



Charcot and Ferrier

(Letter to the Editor)

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It is globally recognized that Charcot's impact on the development of neurology as an independent medical discipline in the latter half of the nineteenth century was immense, not least through his influence on the many clinicians who visited his department at the Salpêtrière. A recent article has documented many of these individuals from around the world (Broussolle et al. 2025) but overlooked one clinician who was to declare, long after his visit to Paris, that he had "himself been a pupil of Charcot over fifty years ago in the Salpêtrière. He referred to his master as one who had made an old poor-house ward into the most visited and most famous clinic in the world" (Anon. 1925, 1311). The clinician in question, also an experimental physiologist, was David Ferrier (1843-1928).

Documentary detail on Ferrier's visit to Paris is sparse. To my knowledge, the only account is incidental, appearing in a note dated 4th April 1877 which reported on a meeting held the previous day, Tuesday 3rd April, and published in the *Lancet* issue of 14th April: "a large party met at the Hospice de la Salpêtrière to witness various experiments made in metallotherapy by Professor Charcot and Dr. Burg". As well as describing the experiments undertaken, the correspondent noted those present: "I may mention that Dr. David Ferrier, of London, who is on a visit to Paris, and who has given especial attention to the wards of Dr. Charcot; ... and several other medical men and writers for the press, were present on the occasion" (Anon. 1877, 553). It may be that this was when Ferrier adjudged himself to have been a "pupil" of Charcot; it dates to almost fifty years before Ferrier's retrospective account. If so, the demonstration on metallotherapy left no obvious trace on Ferrier's subsequent therapeutics.

By this stage of his career Ferrier's name was well-known, based on his experimental research into cerebral localisation of motor and sensory functions, animal studies commenced at the West Riding Asylum in Wakefield (1873) and continued thereafter in London where he was Croonian Lecturer at the Royal Society (1874 and 1875). In 1876 Ferrier published his monograph on *The Functions of the Brain* and was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society. Ferrier's research work was recognised later in 1877 by the award of the Montyon prize in physiology of the Académie des Sciences in Paris, for "his series of experiments on the effects produced by the Electrification of the Surface of the Brain" (the prize was shared with MM. Carville and Duret).



As is well-known, Ferrier subsequently dedicated his Gulstonian Lectures delivered to the Royal College of Physicians of London in 1878, entitled *The Localisation of Cerebral Disease* (Ferrier 1878), to Charcot (later translated into French by de Varigny). Therein Ferrier cited examples of clinico-anatomical correlation reported by Charcot, several in collaboration with Pitres, although Ferrier had already attempted such correlation using material from the case books and postmortem books of the West Riding Asylum (Ferrier 1874).

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