JAMA Revisited

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Annual Meeting of the British Association
The annual meeting of the British Association took place at Hull....The president, Sir Charles Sherrington...in an address entitled “Some Aspects of Animal Mechanism,” referred to the exquisite mechanism by which the blood is kept relatively constant in chemical reaction despite the variety of the food replenishing it, and the fluctuating draft from it. Similarly, various postures were maintained by reflex action in the absence of the higher nerve centers.

Mind and Matter
Turning to the old enigma of the relation of mind and matter, he said that mind becomes more recognizable, the more developed the nervous system. Hence the difficulty of the twilight emergence of mind from no mind, which is repeated even in the individual life history. Mentality was not distributed broadcast through the nervous system, but in the higher vertebrates was restricted to the newer parts of the forebrain. The mental part of the nervous system was so placed that its commerce with the body and the external world occurred only through the archaic nonmental part of the nervous system. Simple nerve impulses, their summations and interferences, seemed the one uniform function of the nervous system in its nonmental aspect. To pass from a nerve impulse to a psychic event was, as it were, to step from one world to another and incommensurable one. We might expect that the brain would exhibit striking changes of structure at the place of transition from its nonmental to its mental regions. But no; there were the same old structural elements set end to end, suggesting the one function of the transmission and collision of nerve impulses. The interconnections were richer, but that was merely a quantitative change....The mental attributes of the nervous system were the coping stone of the construction of the individual. But they did not stop at the individual; they integrated individuals into communities. Reviewing the distribution of mind within the range of animal forms, we met with two peaks of development—in insects and in the vertebrate....In the insect the type of mind was not rational but instinctive; in man there was reason as well as instinct. Yet in both one outcome was the welding of individuals into societies. In many of its aspects, animal life presented a mechanism the how of which, despite many gaps, was fairly explicable. It was as explicable as was the working of a gas engine or an electro-motor. But other aspects, such as the shaping of the animal body, the conspiring of its structural units to compass later functional ends, the predetermination of specific growth from egg to adult, the predetermined natural term of existence, we are still at a loss to understand, despite many brilliant inquiries and inquirers. The steps of the results are known, but the springs of action still lie hidden. Then, again, the how of the mind's connection with its bodily place seemed an utter enigma.

Industry's Death Roll
The annual report of the chief inspector of factories and workshops shows that during 1921 there were 92,565 accidents (951 fatal), as compared with 138,773 (1,404 fatal) in the previous year. This remarkable drop is almost entirely due to the phenomenal inactivity in industry throughout the year and the prolonged coal strike, which resulted in many iron mills and blast furnaces being closed down. These industries are heavy producers of accidents. The number of accidents due to electricity was 322 (thirty-two fatal), a reduction of 20 per cent. The welfare movement in factories and workshops has held its own in face of adverse circumstances. Before 1914, welfare schemes were in operation in comparatively few factories. The war produced an unprecedented interest in the welfare of the workers, when it was realized that on them, as much as on the soldiers, our existence depended. Now reports from inspectors all over the country show that in addition to canteens, cloak rooms, surgeries and rest rooms—matters dealt with in welfare orders—a large number of social activities—saving clubs, benevolent clubs, concerts and dance meetings, summer camps in charge of athletic trainers, bowling greens, dental clinics, libraries, schools and lectures—have been organized. During the year there were 230 cases of lead poisoning, of which twenty-three were fatal. There were no cases of phosphorus or mercury poisoning, but one case of arsenic poisoning. The lower figures for anthrax poisoning (twenty-five, of which six were fatal) are partly due to the inauguration of the government station at Liverpool for disinfecting wool. On the question of the forty-eight-hour week, it is stated that since this has been established and the reduction of hours has been continued over a considerable period, output tends, in the majority of cases, to attain the old level, and the beneficial effect of the increased leisure on the workers is becoming apparent. The plan of “no work on Saturday” appears to be increasing in favor.

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