophic muscular dystrophy, which was called Duchenne-Griesinger disease.

However his psychiatric contributions were even more notable. His book originally published in 1845, went through several German editions and was translated into French and English. It became the leading textbook of psychiatry in the German-speaking countries of Europe. In it he pointed out that a basic defect in psychosis was the inability to form abstractions and that the symptom of confusion was a good prognostic sign in psychotic patients. He explained the manifestations of psychosis as a disorder of ego-function: According to Griesinger the ego disintegrated (or was replaced) in psychotic patients, a process that was favored by weak ego-defenses. He agreed with his predecessor Jacobi that the manifestations of psychosis were due to an upsurge of primitive impulsive drives. (All these ideas—formulated eleven years before Freud was born, became a cornerstone of Freudian psychiatry and ultimately of twentieth century

Men and Medicine

continued

Neo-Aristocort[®] CREAM 0.1%

Neomycin Sulfate (0.5%)—Triamcinolone Acetonide (0.1%)



two new steroid forms for dermatoses threatened by infection

Both of these new members of the ARISTOCORT family of topicals contain Triamcinolone Acetonide (0.1%), highly active in controlling inflammatory dermatoses, complemented by neomycin sulfate (0.5%), the topical antibiotic with outstanding efficacy against a wide range of Gram-negative and Gram-positive organisms. The Ointment or the Cream, sparingly applied, brings early gratifying relief and at the same time helps protect the affected areas against infection.

Effective in atopic dermatitis, eczematous dermatitis, nummular eczema, contact dermatitis, pruritus vulvae and ani, generalized erythrodermia, external otitis, seborrheic dermatitis, eczematized psoriasis, neurodermatitis, eczematized mycotic dermatitis. **Dosage:** Apply to area 3 or 4 times daily. May be used with occlusive dressing in some cases of psoriasis. **Side Effects:** Local skin sensitization due to neomycin. **Contraindications:** Tuberculosis of the skin, herpes simplex and chicken pox. Supplied in 5 and 15 Gm. tubes and ½ lb. jars.



Neo-Aristocort[®] OINTMENT 0.1%

Neomycin Sulfate (0.5%)—Triamcinolone Acetonide (0.1%)

Lederle LEDERLE LABORATORIES • A Division of American Cyanamid Company • Pearl River, N.Y.

209-3

American psychiatry). Although he was a strong proponent of ego-psychology he nevertheless insisted that mental disease was a disease of the brain and not of some sort of disembodied mind or soul. His influence demolished, at least for a time, the tendency of Germanic psychiatry (based on Platonic superstitions) to combine physiological speculations with psychologic metaphor. In addition, his emphasis of the role of reflex activity, from 1843 on, stimulated the Russians, first Sechenov, then Bechterev, and finally Pavlov, to develop their ideas, which later contributed greatly to American behavioristic psychology.

He also founded a new journal, *Archiv für Psychiatrie und Nervenkrankheiten*, the first issue of which appeared in 1868. In his preface to this work he suggested that only dangerous, uncooperative, unmanageable, or suicidal patients be kept in closed mental hospitals and that they be housed in special cottages after discharge until they became adjusted to living in the world. He also suggested that many chronic patients be kept in agricultural communities and that others be given family care, after the manner of the treatment used at Gheel in Belgium for several centuries. (Treatment at Gheel received the ultimate stamp of approval several years ago—a feature article in *Life* magazine.) All these ideas were made available in translation in the *American Journal of Insanity* in 1903 (volume 60, page 97 and 185) but have only recently come into prominence in this country, still without reference to his priority in this matter.

In 1866 Griesinger succeeded Romberg as professor at Berlin. At this point he had twenty years of phenomenal accomplishment behind him and could anticipate twenty more years of good work. He now had all the advantages associated with occupying a famous chair at a leading university. However he died only two years later. His early death probably kept him from becoming the greatest clinical teacher of the nineteenth century. He had a voracious mind, enormous energy and extraordinary powers of observation. Both his pupils and his patients admired him greatly, the former because of his devotion to teaching, the latter because of his close attention to patient signs and symptoms; both became the basis of his remarkable bedside teaching. ■