

Georges Gilles de la Tourette. The man and his times

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To provide a historical overview of the life, work and illness of Georges Gilles de la Tourette (1857-1904).

DISCUSSION

Gilles de la Tourette, a pioneering French neurologist and prolific medical writer, belonged to a group of students closest to Jean- Martin Charcot. In 1885, Gilles de la Tourette published a paper on a rare disorder in 9 patients with involuntary movements, echolalia, echopraxia, coprolalia, and strange, uncontrollable sounds.

In his article, Gilles de la Tourette presented some earlier descriptions of this disorder. According to Charcot, it was a specific neurological disease which he named after his pupil: La Maladie des Tics de Gilles de la Tourette. It was 4 years after Charcot was able to obtain the creation of the first chair in the world for nervous system disorder.

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Gilles de la Tourette was born on October 30, 1857, in the small town of Saint-Gervais-les- Trois-Clochers, France. Little is known about his early life, but he began his medical studies during 1873-1876 in Poitiers and Paris, France. In 1884, Gilles de la Tourette began training under Dr. Charcot’s guidance at the Salpêtrière hospital. Initially, Gilles de la Tourette studied various medical conditions, such as hysteria, hypnosis and ataxia (a neurological disorder causing poor movement coordination), all of which were of interest to his mentor. Later, however, Dr. Charcot asked him to turn his attention to paroxysmal movement disorders, which are neurological illnesses characterized by sudden outbursts of emotion and/or action.

Gilles de la Tourette was potentially a successor to Charcot as Professor of Neurology. He always remained faithful to his mentor's views and the most vehement defenders of La

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In 1881, he translated the 1880 historical paper by American physician George Beard, on the Jumping Frenchman of Maine. In 1886, he clarified the distinction between chorea and convulsive tic disorder. From 1884 to 1887, he became intrigued by hysteria.

He had a strong and public interest in hypnotism, which nearly cost him his life, when a young woman who claimed to have been hypnotized against her will, shot him in the head at his own home in 1893. In 1904, he died after spending three years in a Swiss mental institution following general paralysis.

CONCLUSION: We describe the life and legacy of a famous person whose name is attached to a pediatric onset neurological disorder and highlight the long-term impact of his work. It is now 139 years since Gilles de la Tourette clearly described the disorder that bears his name.

DISCUSSION



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