

Édouard Brissaud (1852–1909)

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Édouard Brissaud (1852–1909) was born into a large family of intellectuals, artists, painters, musicians, and especially actors and lyric singers [9]. The situation was similar in his wife's family, his own mother being the cousin of his wife Hélène Boutet de Monvel (1852–1926). The most well-known were his great-great-grandfather Jacques-Marie Boutet de Monvel (1745–1812), an actor nicknamed “The Great Monvel,” Boutet's daughter Mademoiselle Mars (1779–1847), and his cousin Marie Dorval (1798–1849), sacred monsters of the first half of the nineteenth century, as well as the tenor Adolphe Nourrit (1802–1839), the maternal grandfather of Edouard's wife.

After his medical studies and his thesis, Édouard Brissaud became chief resident under Charles Lasègue (1816–1883), then under Sigismond Jaccoud (1830–1913). He became a physician at the Paris hospitals, assistant professor (‘agrégé’), Head of the Department of Medicine at Saint Antoine Hospital, and subsequently at the Hôtel-Dieu. He was elected a member of the Academy of Medicine in 1909.

His career and his scientific work are deeply marked by the influence of Professor Jean-Martin Charcot (1825–1893), Head of the Clinics for Diseases of the Nervous System at the Salpêtrière. Brissaud was his *externe* in 1875 and his *interne* in 1879. Not only being the main author, Brissaud was instrumental in organizing the famous Medical Handbook (*Traité de médecine*), which was kindly supported by his coauthors Charcot and Bouchard [7]. Charcot thought highly of Brissaud and was fond of him. Two surviving letters of Charcot to Brissaud [8] testify to his attachment to him. In one of these letters,

Charcot kindly discussed the Medical Handbook with Brissaud and entrusted his son Jean-Baptiste Charcot (1867–1936) as an *interne* to the care of Brissaud. In the other letter, Charcot provided Brissaud with an original observation of alcoholic paralysis and asked him what he thought of it [10]. After Charcot's death, Brissaud, in charge of the Salpêtrière as interim head, paid a glowing tribute to him in his first lecture [3, 4]. Brissaud was undoubtedly Charcot's favorite student [11].

Brissaud's works are highly significant in many fields of medicine. In 1893, a few months before Charcot's death, Brissaud founded together with Pierre Marie the *Revue*



Fig. 1 Édouard Brissaud's portrait (courtesy of Ms. Olivier Chauveau, Édouard Brissaud's great-granddaughter)

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neurologique, and in 1899 he was one of the founders of the Paris Neurological Society. He wrote many original papers [5] on various topics in neurology and psychiatry, including anxiety, hysteria, posttraumatic neurosis, and mental torticollis. In addition, he described *chorée variable des dégénérés* (Brissaud's disease), the fascia lata reflex and, with his pupil Sicard, the alternating brain syndrome (hemifacial spasm and contralateral hemiparesis) which bears their names. He also coined the term *sinistrosis* for the pathological tendency to exaggerate the consequences of minor accidents as well as the compensation that is claimed thereafter. In addition, shortly after Wilhelm Roentgen (1845–1923) discovered X-rays, Brissaud and Albert Londe (1858–1917) reported for the first time their application in localizing an intracranial projectile. Brissaud was not only the author of a monumental atlas of the human brain [2], he also published several important papers on pathological anatomy, especially on Bourneville's tuberous sclerosis and on Reclus's cystic disease of the breast, and in internal medicine on conditions, such as pneumonia, cutaneous tuberculosis, asthma, and infantilism. In the field of the history of medicine, Brissaud wrote short papers on Charles de Guyenne, Scarron, Théophile de Bordeu, Couthon, and touch therapy of scrofula by the kings. He devoted two full papers to controversial contemporary problems: vivisection and microbial theory. His outstanding contribution, however, was his *History of Popular Expressions in Medicine* [1], which is a true masterpiece of originality and erudition. In 1899, Édouard Brissaud succeeded Joseph Laboulbène (1825–1898) to become the Chair of History of Medicine at the Paris Medical School. One year later he left this position to become the Chair of Medical Pathology.

Brissaud's personality was exceptional. His cleverness was marvelous and his character humorous, facetious, and cheerful. He wrote a satirical, unpublished theater piece, *The cheque* [6], where a medical student and his master discussed the interim chief of the clinics for diseases of the nervous system. Freethinker, supporter of Alfred Dreyfus (1859–1935), member of the directorial committee of the Human Rights League (*Ligue des Droits de l'Homme*), his closest friends were Countess Anna de Noailles

(1876–1933), Marcel Proust (1871–1922), the young poet Henri Franck (1888–1912), and Paul Reclus (1847–1914). The latter person, a freethinker, anarchist, and professor of surgery, was the most intimate friend of Édouard Brissaud, with whom he spent his holidays in Béarn, a French region in the Pyrénées that they were both fond of. Many of his pupils became eminent neurologists, particularly Achille Souques (1860–1944), Jean-Athanase Sicard (1872–1929), and perhaps his closest student, Henry Meige (1866–1940), who became professor of artistic anatomy at the Paris Beaux Arts School, succeeding Paul Richer (1849–1933).

Brissaud passed away in December 1909 from a brain tumor, unsuccessfully operated on by the renowned British neurosurgeon Victor Horsley (1857–1916) (Fig. 1).

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