



Marshall Hall (1790/1857): Science & Medicine in Early Victorial Society (Clio Medica)

Diana E. Manuel

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Marshall Hall was trained as a physician in the early nineteenth century, scientifically oriented, University of Edinburgh Medical School. The son of a Methodist cotton manufacturer and bleacher at Nottingham, Hall believed that in science lay the future for progress in medicine. Following early work on diagnosis, on women's disorders and on blood-letting, Hall came to specialise in the nervous system and in particular on the concept of reflex action. For Hall, who proposed a mechanistic explanation of reflex action, Galenic animal spirits and souls in decapitated creatures were out. A superb experimentalist, Hall strove to establish experimental medicine (physiology) as the basis of the medical curriculum instead of anatomy, the long standing domain of the surgeons. They were among the strongest critics of Hall's vivisection procedures, despite his efforts to establish a Code of Practice. Hall was involved in several controversies within and without the Royal Society where he was victimised by its Physiological Committee. He addressed a range of social and public health issues including the abolition of slavery, and devised a new method of resuscitation and a more sensitive physiological test for strychnine detection. He also proposed plans for improving and linking sewage disposal and the transport system of the metropolis.

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