

# PHILOSOPHICAL TRANSACTIONS.

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1. *Two remarkable Cases relating to Vision, communicated to the Publisher, by the learned and ingenious Wil. Briggs M. D. fellow of the College of Physicians, and Physician of St. Thomas's Hospital, Lond.*

Sr. **I** Received some time since an account of a remarkable Case in *Vision*, from Dr. Peter Parham a worthy Physician in *Normich*; which because it so rarely occurs,

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and

and the like is mention'd but by few Authors, I imagin'd that the *following Transcript* of two Letters he was pleas'd to send me about it, might not be unwelcom to you, and therefore I took this opportunity of conveying it to your hands.

First Let. ' I was lately in *Suffolk*, and there met with a  
' pretty odd but curious case relating to Vision; which  
' I thought then had something of *Rarity*, and continue  
' still in the perswasion. A *Gentleman* gave me the History  
' of it, and because his Servant, who was concerned in  
' it, was then in the house, I had the opportunity fully to  
' inform my self, and if there be any Questions you would  
' have propos'd, I shall shortly see him again.

' The *Gentleman* propounded the *Case* himself, to know  
' the Phylosophy of it, and what should be that particu-  
' lar *Figure* in his Servants *Eye*, that he should see so a-  
' cutely and strenuously in the *day*, and be just like a post  
' so soon as the *Sun* set. The young man may be towards  
' 20 years of age, and all the day hath as good a sight, if  
' not better, than any of the family; distinguisheth at as  
' great a distance any object; sees either nigh at hand or  
' far off, or any of the intermediate spaces as well as any  
' body, and with as much vigour and unweariedness; but  
' when twilight once comes, is (as the Proverb says)  
' blind as a Beetle; sees nothing; runs against Gates,  
' Posts or Rails (any thing either higher, lower, or level  
' to his Eye) and cannot without great difficulty direct  
' himself. Neither is all this from the want of any vi-  
' gorous influence from the Rays of the Sun, as I conceive;  
' for when he is at home and in the house, he tumbles o-  
' ver Stools, runs his head against Doors, and cannot  
' see or direct himself tolerably well either by the greater  
' or lesser lights of the fire and candle; but commits  
' pleasant mistakes, is apt to complement your feet as  
' readily as present you steadily with a glass of Wine,  
' runs his head against his Master's foot when he is to pull  
' off

‘ off his Boots, and gives them some other diversions all-  
 ‘ terward about the Fire and Utensils there, which cau-  
 ‘ seth variety of sometimes pity and other whiles  
 ‘ laughter.

‘ I confess this odd and unusual case rais'd my curiosity  
 ‘ to view the Boy well and to discourse with him; there  
 ‘ is no disease in the Organ that can be observ'd, no *Ver-*  
 ‘ *tigo* or distemper in the head to interrupt or any way  
 ‘ intercept the spirits in their motions, but to all appear-  
 ‘ ance the fabrick of the Organ is very true and exactly  
 ‘ well, and never disturb'd with *fluxes* any way.

‘ I did observe the Eye both by day and night, but  
 ‘ could not find fault with any part; neither do I think  
 ‘ the suspicion well ground'd, that he sees better than  
 ‘ others by day-light, because of the vigour and plenty of  
 ‘ Rays, for then he might have the same benefit from good  
 ‘ fires and candles to invigorate the Organ, and contract  
 ‘ the Pupil (for so I suppose it is done, because the greater  
 ‘ the Sun-shine is, the better those generally see that are  
 ‘ short-sighted) but it seems rather to depend on some of  
 ‘ the *Humours*, tho I can't tell at present on which, ha-  
 ‘ ving not had time since to consider of it. I try'd him  
 ‘ with Spectacles for variety of sight, but they did him  
 ‘ no service by either lights.

Second Let. ‘ I have had a further account of that odd  
 ‘ case I acquainted you with in my last. and also receiv'd  
 ‘ a Resolution of those Questions you propounded, which  
 ‘ I now send you: I have rang'd the problems in the or-  
 ‘ der they were sent me.

Qu. 1. ‘ Whether the person was so from a child, or any  
 ‘ observable occasion? R. He was thus from the first time  
 ‘ he was able to take notice of things, and it came without  
 ‘ Distempers.

2. ‘ Whether any cloudiness at night falls gradually  
 ‘ upon him like a Mist, or all at once when Sun sets? To

‘ which he replies, that it comes gradually upon him as  
‘ day-light declines.

3. ‘ What effect the several Aspects of the moon have  
‘ upon him ? He says none, for he is always alike.

4. ‘ Whether he feels any pain by fire or candle-light ?  
‘ he says not any.

5. ‘ Whether worse in the winter than summer ? To  
‘ which he says, he hath not observ’d any difference.

6. ‘ Whether upon taking cold he be worse ? he says,  
‘ he never observ’d any mischief by cold.

7. Whether he sweats much at any labour, and so grows  
‘ worse upon any sudden stopping of the pores toward  
‘ night ? R. He sweats much at work, but finds no incon-  
‘ venience, neither observes any difference as to his sight  
‘ in those days when he works hard or not.

‘ So that if you take this account as a true and plain  
‘ Narrative without any artifice, it may be judg’d very rare,  
‘ and is the first case I ever knew of the like kind. I rest, &c.

Thus far the diligent Observer in his account of this un-  
usual case, which I forbear giving you my thoughts upon  
at present, reserving them for another occasion; and  
this being so extraordinary an indisposition of the Eye,  
it may very well deserve a more particular consideration  
in the *Pathology of that part*, which I formerly intimated  
my intentions one day of publishing. And now I have  
*the opportunities* of making more frequent Observations  
in the *Distempers of that part*, which I then thought re-  
quisite to so great a design (and which were since put into  
my hands, by the exceeding bounty and favor of his most  
Gracious MAJESTY, as I must ever own, when he was  
pleas’d of late to place me in the care of one of his *Hos-  
pitals* here) I thin my self in a double manner oblig’d  
to prosecute a subject, which may be of so great impor-  
tance to the world. and should gladly receive any ac-  
count relating to it.

The case now mention’d (though indeed in a different  
sense

sense from that of *a. Hippocrates*) is call'd by later Writers *Nyctalopia* or *Nocturna Cæcitas*, and is accordingly described; with the *Remedies* for it, by *b. Galen*, *c. Pliny*, *d. Forestus*, *e. Sennertus*, and *f. Joël*; to whom I refer the Reader. *Cornelius Celjus*, (*de Medicin. lib. 6. cap. 6. §. 38.*) mentions it under the title of *Imbecilitas oculorum*; but none of all these have given so exact and full a history of it as will be found in the foregoing Relation.

2. To this unusual case I shall subjoin, another relating to the same subject, which I lately had the opportunity of observing here in *St. Thomas's Hospital*, together with my worthy friend *Dr. William Dawkins* (whom I have the happiness to be joyn'd with there) in a Patient we had for some time under our hands.

The case was this; *Daniel Wright* aged about 19 years, of a sanguine and plethoric Constitution, about the end of the year 1683. was seiz'd with a dizziness and pain in the upper part of the head, which he told me he could impute to nothing but the excessive cold weather, which then raged with us to extremity. Hereupon having the misfortune to apply himself to *an ignorant Pretender to Physick* here, a Plaster for his head was only order'd at that time (without any evacuations) but whether it was the *Empl. cephalicum cum euphorbio* in the Dispens. or any other I could not learn. The Patient upon this grows much worse, the pains of his head more fixt and girding (I suppose from some Spasms or *constrictive Motions* of the *Meninges*) to which succeeded *convulsive Fits* (which were accompanied afterwards with a *Tremor* upon his Arms and Legs) and upon this *all Objects appear'd double* to him, from the fibres of the optic nerves being thus distorted from their wonted Parallelism. After this poor young man had been thus tortur'd by his *Empirick*, and this Distemper for about 3

*a In Porrb. lib. 2. §. 40. b See Galende Ocul. Part 6. cap. 10. c Plin. nat. hist. lib. 8. cap. 50. d Forest. lib. 1. observ. 38. e Sennert. lib. 1. part. 3. sect. 2. cap. 44. f Joël practic. lib. 2. Sect. 1. §. 10.*

months, he was taken in as a great Object of charity into our *Hospital*. Upon his admission I examined his case as particularly as I could, and judg'd (by his *seeing all things double thus*) that the *Optic Nerves* were affected, and that it was gone so far that it would probably end in a *gutta serena*, and accordingly it fell out not long after his being in the *Hospital*; which confirms me in the *Opinion about Vision* I formerly communicated to the *R. Society*.<sup>c</sup>

In this difficult and extraordinary case, where the Patient had been so long afflicted, and the Fits grew daily worse upon him (so that he had several in a day, which he told me made his Life so uneasy, that he did not care what was done with him) we endeavoured by all ways we could to relieve him. Accordingly we order'd the *Cephalic Pills*, and an *Electuary* (which we use in the *Hospital* in *Epileptic Cases*) which he receiv'd much benefit by: he was also (by intervals) bled in the *Jugulars* and in the *Hæmorrhoids* and by *Leeches* which also gave him good relief; his head was shaved, blisters apply'd to his Neck, and a *Scion* made sometime after, &c. we endeavouring by all manner of *Revulsions* to derive the humour another way, if it were possible; but it was too much fixt, and of too long standing, so that about two months after he had been under our care (and now and then not without some prospect of Relief) a *Gutta Serena* seiz'd on his right Eye, that he could not see at all on that side; but then the *duplicity ceas'd* and he saw all Objects single again as before, which is another confirmation of the fore-mention'd Opinion.

In the mean time the left Eye being still in danger, we further order'd (besides the continuance of the former *Electuary*) a *Fontanel* about the meeting of the *Sagittal* and *Lambdooid Sutures*, and *Cupping-glasses* to his Neck and Shoulders, that nothing might be left unat-

<sup>c</sup> *In Philos. Collect. No. 6. & Transact. No. 147.*

tempted that we thought requisite ; but it seems these last were omitted, and whilst we were thus solicitous about preserving his t'other Eye a severe Fit seiz'd him, soon after which he died. I hapned the day after to be with a Patient out o'th town, and not having timely notice of his death I mist the opportunity of opening the Body ; but I was told that in the upper part of his head, neck and shoulders, a *great blackness* appear'd not long after he was dead ( from the settling of the blood I suppose in those parts ) which shews that what was last order'd, which was for several days before his death, had been very proper in this case.

What success the *Trepan* or *Salivation* might have had here we did not try ; tho the former where there is any discharge of matter, and the latter in *venereal pains* of the head I know succeed well ; but these were not chiefly *nocturnal*, and the Patient ( whenever I prest him in the thing ) profess'd to me the contrary, and seeing him so willing to do any thing for a Cure, and being a very sober temperate Youth, I had no reason to suspect him ; and indeed he never suffer'd much of those severe and *girding pains* but when his Fits were upon him.

Thus, Sir, have I sent you a plain Narrative of this extraordinary Case, hoping you will excuse the careless and un-studied dress 'tis sent in ; whereby you will further oblige

SIR,

Your very humble Servant

*William Briggs.*

*The*