PHRENOLOGY AND BRITISH ALIENISTS, *c.* 1825–1845

PART I: CONVERTS TO A DOCTRINE

by

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INTRODUCTION

EVEN IN THE light of its legitimate claim to be an important stimulant to research in cerebral physiology, phrenology seems an unpromising vehicle for understanding the progress of psychiatry in the nineteenth century. Yet, in the first half of that century at least, phrenology *was* important for the progressive development of psychiatry for it had something to say at each of the required levels: its doctrine could claim to be scientific and somatic; it led to treatments which were moral and were conveyed as such; and it brought the phenomenon of madness into contact with the social world and the progressive social philosophies of the time. Above all it was comprehensible. Its advocates and its converts promised to provide at a stroke solutions to the mysteries of character, personality, talent or the lack of it, crime and madness. While the most basic assumptions of phrenology have continued to influence psychology, physiology, neurology, sociology, criminology and psychiatry, all of the particular claims which led to its pervasive influence prior to 1850 were subsequently considered absurd. My intention in this paper is to build up phrenology's transforming influence in psychiatry and then to tear away the phrenological scaffolding. Progress—always assuming that "progress" is "progressive"—often uses strange and fascinating mediators in the advancement of social, political, moral and scientific ideas. Phrenology, I will argue, was probably the single most important, as well as one of the most curious, of these vehicles for the progress of psychiatry in the second quarter of the nineteenth century.

I will be primarily concerned in this inquiry with exposing how and why phrenology between the 1820s and the 1840s came to dominate psychiatric thought or how, to quote James Cowles Prichard in the early 1830s, "the celebrated system of Gall . . . eclipsed all other attempts to theorise on the functions of the brain".[1] In doing this

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[1]J. C. Prichard, 'Temperaments', in John Forbes, Alexander Tweedie, and John Conolly (eds.), *Cyclopaedia of practical medicine*, London, Piper, 1833–1835, vol. 4, p. 167. Prichard was one of the few leading alienists of the period who was not attracted to phrenological views, largely because his research in natural history brought him to different conclusions than Gall's about the development of the brain in lower animals. He also saw, with greater clarity than most, that phrenology appealed because of the "ready explanation which it *seems to afford* of a greater number of phenomena in natural history and psychology". 'Supplementary note on peculiar configurations of the skull connected with mental derangement, with observations on the evidence of phrenology, and opinions respecting the functions of the brain', in Prichard, *A treatise on insanity and other disorders affecting the mind*, London, Houlston, 1835, p. 464.

I will be working between three approaches to psychiatric history: the socio-institutional, the clinical and the scientific. On the first of these, the socio-institutional approach, the criticism made by Alexander Walk some twenty years ago still remains valid, namely: that there is substantially more to nineteenth-century psychiatry than Metropolitan Commissioners in Lunacy and Select Committees of Inquiry, or that psychiatric history must be seen as a set of institutions being driven between the wheels of Utilitarianism and Evangelicalism.[2] Walk's reaction to the institutional approach stemmed from his examination of the diverse contemporary attitudes and opinions on one clinical aspect of early nineteenth-century psychiatry, the "moral treatment". This internal or clinical approach to British psychiatry has since received further attention, most recently by William Bynum[3] who has expanded the clinical picture to expose the dichotomy that was created by the introduction of moral therapy *vis à vis* the position of medical therapy. On this aspect of psychiatry I shall have more to say in the second part of this paper.

The third, or what I have called the "scientific" approach to British psychiatry, has been touched upon by several writers though it has never been thoroughly explored. The reluctance of medical historians to treat phrenology seriously because of its stigma as a "pseudoscience" has been largely responsible for neglecting phrenology in its role as the first "science of brain". The eclecticism of the early nineteenth-century alienists and the obfuscation in much of their writing scarcely increases the appeal of such an investigation. Moreover, in treating phrenology as a major contribution to the scientific evolution of psychiatry, difficulties are further compounded by the fact that it was an uniquely popular science in early-Victorian Britain for largely social reasons.[4] Thus while the scientific approach to psychiatry should, *prima facie,* remove us from the social context and involve us more deeply with an internalist discussion, through phrenology this approach extends beyond neurological, clinical and institutional aspects to the consideration of far broader social issues. To deal fully with these social ramifications of phrenology is outside the scope of this paper. Nor will it be apposite here to elucidate the social background that would be necessary if we were to comprehend the frameworks in which the superintendents of lunatic asylums operated. It is necessary however, before entering upon the more specific applications of the phrenological doctrine to psychiatric theory and treatment, to give some attention to the social claims of phrenology, and in particular, to the relation of these claims to the acceptance of the doctrine by alienists. One of the themes I will be introducing in the first part of this paper, therefore, is that the science of phrenology forms an essential starting point for a broader historical synthesis of nineteenth-century psychiatry because the doctrine was *also* a phenomenon of considerable social significance.

[2] A. Walk, 'Some aspects of the "moral treatment" of the insane up to 1854', *J. ment. Sci.*, 1954, **100**: 807–837.

[3] W. F. Bynum, 'Rationales for therapy in British psychiatry: 1780–1835', *Med. Hist.*, 1974, **18**: 317–334.

[4] See, David De Giustino, *The conquest of mind. Phrenology and Victorian social thought*, London, Croom Helm, 1975. It is a part of other work with which I am presently involved to show how phrenology served as a mediator for social, political and moral ideas among the British middle and working classes. It is hoped that, ultimately, the conclusions from that material can be united with those on insanity presented here.

There is abundant evidence to substantiate the claim that phrenology completely reorientated psychiatric thought. Briefly, this reorientation can be seen as the shift in psychiatry to an interpretation of mental illness as related to the physiology of the brain. Franz Joseph Gall (1758–1828), the founder of what became popularly known as phrenology, "convinced the scientific community once and for all that 'the brain is the organ of the mind' and argued strongly that both its structure and functions could be concomitantly analysed by observation rather than speculation."[5] Despite disclaimers by defensive phrenologists, Gall's doctrine overstepped the limits of orthodox inquiry by "physiologizing" the mind within the brain so that it could become (as in Cartesian philosophy it was not) the subject of scientific study. The old philosophical use of the term "faculties of the mind" was transformed both medically and popularly into the notion of faculties as the functions of specific cerebral parts and often made to be synonymous with the parts themselves. Investigating the derivation of the word "function" as a systematic term in psychology, K. M. Dallenbach concluded that "*phrenology is the matrix from which our term is derived*"; that only after Gall and Spurzheim had propagated the doctrine did "mental functions" take on its present meaning.[6] Thus long after phrenology had been abandoned by professional men the complaint could still be heard that "The old notions promulgated by phrenologists . . . still tend, I fear, to confuse our view, and to prevent a true scientific conception of the constitution of the intellect."[7] Such a statement only underscores the conclusion of Ackerknecht that Gall's doctrine was "at least as influential in the first half of the nineteenth century as psychoanalysis in the first half of the twentieth."[8]

In the first part of this paper I want briefly to outline the extent to which phrenology was involved with the nineteenth-century asylums in Britain; to give some indication of the alienists[9] and writers involved; and to establish the place they occupy in psychiatric history. An examination of the advancement of phrenology among the medical profession generally; reference to the social implications involved in the contemporary acceptance of the doctrine; and what exactly the doctrine appeared to be offering to alienists, will constitute the remainder of this background material. In part two of the paper I will be concerned almost entirely with looking at Gall's system in the context of the then-existing theories and practices of clinical psychiatry in an attempt to define the place it came to occupy. Turning to subsequent develop-

[5] Robert M. Young, *Mind, brain and adaptation in the nineteenth century*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1970, p. 3.

[6] K. M. Dallenbach, 'The history and derivation of the word "function" as a systematic term in psychology', *Amer. J. Psychol.*, 1915, **26**: 484 (his italics).

[7] W. Cave Thomas, *The limitation of brain power or, the hygiene of education. A lecture to the society for the development of the science of education*, London, Co-operative Printing Co., 1878, p. 9.

[8] E. H. Ackerknecht, *Medicine at the Paris Hospital 1794–1848*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins Press, 1967, p. 172. See also, E. H. Ackerknecht and Henri V. Vallois, *Franz Joseph Gall, inventor of phrenology and his collection*, trans. by Claire St. Leon, Wisconsin Studies in Medical History, University of Wisconsin, 1956; and Owsei Temkin, 'Gall and the phrenological movement', *Bull. Hist. Med.*, 1947, **21**: 275–321. None of these works pays attention to the practice of British psychiatry.

[9] The term "alienist" is used throughout to signify "one engaged in the scientific study or treatment of mental disease", *Century dictionary*, New York and London, Century Co., 1889, vol. 1. Along with "mental alienation", the designation was in common usage in the nineteenth century and it is employed here as more historically appropriate and precise than the modern equivalent "psychiatrist".

ments during the twilight of phrenological psychiatry, I will try to place in perspective the role of phrenology in early-Victorian psychiatry and to assess the particular nature of its historical significance.

For reasons which will become obvious, such an inquiry cannot be superficially conducted; as serious Victorians themselves recorded when they entered upon this subject, "The great question of phrenology is of too important and too comprehensive a character to be thus cursorily discussed."[10]

I

The very name of the practical phrenologist and itinerant lecturer, J. Q. Rumball, has often been cited as an apt reflection on the sort of person attracted to phrenology. It may seem that a pseudoscience of lumps and bumps is appropriately associated with such a name. Yet Rumball should not be too quickly dismissed. Like so many of his contemporaries he took his phrenology seriously and he fought strenuously to prevent its sabotage by materialists and mesmerists. More significant here is the fact that Rumball was the proprietor and manager of a private madhouse near St. Albans in Hertfordshire and was also the author of one of the addresses to Lord Brougham in 1843 which called for the pardon of Daniel M'Naughton (from whose case the M'Naughton Rules for the criminally insane were formulated) upon phrenological proofs of the murderer's "moral insanity". In his address Rumball observed that "In treating this question Phrenologically, no excuse is required". As he went on to point out: "most of the Superintendents of our Public [county] Asylums are Phrenologists. Hanwell, Gloucester, Glasgow, Leicester, Nottingham, and Maidstone are thus governed; in them, the spirit of improvement, of amelioration to the Patient in his physical treatment, and philosophy in his cure, is alone apparent. . . ."[11]

The name of James Quilter Rumball is not to be found in the anthologies of psychiatry nor in any dictionary of biography. As with most of the superintendents of the asylums he mentions, little biographical information is obtainable. However, the correspondence which Rumball points to between phrenological alienists and the spirit of improvement is one that can be verified, if not through minor figures such as Rumball himself, then quite clearly through some of the most distinguished psychiatrists of the period. Rumball noted Hanwell where John Conolly (1794–1866) superintended; he might have also mentioned Conolly's distinguished predecessor, Sir William Ellis (1780–1839), or W. A. F. Browne (1805–1886) of the Montrose and, later, Crichton Royal asylums. To these three eminent figures Rumball could have added the names of contemporaries of often only slightly less influence:

[10] '[Rev. of] *Bibliothèque du médecin practicien*', *J. psychol. Med.*, 1849, **2**: 539.

[11] J. Q. Rumball, *M'Naughten. A letter to the Lord Chancellor, upon insanity*, 2nd ed., London, J. Churchill, 1843, pp. iv–v. An advertisement for Rumball's private (and apparently unlicensed) asylum appears on the back page of his *On the nature, cause, and cure of asthma*, London, Tallant & Allen, 1857. On the phrenological interest in the M'Naughten case see also, James George Davey, *Medico-legal reflections on the trial of Daniel M'Naughten*, London, Bailliere, 1843; [Thomas Tichborne], *On the amendment of the law of lunacy. A letter to Lord Brougham by a phrenologist*, London, H. Renshaw, 1843; *Phrenological Journal* [hereafter *P. J.*], 1843, **16**: 182–191; and *Zoist*, 1843, **1**: 397–405.

Matthew Allen (1783–1845), the owner and superintendent of the first cottage-style asylum in Britain at High Beech in Epping; Disney Alexander, successor to Ellis at the Wakefield Asylum from 1831 to 1836; Richard Poole, successor to Browne at Montrose after 1839; James Davey (1813–1895), house-surgeon at Hanwell under Conolly and later medical-superintendent of the female side of Europe's largest and most modern asylum at mid-century, Colney Hatch in Middlesex; James Scott, superintendent of the Royal Navy Asylum at Haslar; and Edward Wright (1791–1859), apothecary and superintendent of Bethlem. Along with phrenological authors of works on insanity who were not themselves involved with the actual care of the insane, most notably, J. G. Spurzheim (1776–1832) and Andrew Combe (1797–1847), these men comprised what can be termed the hard core of phrenological alienists.[12] All of them would have said that they treated their patients on phrenological principles, although their specific interests in the science had differing degrees of emphasis. While Edward Wright was chiefly interested in phrenology's physiological division of brain for locating organic changes in insane patients, Conolly turned to the science more for the assistance it gave in relating cranial shape to specific forms of insanity (see below). All those within the hard core, however, were directly involved in the dissemination and propagation of phrenology. Conolly was a founding member of the Warwick and Leamington Phrenological Society and was later one of the chairmen of the Phrenological Association.[13] Ellis founded a society while superintending the Wakefield Asylum,[14] and Disney Alexander drew up lectures to be delivered at the Wakefield Dispensary.[15] Matthew Allen was the first itinerant lecturer on phrenology in Britain after Spurzheim,[16] while W. A. F. Browne, though not a charter member of the Edinburgh Phrenological Society, was by the 1830s as dominant a figure in the Society as George and Andrew Combe. Browne also established a phrenological society at Montrose and was one of the most popular lecturers on phrenology to middle- and working-class audiences throughout Scotland.[17] Richard Poole was the first editor of the *Phrenological Journal*. James Scott lectured on the science to audiences in Gosport and he and Edward Wright were the some-time presidents of the phrenological societies of Hampshire and London,

[12] Major sources: *P. J.; Zoist; Lancet;* Hewett C. Watson, *Statistics on phrenology*, London, Longman, 1836; and Margaret C. Barnet, 'Matthew Allen, M.D. (Aberdeen) 1783–1845', *Med. Hist.*, 1965, **9**: 16–28. More specific references are given below.

[13] Richard Hunter and Ida Macalpine, '[Biographical] Introduction', John Conolly, *An inquiry concerning the indications of insanity*, facsimile reprint of 1830 ed., London, Dawsons, 1964, p. 33. The Phrenological Association was founded at the time of the British Association meeting in Newcastle in 1835. Conolly's name appears on the Committee as printed in *Zoist*, 1843, **1**: p. 220.

[14] Watson, op. cit., note 12 above, p. 165.

[15] D. Alexander, *A lecture on phrenology, as illustrative of the moral and intellectual capacities of man*, London, Baldwin, Cradock & Joy, 1826. Alexander was elected a corresponding member of the London Phrenological Society on 6 January 1827; the *P. J.* noted his paper to the Leeds Philosophical and Literature Society, 2 December 1831, on 'A phrenological analysis of the theory of dreams, spectral illusions, and some of the more usual phenomena of mental derangement', and on 9 June 1832 his essay to the Glasgow Phrenological Society, *P. J.*, 1831–1832, **7**: 189–190, 479.

[16] Barnet, op. cit., note 12 above; Watson, op. cit., note 12 above, pp. 140–141, 144–146, 155; and Matthew Allen, *Essay on the classification of the insane*, London, John Taylor, [1837], pp. viii–ix.

[17] For examples of his remarkable success as a phrenology lecturer before and after his appointment at Montrose, see *P. J.*, 1832–1834, **8**: 571–572, 662–663; and 1838, **11**: 214.

respectively.[18] James Davey was an influential member of the Phrenological Association and a vigorous author of addresses and phreno-medical tracts that ceased only with his death in 1895.[19] Rumball, it might be added, spent time lecturing on phrenology in the Midlands and in the South West, ran a phrenology shop in the Strand, submitted papers to the *Journal of Psychological Medicine* and made his mark in history by delineating the formidable head of Herbert Spencer.[20]

As lecturers on phrenology and writers of both popular and specialist medical works, these men had a considerable impact on the rest of the profession. The phrenological endeavours of Spurzheim, Combe, Ellis and Browne in particular, greatly contributed to the education of students and practitioners alike and their influence on leading American alienists like Amariah Brigham, Samuel Woodward and Pliny Earle soon resulted in a reciprocal transatlantic influence on British psychiatrists.[21] It is therefore possible to speak of a second line of phrenological alienists who, if less vocal on the subject, were nevertheless strongly influenced by phrenology in their dealings with the insane. The superintendents of some of the asylums that Rumball mentions can probably be included in this category as can Alexander Mackintosh, medical superintendent of the Dundee Royal Lunatic Asylum; David Uwins at the Peckham Asylum; Forbes Winslow, later editor of the *Journal of Psychological Medicine,* who ran two private asylums in Hammersmith; H. A. Galbraith, surgeon to the Glasgow Royal Lunatic Asylum; Samuel Hare, proprietor and medical attendant of the Retreat for the Insane near Leeds; Donald Mackintosh, superintendent of the Newcastle Lunatic Asylum; and John Kitching, medical superintendent of the Friends' Retreat at York in the 1850s. The phrenological views of these alienists can be traced through letters and articles and verified in some cases by membership in a phrenological society, of which there were over thirty in the first half of the century.

Altogether these alienists make up a list as impressive as it is substantial. It numbers

[18] J. Scott, *Extracts from lectures on phrenology*, Gosport, privately printed, 1838; on Wright see *New Monthly Mag.*, 1831, **33**: 28. Wright (M.D. Edinburgh) was appointed resident apothecary superintendent of Bethlem on 24 March 1819, formerly having held the post of apothecary. He was dismissed in 1830 after a long inquiry into his conduct, which included drunkenness. A fulsome tribute to Wright appears in *Sketches in Bedlam . . . by a constant observer*, London, Sherwood, Jones, 1823, pp. xxix–xxxi. Further reference to Wright will be found in Part II. I would like to thank the archivist of Bethlem, Patricia Allderidge, for her assistance in locating information on Wright.

[19] See, for example, his essays in: *P. J.*, 1842, **15**: 336–340, 1847, **20**: 147–156; *Zoist*, 1843, **1**: 111–119; *Lancet*, 19 March 1842, **i**: 850–852, 30 April 1842, **ii**: 158–160; *Med. Times*, 1842, **6**: 291–293, 310–311; *J. psychol. Med.*, 1859, **6**: 31–38, 1864, **10**: 168–194, 1875, N. S. **1**: 88–97, 1876, N. S. **2**: 252–262, 1879, N. S. **5**: 172–204; *Br. med. J.*, 1 March 1884, **i**: 420.

[20] See *J. psychol. Med.*, 1851, **4**: 392–407; 1862, N. S. **2**: 12–37; there are many references to Rumball in the *People's Phrenological Journal*, 1843, **1**; the details of Spencer's delineation are given in Herbert Spencer, *An autobiography*, London, Williams & Norgate, 1904, vol. 1, pp. 200–201.

[21] No comprehensive study has been made of the considerable influence of phrenology in American psychiatry. The subject receives partial attention in Eric T. Carlson, 'The influence of phrenology on early American psychiatric thought', *Amer. J. Psychiat.*, 1958, **115**: 535–538; John D. Davies, 'Phrenology and insanity', in his *Phrenology fad and science. A nineteenth century American crusade*, New Haven, Conn., Yale University Press, 1955, pp. 89–97; Harold Schwartz, 'Samuel Gridley Howe as phrenologist', *Amer. hist. Rev.*, 1951–1952, **57**: 644–651; and in Norman Dain, *Concepts of insanity in the United States, 1789–1865*, New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press, 1964, pp. 61ff, 87ff. Of related importance see David Bakan, 'The influence of phrenology on American psychology', *J. Hist. behav. Sci.*, 1966, **2**: 200–220.

ten of the medical superintendents of the twenty-three public asylums in England and Scotland in 1844 and among them all those which were considered most advanced in management and humanity. It includes too the proprietors, managers, surgeons and apothecaries of some of the more highly regarded borough and private asylums of the time. Undoubtedly there were others for whom there is yet no evidence, just as there are marginal figures connected with the asylums whose phrenological influence is not readily ascertained. Charles Augustus Tulk (1786–1849), for instance, was the Chairman of the Committee of Management of Hanwell from 1839 to 1847; earlier he had been a friend and correspondent of Spurzheim and had served at times as the President of the London Phrenological Society in the 1830s.[22] More difficult to trace but potentially of more direct influence in encouraging phrenological techniques could have been persons such as the matron who had worked under Browne at Montrose and who subsequently took up appointment under Conolly at Hanwell.[23] On the other hand, it is also apparent that there were some managers of asylums who desired to be considered as operating on phrenological principles though they had, as Andrew Combe discovered in 1836, only a slight awareness of the science's principles and utility.[24] But the fact that these alienists wanted to be seen as being guided by phrenology—apparently to make their management seem respectably fashionable—gives a further indication of the extent of phrenology's influence at the time.

II

Despite later claims about the immediate revolutionary impact of the phrenological theory, its acceptance by alienists was gradual and cumulative, progressively so as the older generation of alienists died off. Though by 1803 most alienists in Britain had probably heard, along with the readers of the *Edinburgh Review*, of "Dr. Gall and his skulls",[25] it was not Gall but his contemporaries Pinel and Tuke who were beginning to have a slight impact on British asylums. Gall's direct influence was in fact almost negligible. His great multivolume work, *Sur les fonctions du cerveau*, did not begin publication until 1822 and was not translated into English until 1835 and then only in America. Gall's one visit to England in May 1823 scarcely received comment and only one London medical journal gave any report of his lectures.[26] Spurzheim's British tour of 1814 attracted some medical attention largely due to his demonstration of the new technique of brain dissection, but it was not until his later visit in 1816

[22] Mary Catherine Hume, *A brief sketch of the life, character, and religious opinions of Charles Augustus Tulk*, 2nd ed., London, John Speirs, 1890.

[23] Walk, op. cit., note 2 above, p. 26*n*. This is the Mrs. Bowden (*née* Powell) praised alongside Tulk in John Conolly, *The treatment of the insane without mechanical restraints*, London, Smith, Elder, 1856, p. 274, and noted in Sir James Clark, *A memoir of John Conolly, M.D.*, London, John Murray, 1869, p. 26. Another member of Hanwell's Committee of Management, who was also praised by Conolly, was Serjeant Adams, a member of the Phrenological Association.

[24] Cited in George Combe, *The life and correspondence of Andrew Combe, M.D.*, Edinburgh, Maclachlan & Stewart, 1850, p. 277.

[25] [Thomas Brown], 'Viller, sur une nouvelle theorie de cerveau', *Edinb. Rev.*, 1803, **2**: 147. For the earliest references to phrenology in British medical journals see J. S. Streeter's letter to Samuel Solly, April 1847, in Solly, *The human brain*, 2nd ed., London, Longman, 1846, pp. xi–xiii.

[26] 'Dr. Gall's lectures on the physiology of the brain', *Weekly Medico-Chirurgical & Philosophical Mag.*, 24 May to 23 August 1823, **1**: 241–369, **2**: 2–68 (serially).

and subsequent tours in the 'twenties that a significant amount of interest (both medical and popular) was drawn to the theory. Thomas Forster, who had coined the word "phrenology" for the doctrine in January 1815,[27] dedicated a work to Spurzheim in 1817 and observed that

> Although you have left Great Britain without establishing so fully in the minds of British Anatomists the truth of the doctrines respecting the Organs of the Brain, as the clearness of the proofs seemed to warrant . . . yet the valuable Observations on Insanity, and its periodical exacerbations, which you have given to the World in your late Work, will give rise to a better knowledge and treatment of that disease.[28]

Forster was referring to Spurzheim's *Observations on the deranged manifestations of the mind or insanity* first published in London in 1817. Yet it is doubtful if this work had much immediate success in bringing British alienists around to a phrenological point of view. As the *Lancet* later noted, it was a "complete and excellent treatise on insanity" but it proffered no specifically phrenological plan of treatment. The *Lancet* concluded its review with the observation that "Phrenology has furnished the theory and argument [of insanity]; reason and experience the practice."[29] However, it was only after the publication of Andrew Combe's more cogent treatise, *Observations on mental derangement; being an application of the principles of phrenology to the elucidation of the causes, symptoms, nature, and treatment of insanity* (1831), that this "theory and argument" of phrenology really began to have a decisive impact on British psychiatric thought. Thereafter phrenological pyschiatry can be said to have taken root and reaffirmed the belief in its revolutionary claim to solve the enigma of Mind. As Forbes Winslow declared in his *The principles of phrenology as applied to the elucidation and cure of insanity* (1832): "Until the opinions of Drs. Spurzheim and Combe were published on this subject the definitions of insanity were vague and contradictory".[30] The opinion now became widely shared that an "elucidation" had been formulated where none had previously existed.

Since psychiatry formed no separate branch of medical education in the early nineteenth century, one means of gaining an insight on the advancement of phrenology in psychiatry can be found in the reception of the doctrine within the medical profession generally. An important boost from this direction came in 1821 when the celebrated lecturer on surgery, John Abernethy, acknowledged the soundness of Gall and Spurzheim's physiology and admitted that he could offer no rational objection to the system which he believed worthy of medical attention. Abernethy cautioned though, that he foresaw "nothing but mischief" if the system became generally known

[27] Thomas Forster, 'Observations on a new system of phrenology, or the anatomy and physiology of the brain, of Drs. Gall and Spurzheim', *Phil. Mag. & J.*, 1815, **45**: 44–50.

[28] T. Forster, *Observations on the casual and periodical influence of particular states of the atmosphere on human health and disease, particularly insanity*, London, T. & J. Underwood and Baldwin, Cradock & Joy, 1817, pp. vi–vii. Shortly before leaving England in 1817, Spurzheim had been admitted a licentiate of the Royal College of Physicians, London. W. Munk, *Roll of the Royal College of Physicians, London*, London, Royal College of Physicians, 1878, vol. 3, pp. 166–168.

[29] 'Spurzheim, Knight, and Morison on insanity', *Lancet*, 14 April 1827, **12**: 53–54, 21 April, 84, 85. Cf. Andrew Combe, *Observations on mental derangement*, Edinburgh, John Anderson, 1831, p. 324, where it is also noted that Spurzheim appears to offer nothing new by way of treating the insane and that his work is best appreciated by those already familiar with phrenology.

[30] London, Samuel Highley, p. 11.

and accredited.[31] The outspoken cockney hero of medical students, John Elliotson, had no such reservations and his incorporation of the subject into his lectures and his establishment of the London Phrenological Society in 1823, made the science increasingly difficult for others to overlook. By February of that year the *Weekly Medico-Chirurgical and Philosophical Magazine* was presenting its readers with leader articles and illustrations of the science and this coverage was soon extended in Wakley's *Lancet* (established in October 1823) where the doctrine was upheld as both "beautiful and useful".[32] In a more literary fashion the science received further promotion in the *Medico-Chirurgical Review*[33] edited by James Johnson and in the *British and Foreign Medical Review* edited by John Forbes, himself a member of the Phrenological Association. By 1833 the subject had obtained sufficient standing among the medical profession to be lectured on at the London Hospital, St. Thomas's Hospital, Grainger's Theatre of Anatomy, Dermott's School of Medicine and at the London University[34] as well as at such non-medical clubs as the London Institution and the Philomathic Institution. In the medical schools outside of London phrenology found similar shelter and advancement: in Manchester, Daniel Noble lectured on the science at the Chatham Street School of Medicine; in Glasgow, the subject found a spokesman in Robert Hunter, Professor of Anatomy at the Andersonian University; and in Edinburgh, phrenologists looked favourably on the lectures of John Mackintosh, lecturer on pathology and the practice of physic at the Argyle Square School of Medicine.[35] In the provinces as well, the "Lit. & Phils." and mechanics' institutes along with the phrenological societies further contributed to propagate the doctrine and to make it fashionable among a wide audience.

Not all who wrote or spoke on phrenology, however, were necessarily endorsing

[31] J. Abernethy, *Reflections on Gall and Spurzheim's system of physiognomy and phrenology. Addressed to the Court of Assistants of the Royal College of Surgeons, in London, in June, 1821*, London, Longman, 1821, pp. 48–49, 7–9. The end-of-the-century phrenologist, Ambrose Lewis Vago, was convinced that this expression of Abernethy's did most to make phrenology medically respectable; thereafter, says Vago, "a surgery was considered to be incompletely furnished without such a bust; and a phrenological head was a regular item in the order for an outfit such as supplied to medical men by the firm of Messrs. Maw, Son, and Thompson, surgical instrument makers of London." *Phrenology vindicated*, London, Simpkin, [1879], p. 56. Much the same was repeated by the phrenologist Bernard Hollander, *In search of the soul*, London, Kegan Paul, [1920], vol. 1, p. 345.

[32] *Lancet*, 16 April 1825, **i**: 41. Between 1824 and 1851 the *Lancet* devoted over 600 pages exclusively to phrenology, including a full course of eighteen lectures by Spurzheim (April to September, 1825) and a course of twenty lectures by François Broussais (June to September, 1836).

[33] It described phrenology in 1826 as "the most intelligible and self consistent system of mental philosophy that has ever yet been presented to the contemplation of inquisitive men." 'Phrenology and physiognomy', N. S. **5**: p. 437. See also, ibid., 1817, **4**: 53–63, 117–134; 1824, N. S. **4**: 847–882; 1831, N. S. **14**: 321–322; 1835, N. S. **23**: 361–370.

[34] 'Account of the schools of medicine in London, session 1833–4', *Lancet*, 28 September 1833, **i**: 7. See also, Dr. J. W. Crane, 'State of phrenology in Great Britain [with notes by the *Lancet* reporter]', *Lancet*, 22 June 1833, **ii**: 407–408; and J. F. Clarke, *Autobiographical recollections of the medical profession*, London, J. Churchill, 1874, pp. 125–126. The first person to deliver a course of lectures on phrenology to a British medical school (other than the lectures of Gall and Spurzheim) was Henry Haley Holm (1806–1846), Spurzheim's closest friend in London. Ironically, these lectures were begun on the day Spurzheim died, 10 November 1832. Obituary on Holm, *P. J.*, 1846, **19**: 286–289.

[35] It is worth noting that George Combe gave by request six lectures on insanity to Dr. Mackintosh's class of 200 students in April 1832. Charles Gibbon, *The life of George Combe*, London, Macmillan, 1878, vol. 1, pp. 254–255.

the science in all its details. Votaries of Gall differed widely on their acceptance of the principles, particularly with relation to the practical aspects of cranioscopy, and not everyone who took an interest in the science agreed with phrenologists that it was the best or the only system with which to explain the moral and intellectual nature of man. While those alienists designated the "hard core" came closest to accepting all aspects of phrenology, the majority of those in the medical profession who were receptive to the ideas of the phrenologists were often only sharing—publicly at least—the sentiment of James Johnson, that "without subscribing to all the details of phrenology, I believe its fundamental principles to be based on truth."[36]

Such reserved statements of acceptance were expedient, for despite phrenology's advancement within certain medical quarters, opposition to the doctrine remained considerable. During the first three decades of the century in particular, there was persistent ridicule of the notion that a man's faculties could be determined by a detailed examination of his cranium and satirical invective was heaped upon the supposed validity of a detailed organology. Added to this was the opposition, mainly from outside the medical profession, that levelled the charges of fatalism and materialism on the science. The details of these debates between phrenologists and anti-phrenologists, especially as dramatized in Edinburgh in the early decades of the century, need not detain us here.[37] What *is* worth noting is the social and intellectual climate that surrounded the debated subject during the period under consideration, for this, as much as any direct contact with phrenology in the medical schools and journals, or through the literary societies and phrenological publications, formed an important part of the increasing awareness of the doctrine by alienists. Attacks in leading journals like the *Edinburgh*, the *Quarterly* and *Blackwoods*, together with the denunciations by men of eminence such as Sir Charles Bell, Dr. P. M. Roget, Dr. John Gordon, Sir William Hamilton, Dr. Thomas Stone and Dr. John Barclay, to name but a few,[38] were important as much for the serious interest in the doctrine which they displayed, as for their opposition. The audience of these opponents understood well that not only were personal reputations at stake in the debate but, since the antagonists were within the scientific élite, that the élite itself was being threatened by phrenology. Under these circumstances professions of belief in phrenology became symbolic of views antipathic to the accepted canons of the academic establishment in particular and to traditional ideas and institutions in general. Though Gall's doctrine might as easily have lent itself to defending the *status quo* (Gall, after all, had reacted against Enlightenment thought, especially the Sensation-

[36] Letter, James Johnson to George Combe in *Testimonials on behalf of George Combe as a candidate for the chair of logic in the University of Edinburgh*, Edinburgh, John Anderson, 1836, p. 67.

[37] For a full discussion of the phrenology debate in Edinburgh see G. N. Cantor and S. Shapin, 'Phrenology in early nineteenth-century Edinburgh: an historiographical discussion', *Ann. Sci.*, 1975, **32**: 195–256. Dr. Shapin's contribution to the discussion ('Phrenological knowledge and the social structure of early nineteenth century Edinburgh', pp. 219–243) has been heavily relied upon for sharpening the focus in what follows. I am indebted to both authors for allowing me to make use of their scholarship prior to its publication.

[38] For specific references to these better-known events in phrenology's history in Britain see: Cantor and Shapin, ibid.; Temkin, op. cit., note 8 above; de Giustino, op. cit., note 4 above; and T. M. Parssinen, 'Popular science and society: the phrenology movement in early Victorian Britain', *J. social Hist.*, 1974, **7**: 1–20.

alism of Helvétius, and his concept of innate faculties could have been used to justify the futility of attempting any reform of man's character) the doctrine was deployed as a confrontation to the British academic élite. What emerged from these debates was the characterization of phrenology as a tool for legitimating radical change and reform.

Phrenology thus attracted a body of men who, for a variety of cultural, political and idiosyncratic reasons, wished to utilize phrenology for specific social purposes. Though many of these men were themselves members of medical and social élites, they shared a common set of assumptions about and liberal approaches to the institutional arrangements of their society. Not unlike the seventeenth-century Puritan scientists described by Robert Merton,[39] most of them maintained an exaggerated contempt for the *ancien régime* and expressed this in a profound conviction in the future progress and reformation of society through the application of science. Gall's doctrine, as shaped into a more progressive philosophy in Britain by Spurzheim and George Combe, was easily translated into a scientific legitimation of these reformist ambitions, which became all the more sharply defined by the nature of the opposition. Not surprisingly, young middle-class liberals who resented the political, social and cultural restrictions still imposed upon them by the *ancien régime* were strongly attracted to this science, philosophy and social programme that promised such fundamental and sweeping changes to the society about them.

It is necessary to recognize therefore that when medical men turned to advocating phrenology or to joining a phrenological society[40] they did so not merely because they had become convinced intellectually that Gall's doctrine was scientifically sound. Of equal, if not more, significance to them was the fact that the doctrine symbolized that which challenged the traditional values of the establishment in the context of a rapidly emerging new social and economic order. This socially symbolic role of phrenology was as important for the attraction of alienists to the doctrine as it was for any other occupational group. Indeed, two further social considerations might substantiate a claim that alienists were particularly attracted to phrenology for social reasons. First, since asylums in this period were one of the chief targets of evangelical reformers, alienists were already that much more concerned and involved with Victorian reform than other members of the medical profession. As Norman Dain has suggested in his study of American psychiatric thought, this involvement of alienists with social reform might well indicate that it was as reformers rather than as psychiatrists that phrenology made its extensive appeal.[41] The doctrine certainly harboured a set of social values and beliefs with which they could identify and through the science itself these values could be justified. For instance the idea which British phrenologists increasingly stressed, that man had innate faculties which could be gradually modified and improved through a better environment, nicely agreed with reforming aspirations. The medico-scientific insights revealed by Gall's doctrine may

[39] R. Merton, *Science, technology and society in seventeenth century England*, new ed., New York, Howard Fertig, 1970.

[40] According to the *P. J.*, "one-third of the hundred writers on Phrenology [in Britain], and one-sixth of the thousand members of phrenological societies, are physicians or surgeons". 1838, **11**: 263.

[41] Dain, op. cit., note 21 above, p. 167.

thus have only helped to justify pre-existing or emergent social motivations. Second, the separateness of the alienists within their asylums might have hastened their adoption of phrenology as a socially-engaging doctrine. Although the wide intellectual connexions and social involvement of men like Browne, Ellis and Conolly, both before and after they became alienists, militate against the notion of alienists as *alienated*, with many of the lesser-known figures the separation of the asylum from the rest of society could possibly have been a significant factor in encouraging phrenological positions.[42] Armed with phrenology, the alienist was no longer merely a "mad-doctor"; he became a proto-social scientist studying an aspect of deviance, the knowledge from which was intimately connected with answers to other pressing social issues such as education and criminal reform.

A very wide range of social considerations could thus have underpinned the acceptance of phrenology by alienists and medical education may either have sparked or only fanned that interest. When we observe that, in addition to being solidly middle class in background, the alienists discussed here were, with few exceptions, less than thirty-five years old when they were first attracted to the science; were predominantly Nonconformists;[43] were firmly imbued with an Enlightenment faith in Progress and the improvement of mankind through the application of science; and were liberals in politics, often playing leading roles in various reform programmes, it is difficult to maintain that the social-reformist countenance of phrenology was merely a coincidental feature of their accepting the doctrine. On the contrary, it appears that social considerations were of primary importance for motivating and for perpetuating interest in a doctrine which boldly asserted its dismissal of old theories while holding out the promise of vast reforms in the care and curing of the insane.

Such factors need stressing, for although phrenology's full appeal to British alienists cannot be understood without referring to the specific scientific aspects of Gall's doctrine, it is easy to overlook what phrenology meant in the social currency of the time when discussing the more internalist issues. In turning our attention to phrenology's involvement with clinical psychiatry, it is worth bearing in mind, therefore, that we are not dealing with simply a "scientific" aspect of psychiatry but rather with a body of uninstitutionalized thought that, while being applied in practical psychiatry, was also popular outside its domain. It was supported and advanced by a normally distinguishable social group and was opposed for social as well as scientific reasons by an equally distinguishable traditionalist élite. It is because of this special nature of phrenology and because of the doctrine's significant place in psychiatry that the scientific approach to early nineteenth-century psychiatry is fundamentally as social as it is scientific.

[42] Even Conolly felt upon first arriving at Hanwell that he had "severed myself from the ordinary ways and customs of men, and from the cheering influences of society". 'Recollections of the varieties of insanity', *Med. Times Gaz.*, 1860, **1**: 9.

[43] Ellis and Conolly, for example, both belonged to the Church of England, became apostate and then joined, respectively, the Methodists and the Unitarians. Hunter and Macalpine, op. cit., note 13 above, p. 11. The secular-tending sympathies of W. A. F. Browne, which were common among most phrenologists, may be observed in his *Observations on religious fanaticism; illustrated by a comparison of the belief and conduct of noted religious enthusiasts with those of patients in the Montrose Lunatic Asylum*, Edinburgh, privately printed, 1835.

III

Since Gall had conducted his many years of research with the primary objective of having the "happiest influence on moral institutions, in the treatment of cerebral disease, particularly mental alienation,"[44] there was good reason why his elaborate anatomical and physiological studies should have gained the attention of British alienists, however indirectly. Although the practice of incarcerating lunatics was losing support among mad-doctors in the early nineteenth century, thanks chiefly to the influence of Pinel and Tuke, no equally bold innovation for the understanding of mental derangement had been popularized. Nor was it likely that any new theory would be put forward so long as the Cartesian proscription on the scientific study of the mind prevailed and metaphysics remained divorced from anatomy. With the brain regarded as an organ of sensation and reflection and with the terms of reference based on the speculative faculties of Imagination, Reason, Memory, etc., a discussion of the insane mind could seldom be more than an "academical exercise".[45] Gall, though he rejected the anti-Cartesian metaphysics of his Sensationalist contemporaries, nevertheless effectively undermined the Cartesian framework by constructing a *physiological* psychology based on the brain as the organ of the mind. The dichotomy between mind and body was thus endangered and the study of mind became united with neurology on the one hand and with the biology of adaptation on the other. It was for this reason—this removal of mind from psychology and its replacement in biology—that George Henry Lewes, who was no champion of popular phrenology, felt that Gall had "produced a revolution" and could be styled "the Kepler of Psychology".[46]

Alienists, as practitioners rather than theoreticians, were alive to the inadequacies of faculty psychology for producing any practical insights into the nature and treatment of insanity. Although materialistic explanations of derangement had not actually been sought, alienists *had* been searching "long and anxiously", according to John Haslam in 1817, for an adequate definition of insanity and "these efforts [had] been hitherto fruitless".[47] Haslam felt, along with many fellow alienists, that "whenever the functions of the brain shall be fully understood, and the use of its different parts ascertained, we may then be enabled to judge how far disease, attacking any of these parts, may increase, diminish, or otherwise alter its functions."[48] Gall's doctrine claimed to supply precisely this need. Perhaps it was natural, therefore, that once

[44] F. J. Gall, *On the functions of the brain and of each of its parts*, trans. by Winslow Lewis, Jr., Boston, Phrenological Library, Nahum Capen ed., 1835, vol. 1, p. 54. Except where indicated all references are to this edition.

[45] Such was Conolly's comment on his medical dissertation on mania and melancholia (Edinburgh, 1821). 'Recollections', op. cit., note 42 above, p. 9.

[46] 'Phrenology', in G. H. Lewes, *Biographical history of philosophy*, rev. ed., London, Parker & Son, 1857, p. 640, and 'Psychology finally recognised as a branch of Biology. The phrenological hypothesis', in the 3rd ed., (newly titled) *The history of philosophy from Thales to Comte*, London, Longmans, 1867, vol. 2, p. 410.

[47] J. Haslam, *Medical jurisprudence, as it relates to insanity, according to the law of England*, London, Hunter, 1817, p. 62.

[48] J. Haslam, *Observations on madness and melancholy*, 2nd ed., London, privately printed, 1809, pp. 237–238.

alienists had been drawn to the doctrine their condemnation of established metaphysics was severe.[49] "With *Phrenology* it is otherwise", wrote Disney Alexander in 1826: "The founders of that Science . . . did not commence their labours with any preconcerted view of creating, or supporting, a favourite hypothesis; but were led . . . into a train of observations on the functions of the brain; from which they, at length, drew those inferences. . . ."[50]

This was where the science of phrenology supposedly divided itself from the woolly metaphysical thinking of the faculty psychologists; its methodology, claimed to be rigorously Baconian, spoke only of facts and repeated observations.[51] The result was a simplistic physiological explanation of mental organization and function which, unlike faculty psychology it seemed, could be readily applied to understanding insanity. This utility of the science was heralded as a further confirmation of its truth for, as "Bacon inferred that Aristotle's philosophy was false, because it was barren . . . it is a legitimate inference from the same principle, that phrenology is true because it is fruitful."[52] But if the claim seemed sweeping that through phrenology the mysteries of the mind and of lunacy were to fade into insignificance, a closer look at Gall's doctrine showed that it was by no means insupportable. Nor, in view of some of the contemporaneous advances in the physical sciences, was the claim perhaps so startling.

Gall's first point, that the brain was the organ of the mind, was alone a milestone for clearer thought. Though the idea was not Gall's own, no one before him had argued so specifically or with so much detail in its defence. Gall's major opponent in France, Pierre Flourens, readily acknowledged that

> The merit of Gall, and it is by no means a slender merit, consists in having understood better than any of his predecessors the whole of its importance [of the brain being the organ of the mind], and in having devoted himself to its demonstration. It existed in science before Gall appeared—it may be said to reign there ever since his appearance.[53]

In linking physiology of function and anatomy with psychology, Gall was correctly identified as the first to establish the brain as the organ of the mind on a scientific basis. The brain thus came to be regarded "as part and parcel of the human organism, and as subject in common with the liver and lungs, etc., to similar organic laws and sympathies".[54]

The second aspect of Gall's doctrine, that the brain was a congeries of organs,

[49] Dr. William Collin Engledue's remarks on metaphysics before Gall are typical of the more materialistic phrenological view: "crude indigestible masses of metaphysical speculation! What heaps of idle theories! What display of learned ignorance! . . . useless lumber!" *Zoist*, 1843, **1**: 6.

[50] Alexander, *A lecture on phrenology*, op. cit., note 15 above, p. 2.

[51] John Mackintosh, *Elements of pathology, and practice of physic*, Edinburgh, Longman, 1830, vol. 2, p. 5.

[52] '[Rev. of] Spurzheim on education', *New Edinb. Rev.*, 1821, **1**: 327. This journal was also edited by Richard Poole. It is interesting that the sharp distinction between the metaphysical and scientific stages of a discipline was developed by Comte, who drew heavily on phrenology for his conception of biology, psychology and the components of knowledge.

[53] P. Flourens, *Phrenology examined*, trans. by Charles de Lucene Meigs, Philadelphia, Hogan & Thompson, 1846, pp. 27–28, quoted in Young, op. cit., note 5 above, pp. 20–21.

[54] James George Davey, *On the nature, and proximate cause, of insanity*, London, J. Churchill, 1853, p. 26*n*, quoting himself from a decade previous.

had also been expressed long before Gall,[55] but for the first time "Nature's evidence" was marshalled in support of the idea through Gall's extensive labours in comparative anatomy. That Gall had proved himself a neuro-anatomist *par excellence* was of course a key factor for the doctrine's credibility among medical men, for anatomy, beyond even physiology, was universally accepted as a firmly established science about which no speculations could exist. A doctrine so empirically based, many believed, must necessarily be grounded in truth. Moreover, in spite of the brain's appearance, the notion of cerebral localization was a logical and desirable one if only by analogy with the functions of the rest of the body's organs. By 1842 even the hostile *Edinburgh Review* was willing to concede this much, while rejecting the details of Gall's organology.[56] Similarly, Gall's third premise, that "each particular cerebral part, according to its development, may modify, in some degree, the manifestation of a particular moral quality, or intellectual faculty",[57] (which would later become the *caeteris paribus* clause that other factors being equal, size is a measure of power), also seemed reasonable through analogies in the natural world and with the rest of the body. As expressed by the Manchester lecturer, Daniel Noble, "Unless rules of investigation apply to the brain's physiology which differ from those relating to the remaining organization" then these principles of Gall's could not possibly be denied.[58]

It is not difficult therefore to understand why medical men should have found these concepts attractive on medical grounds alone: in many respects they were simply an extension of the physiological premises they had already come to accept. Gall's organology did not demand a radically new way of understanding function. Nor did some of the other concepts relied upon by phrenologists mark any distinct break with older medical ideas. The division of man into the four basic temperaments as a basis for phrenological delineations was a clear link between the old and the new, while the phrenological explanation of rational behaviour as mental organs in a balanced state bore a strong resemblance to the balance of the "passions" in the humoral tradition. John Mackintosh felt obliged to inform his students in 1830 that it was on

[55] On the origin and antiquity of Gall's ideas see: Madison Bentley, 'The psychological antecedents of phrenology', *Psychological Monographs*, 1916, **21**: 102–115; Edwin Clarke and C. D. O'Malley, *The human brain and spinal cord. A historical study illustrated by writings from antiquity to the twentieth century*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1968; Erna Lesky, 'Structure and function in Gall', *Bull. Hist. Med.*, 1970, **44**: 297–314; H. W. Magoun, 'Development of ideas relating the mind with the brain', in C. Brooks and Paul Cranefield (eds.), *The historical development of physiological thought*, New York, Hafner, 1959; Nicholas H. Steneck, 'Albert the Great on the classification and localization of the internal senses', *Isis*, 1974, **65**: 193–211; A. Earl Walker, 'The development of the concept of cerebral localization in the nineteenth century', *Bull. Hist. Med.*, 1957, **31**: 99–121. While opponents of phrenology took the doctrine's antiquity to argue against its novelty, phrenologists used it to show the doctrine's "respectable heritage". See, 'The phrenology of the middle ages, to ed.', *Gentleman's Mag.*, 1833, **103**: 126–128; 'Historical notice of early opinions regarding the functions of the brain', *P. J.*, 1824–1825, **2**: 378–391; and 'Antiquity of phrenology', *Lancet*, 5 August 1826, **10**: 599.

[56] [Alexander Smith], 'Phrenological ethics', *Edinb. Rev.*, 1842, **74**: 391.

[57] Gall, op. cit., note 44 above, vol. 2, p. 224.

[58] D. Noble, *The brain and its physiology; a critical disquisition on the methods of determining the relations subsisting between the structure and functions of the encephalon*, London, J. Churchill, 1846, pp. 123–124. Noble (1810–1885), F.R.C.S., F.R.C.P., was a leading Manchester physician, a member of the Provincial Medical Association Council, President of the Lancashire and Cheshire branch of the British Medical Association and Visiting Physician to the Clifden Hall Retreat and Why House Lunatic Asylum, Buxton. Further reference to Noble will be found in Part II.

the basis of his past "experience and observation" that he concluded that there was much truth in phrenology.[59] Similarly, the author of the standard Victorian text on the *Principles of forensic medicine* (1843), William Guy, confessed to adopting the principles of phrenology because they composed a theory "best agreeing with reason and experience."[60] The view of man as a rational mechanism influenced by natural laws was also a well-established and physiologically-supportable concept by the 1820s. In giving a biological context to the organs of the mind, Gall's doctrine logically elevated or extended this paradigm to the brain. For alienists this removed the frustration of not being able to treat the deranged mind as they would localized diseases elsewhere in the body. Gall was thus seen as having produced a scientific framework for an organization of mind and body that would facilitate a physical understanding of the organs of the mind in their healthy and deranged states.

The fourth aspect of Gall's doctrine[61] was never so defensible from nature nor as convincing in principle. That since the cranium was ossified over the shape of the brain, one's organology could be determined by an external examination of the skull, was a point that caused many persons a great deal of doubt and required of others considerable faith. Yet it was craniology that gained for phrenology not only its notoriety but its most zealous converts. To explain this faith we can make few appeals to the logic, analogies or past medical experience that serve us for the other aspects of Gall's doctrine.[62] But this does not mean that a belief in cranioscopy should be attributed to blind credulity. The comparison with the miraculous insulin cure for schizophrenia in our own time should help our understanding here. In both cases it was subsequently shown that there was virtually no medical foundation for the claims, yet in both cases, and with neither intentional fraud nor deception, the results—cures and accurate delineations—justified the faith in the practice. When Gall and Spurzheim paraded through the asylums and prisons of Germany and described with uncanny accuracy the reasons why each inmate was confined, their entourage of doctors, warders and civic officials could hardly do otherwise than believe that this was

[59] Mackintosh, op. cit., note 51 above, vol. 2, p. 4.

[60] P. 207. A 6th ed. of this work in 1888, with David Ferrier as editor, still retained the praise for the reasonableness of phrenology.

[61] I have presented here the four aspects of Gall's doctrine that were generally considered in Britain as the most fundamental parts of his theory. It is worth recalling that Gall was not widely read in Britain and that Gall himself listed the four suppositions of his doctrine as "1. That moral and intellectual faculties are innate. 2. That their exercise or manifestation depends on organization. 3. That the brain is the organ of all the propensities, sentiments, and faculties. 4. That the brain is composed of as many particular organs as there are propensities, sentiments, and faculties, which differ essentially from each other." 'Advertisement', op. cit., note 44 above, vol. 1, p. 55.

[62] Craniology can be related, however, to the more general interest in physiognomy, a great many articles on which appear in the *Asylum Journal* (later the *J. ment. Sci.*). An interest in anthropology by many alienists was another path to craniology, as the anthropological and ethnological journals reveal. Conolly was an early member of the Ethnological Society in the 1840s and was President of the Society in 1855–1856. John Thurnam (1810–1873), joint author with Joseph Barnard Davies of the definitive and much acclaimed *Crania Britannica* (1856), was medical superintendent of the Wiltshire County Asylum from 1851 until his death and was twice the President of the Medico-Psychological Association. As the *J. ment. Sci.* was pleased to note in its review of the *Crania*, a "comparatively large number of names of medical officers connected with our English asylums are found in the list of *subscribers*." 1864, **10**: 569–570.

a correct system, however marvellous.[63] Those who saw Spurzheim's demonstrations in Britain, or those of George Combe, were similarly amazed and often totally convinced of the theory thereby. Even more persuasive was an "accurate" delineation of oneself or one's friends. The English authority on brain anatomy, the medical lecturer and Fellow of the Royal Society, Samuel Solly (1805–1871), was only one of countless physicians who, though having ample reason to praise Gall without reference to cranioscopy, yet headed his list of reasons for believing in phrenology with the confirmation "I have received from practical phrenologists . . . such accurate characters of individuals known to me, but unknown to them, that I cannot believe the accounts I received could be the result of accident and conjecture, which must have been the case if phrenology is untrue."[64] Solly's second reason, incidently, was that phrenology alone could account for all the varieties of insanity.

Most of the alienists referred to here and all those within the "hard core" of phrenological alienists were among the cranioscopic enthusiasts and for them it was no mere arabesque to the doctrine. William Ellis, who was probably attracted to phrenology as a result of Spurzheim's visit to Wakefield in the early 1820s and Matthew Allen's lectures there a few years later, believed very firmly in the practical value of cranioscopy. In a letter from Hanwell of December 1835 he stated that he "examine[d] the heads of all patients on admission & direct[ed] their treatment accordingly."[65] In calling for proper psychiatric education, he further stressed the benefits to be derived from a knowledge of craniology, noting that a "mere examination of the head, without any previous knowledge of or information whatever as to the habits of the patient" can often provide specific information on the type of insanity involved.[66] Where else in fact was a physician more in need of an external guide for internal diseases than in the diagnoses and treatment of the insane? Though Gall, Spurzheim and Andrew Combe stressed that "in insanity the configuration of heads is neither to be overlooked, nor to be over-rated" since diseases of the brain like diseases elsewhere were subject to "infinite modification", they agreed that "in the greater number of cases" a relationship could be observed between an enlarged organ manifested in

[63] See Gall, op. cit., note 44 above, vol. 6, pp. 295–306, where his visit to the prisons of Berlin and Spandau are quoted from *Freymüthige*, May 1805; and [Richard Chenevix], 'Gall and Spurzheim —phrenology', *For. & quart. Rev.*, 1828, **2**: 12–14.

[64] Solly, op. cit., note 25 above, p. 339. Solly's interest in phrenology was inspired by Spurzheim's demonstration of brain dissection at St. Thomas's Hospital in 1823 (ibid., pp. x–xi). Character readings from the cranium were of course double-edged: writing on 'Insanity' in his *Dictionary of practical medicine*, London, Longman, 1858, vol. 2, p. 503*n*, James Copland noted that he had had his head examined by eminent phrenologists and (as was the case with John Stuart Mill) he was dissatisfied with the findings. The opposite result was much more common, however, and a clear case for its effects on a alienist can be seen through Pliny Earle's enthusiasm for phrenology after he had had his head examined by the American practical phrenologist, Lorenzo Fowler. See, Madeline B. Stern, *Heads and headlines, the phrenological Fowlers*, University of Oklahoma Press, 1971, p. 42.

[65] A photocopy of the letter and transcript appears in Richard Hunter and Ida Macalpine, *Three hundred years of psychiatry 1535–1860*, London, Oxford University Press, 1963, pp. 819–820.

[66] W. Ellis, *A treatise on the nature, symptoms, causes, and treatment of insanity with practical observations on lunatic asylums and a description of the pauper lunatic asylum for the county of Middlesex at Hanwell with a detailed account of its management*, London, S. Holdsworth, 1838, p. 256; see also pp. 220–221.

the cranial structure and the specific type of insanity.[67]

Ellis's praise and practice of phrenology made a deep impression on others. Alexander Mackintosh, who visited Wakefield as a doubter of the system, returned to the Dundee Asylum converted to Ellis's methods.[68] Harriet Martineau paid a visit to Hanwell in 1834 and, though a scoffer at phrenology, she willingly agreed with almost every other visitor that Ellis's system of classification "to which he has been led by his adoption of phrenological principles," showed undoubtable wisdom.[69] Conolly also visited Hanwell in that year and was prompted to address the Provincial Medical Association: "There is reason to hope that as a result of the humane and enlightened management of the large lunatic asylum at Hanwell, under the superintendence of Dr. Ellis, this [phrenological] branch of practice may hereafter be more satisfactorily spoken of."[70]

Conolly's acquaintance with phrenology stemmed from as far back as the early 1820s when he had been a student in Edinburgh. It was probably there that he had witnessed George Combe's delineations on some prisoners after which he had little doubt of phrenology's truth.[71] As he told the members of the Royal Institution in 1854, he was still convinced that "although the doctrines of the phrenologists have met with little favour . . . no person not altogether devoid of the power of observation can affect to overlook the general importance of the shape and even the size of the brain in relation to the development of the mental faculties."[72]

Disney Alexander, also following in Ellis's footsteps, considered it "as proved beyond all reasonable contradiction" that it was at least possible to "distinguish men of desperate and dangerous tendencies from those of good dispositions" from

[67] J. G. Spurzheim, *Observations on the deranged manifestations of the mind or insanity*, London, Baldwin, Cradock & Joy, 1817, pp. 145–146; J. G. Spurzheim, *The physiognomical system of Drs. Gall and Spurzheim*, London and Edinburgh, Baldwin, Cradock & Joy, 1815, p. 267. See, F. J. Gall, 'Influence of the brain upon cranium in mental diseases', in op. cit., note 44 above, vol. 3, pp. 55–59, and Combe, op. cit., note 29 above, pp. 104–106. See also, John Elliotson, *The principles and practice of medicine with notes and illustrations by Nathanial Rogers, M.D.*, London, Joseph Butler, 1839, p. 618. For the popularized view that specific forms of insanity may be judged with "wonderful accuracy" from the cranium, see Robert Macnish, *An introduction to phrenology, in the form of question and answer*, 2nd ed., Glasgow, Edinburgh and London, W. R. M'Phun, 1837, p. 202.

[68] Letter, Mackintosh to George Combe, in *Testimonials*, op. cit., note 36 above, p. 53.

[69] Harriet Martineau, 'The Hanwell Lunatic Asylum', *Tait's Edinb. Mag.*, 1834, N. S. **1**: 308. The same somewhat reluctant admission is made by A. M. [? Martineau], 'Pauper lunatic asylum at Hanwell', *Athenaeum*, 3 May 1834, p. 333.

[70] *Trans. prov. med. surg. J.*, 1835, **3**: 18.

[71] Conolly to George Combe, Hanwell 5 January 1846, printed in Appendix to Andrew Combe, *Phrenology—its nature and uses: and address to the students of Anderson's University at the opening of Dr. Weir's first course of lectures on phrenology in that institution Jan. 7, 1846*, Edinburgh, Maclachlan & Stewart, 1846, p. 32. There are also several letters from Conolly to George Combe in which he discusses his faith in cranioscopy in the Combe MS, National Library of Scotland.

[72] 'On the characters of insanity, a lecture delivered at the Royal Institution of Great Britain, Feb. 17th', *Asylum Journal*, 1854, **1**: 70. An illustration of Conolly practising what he preached is recounted in Clarke, op. cit., note 34 above, p. 202 where Conolly's delineation of Edward Oxford (for the case of Oxford v. the Queen) is given. That Conolly's understanding of phrenology went deeper than the cranium is revealed in his *An inquiry concerning the indications of insanity*, op. cit., note 13 above, p. 135*n*. See also, Clark, op. cit., note 23 above, pp. 66–75.

the form and size of the brain during life.[73] What the superintendent of the Royal Navy Asylum appropriately called the "almost infallible beacon of Phrenology" was a craniological sentiment wholeheartedly shared by the seven other alienists who contributed testimonials to George Combe and Sir George Mackenzie in 1836.[74] W. A. F. Browne and Matthew Allen, as lecturers and public demonstrators of the science, also made use of their delineating abilities on their patients. Browne did not refer to this method of analysis in his major work of 1837 (ostensibly not to confuse the non-phrenological reader) but he did offer the assurance that "Insanity can neither be understood, nor described, nor treated by the aid of any other philosophy."[75] Matthew Allen was less cautious: in his *Cases of insanity* (1831) phrenological delineations form a part of the presentation.[76]

Even much later in the century one could still find alienists who retained a faith in cranioscopy. One of these was Dr. J. W. Eastwood, medical superintendent of the Dinsdale Park Retreat at Darlington. Like so many other Victorians, Eastwood had witnessed phrenological delineations in which no deceit had been possible and in which "the descriptions were so accurate as to afford striking evidence of the truth of phrenology." In an article 'On craniology' in the *Journal of Mental Science* in October 1871 he noted, from casts taken from his own skull and from those of his patients, that at least some of the organs in Gall and Spurzheim's system were correct. Reiterating the optimism and hopes of the phrenological alienists of the first half of the century, Eastwood concluded his article: "If we are enabled by these means to understand the morbid manifestations of the brain for the classification of its diseases, and for the diagnosis of insanity, we shall render great service to the special branch of the profession in which we are engaged."[77]

That such hope could be seriously expressed by an alienist in 1871 when craniology as a scientific system had been totally discredited, gives perhaps the best insight on the promise that it held for alienists between the 1820s and the 1840s.

But not all alienists were as convinced of the craniological aspects of Gall's doctrine. Obviously they had not witnessed the "striking evidence" that Eastwood had. That sort of conviction came only through personal involvement; second-hand accounts of craniology's worth were never as convincing, whatever the stature of the spokesmen. Concomitantly, these alienists remained sceptical of Gall's detailed location of

[73] Testimonial to the practical value of phrenology, Alexander to Lord Glenelg, in *Documents laid before the Right Honourable Lord Glenelg, by Sir George Mackenzie, relative to the convicts sent to New South Wales*, [Edinburgh], privately printed, April 1836, p. 17.

[74] Ibid., p. 14. The others were Ellis, Browne, A. Mackintosh, Alexander, H. A. Galbraith, D. Mackintosh and Samuel Hare.

[75] *What asylums were, are, and ought to be: five lectures delivered before the managers of the Montrose Royal Lunatic Asylum*, London and Edinburgh, Black, 1837, p. viii. The work was dedicated to Andrew Combe "as an acknowledgement of the benefits conferred on society by his exposition of the application of phrenology in the treatment of insanity and nervous diseases". In its lavish praise of the work, the *Lancet* thought the dedication most appropriate, 8 July 1837, **ii**: 556.

[76] M. Allen, *Cases of insanity with medical, moral, and philosophical observations and essays upon them. Part I–Volume I*, London, George Swire, 1831 (the work was never concluded). See also, Allen, op. cit., note 16 above. Both works are excellent examples of Allen's feigned erudition. In its otherwise damning review of the *Essay*, the *Br. for. med. Rev.* noted "We are bound to confess that the heads represented in the plates furnish very respectable phrenological testimony." 1839, **7**: 47.

[77] *J. ment. Sci.*, 1871, **17**: 378.

the mental organs though this did not necessarily mean that they were any less enthusiastic about the doctrine's other principles. Many of them were, as David Uwins declared of himself, "*bitten* by phrenology" but few of them had either the occasion or the inclination to state, as Uwins did, that "thinking as I do on the applicability of phrenological principle to measures preventive of insanity, I should not do justice to my conscience, were I to shrink from declaring my sentiments, under the apprehension of being stigmatized as a visionary."[78]

The ridicule to which craniology easily lent itself most often prevented those who accepted the other tenets of the doctrine from openly admitting as much. (That the reputations of those who were becoming eminent in the field of psychiatry rarely suffered because of their public statements on phrenology—Conolly's stature only grew in public and medical opinion; Andrew Combe was appointed physician to the King of the Belgians; Ellis was the first superintendent of a lunatic asylum in Britain to be knighted—seems to have made little difference to the more conservatively minded.) When Andrew Combe—himself cautioned by friends to dress up and disguise his phrenology for his treatise of 1831—saw the omission of phrenology from the first draft of Browne's treatise, he was understandably disappointed. It "seems to me so improbable that you should omit it", he wrote to Browne; yet Combe understood why such omissions occurred and what the consequences were: "It is true, present popularity is gained; but my conviction is, that truth is retarded in the long-run, and Phrenology itself thrown into the background, branded with the stamp of folly by those who never suspect that what they read is Phrenology. . . . while the fruit is admired and cherished, the tree is cast into the furnace as fit only to be be burned up."[79]

As was the case with so many Victorian works on education, the laws of health, penal reform and anthropology, it was precisely in this inexplicit manner that phrenology was mainly infused into the discussions on insanity. In effect most writers were prepared to quietly agree with the eminent French pathologist, Gabriel Andral, that the principles of Gall were fairly proven or that there was "not much astray in assigning particular cerebral parts to special instincts or intellectual faculties."[80] In the 1830s and 1840s this view gained increasing favour among those involved with mental derangement, almost all of whom now relied on brain physiology in their definitions of insanity as diseased or disordered function of the organs of the brain. Since a functional understanding of the brain based on physiology could optimistically deal with the patient in terms of a definable disease subject to treatment (whereas earlier brain pathology could offer little hope for the patient) the interest in phrenology was certainly justified. There was, however, no need to subscribe fully to Gall's

[78] D. Uwins, *A treatise on those disorders of the brain and nervous system, which are usually considered and called mental*, London, Renshaw & Rush, 1833, pp. 95–96, see also pp. 227–228; and D. Uwins, 'Phrenology', *New Monthly Mag.*, 1832, **34**: 445–455.

[79] A. Combe to Browne, 28 January 1837, quoted in Combe, op. cit., note 24 above, pp. 280–281.

[80] G. Andral, 'Lecture on medical pathology, delivered in the University of Paris 1833, VIII: insanity illustrated by phrenology', *Lancet*, 16 February 1833, **i**: 653. Andral was one of the central figures of the Paris clinical school of the first half of the nineteenth century. He was also the first President of the Paris Phrenological Society (established in 1831) when Broussais was Vice-President and the alienists Lelut, Fossiti, Foville, Voisin and Vimont were among the members.

doctrine—and even less need to assume the dogmatism of the phrenologists—in order to share this optimism. William B. Neville, for instance, the medical adviser for a private asylum in Earl's Court, relied completely on the works of Combe and Spurzheim and on the work of the French alienist (and member of the Paris Phrenological Society) Achille-Louis Foville for his treatise *On insanity; its nature and cure* (1836). Yet Neville expresses no desire to acknowledge a debt to phrenology. It is this sort of general reliance on phrenological authors and on phrenological facts and assumptions that can be found throughout the writings on insanity in the period and not infrequently in the writings of *anti*-phrenologists. Like the loose reliance on Freudian ideas and terms in the twentieth century that only indirectly acknowledges conceptual and methodological debts to Freud, so in the nineteenth century there were a great many persons who, as Browne said, "*think* phrenologically, judge of conduct and character through the medium of Phrenology and employ its phraseology".[81] What separated these persons from most of the "hard core" phrenological alienists was that they had no special cultural interest in utilizing phrenological ideas; since the subject touched "too dangerously upon too many of those subjects upon which mankind rejoice in conventional delusions",[82] it was more convenient to avoid explicit reference to it. The ideas worked quite as well without the dogma. Hence most authors of works on the insane came to feel that even if phrenology had not yet established itself as a science (i.e. even if the organology and craniology could not be completely trusted[83]) it at least provided some excellent conceptual tools with which insanity could be better understood and through which one could be more optimistic in the treatment of the insane. Again, William Guy was speaking for a great many in the profession when he passed the elogium on "Gall and Spurzheim, and their followers" that to them was "due the great merit of having directed attention to those faculties which are the real source of action . . . and to them must be ascribed the praise of having originated the simplest, and by far the most practical, theory of the human mind."[84]

It was this conceptual advantage of phrenology that facilitated its role as a rationale for both the "moral" and the "medical" treatments of the insane that will be discussed in the next part of this paper. As we shall then see, Gall's essential reification of the mind provided alienists with a reassuringly scientific basis for optimistically believing that in the actual practice of psychiatry they could impose a logic upon madness.

[81] W. A. F. Browne to A. Combe, Crichton Institution, Dumfries, 3 January 1845, in Appendix to A. Combe, op. cit., note 71 above, p. 30. Andrew Combe made this point earlier in 'Phrenology', *Br. for. med. Rev.*, 1840, **9**: 193.

[82] 'Prichard, Esquirol, Allen, Ellis, Ferrarese, Greco, Farr, Crowther, etc. on insanity', ibid., 1839, **7**: 14. The author (most likely Conolly or the co-editor, John Forbes) believed that the phrenologists could give a better account of certain cases than the anti-phrenologists, "But upon that debateable ground we have no wish to enter."

[83] Many persons undoubtedly shared the view of Arthur Ladbroke Wigan, that the science could be likened to the earlier position of alchemy: as the latter led to chemistry, "so will phrenology perhaps lead in time to a correct knowledge of the brain and the intellectual faculties." 'Considerations on phrenology', in Wigan, *A new view of insanity. The duality of the mind proved by the structure, functions, and diseases of the brain, and by the phenomena of mental derangement, and shewn to be essential to moral responsibility*, London, Longman, 1844, p. 159.

[84] Guy, op. cit., note 60 above, p. 207.