

Munro's Doctrines: A Forgotten Pioneer in Holism and Hypnosis

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One of the characteristics of this post-Freudian age is the fast developing holistic approach to the person. Side by side with the explosive growth in microbiology, neurology, and all the "hard" sciences, goes the growing recognition that the human being is a totally reacting organism. "Mind" does not control body, or body "mind"—they function as a unit.

Among the phenomena illustrating the development of holism are psychologists being appointed to teach medical students (e.g., 33); a prestigious medical journal publishing a layman's self-cure, largely by positive emotions (3), and this layman subsequently becoming a member of a medical faculty; and a Nobel Prize winning immunologist listing hypnosis as one established, indirect immunodepressor (12).

Hypnosis, the most obvious area where psyche and soma, mind and body, meet and interact, is also in the midst of a research explosion and of accepted and respected practice. One major trend here is also toward demythologizing, generalization, and synthesis. The conceptual baggage—like trance, surreal capabilities, addressing the subconscious—is being lightened.

Of course, this new direction is not the only one; argument is carried on. However, statements like the following are today common.

The far reaching influence of suggestion or the personal influence of the physician . . . (is) not even faintly appreciated by the profession . . .

Physiology, psychology, and biology are on friendly terms.

Education is another form of suggestion

We now realize that . . . both mind and body constitute a manifestation of the real self in action.

I use the terms "hypnotism" and "suggestion" as synonymous terms.

Our therapeutic measures must be in accordance with an individual's preconceived beliefs.

But these are not contemporary quotations. They are culled, almost randomly, from *A Handbook of Suggestive Therapeutics, Applied Hypnotism, Psychic Science* by Henry S. Munro, M.D., second edition—1908 (14, pp. 5, 6, 11, 14, 19, 31).

Seemingly a historical curiosity, the book does contain Edwardian prose, philosophical speculation, purely anecdotal evidence. To a contemporary scientist, it is in many ways naive.

However, with and underlying all this, Munro presents startlingly modern and challenging ideas about hypnosis and suggestion, and propounds sophisticated holistic approaches generally.

Yet, Munro is unknown. The *Handbook* is out of print. Altogether only four references to Munro were found (4, 8, 9, 32). No mention of him occurred in any standard treatise. No worker in the field was found who knew about Munro.

Henry S. Munro is a forgotten pioneer.

The *Handbook* indicates little more than that he was a downstate Georgia physician at the turn of this century. Lengthy investigation and the cooperation of many resulted in considerable information on Munro's work and life. An outline follows.

Munro's *Handbook* . . . went through four editions (13, 14, 15, 16). The first and second editions, 1907 and 1908 (13, 14), are identical; the third and fourth, 1911 and 1917 (15, 16), revised and enlarged, differ in that the fourth edition has two additional chapters.

The two later editions differ interestingly from the earlier two. The later ones are much more like modern publications, in style, make-up, index and references.

The third and fourth editions have a chapter on psychoanalysis. Munro treats Freud with respect, but critically. Among other matters, Munro discusses Freudians' rejection of hypnosis, quoting Freud himself (6) as not really negative toward it.

Ten papers by Munro were found (17 through 26), one published twice, in different journals (26). Two further papers are referred to, but could not be traced. In addition, there are four pamphlets Munro issued (27, 28, 29, 30); here too he aggressively propagates his teachings, but also sells and advertises in questionable taste.

The following themes are prominent in Munro's work.

Munro teaches transcendence of the mind-body dichotomy. He stresses and deals with attitudes and expectations as involved in the etiology of health and disease. He recognizes the social environment. He insists that the physiological machinery is basic, but is affected by "psychotherapy" or "suggestive therapeutics."

Munro defines these as "mental influences in the treatment of disease . . . with the definite understanding that any influence . . . exerted in any way by the personality of the physician . . . come(s) under the broad domain of Suggestive Therapeutics" (14, p. 16); or "Suggestive Therapeutics is the sum total of the influence exerted by the physician . . . to help toward recovery, or for relief of mental or physical symptoms. This is always accomplished through the normal physiological processes" (14, p. 19).

Munro teaches that the organism has as a whole and in each of its parts and systems—cell, nerve, muscle, gland, immune machinery, etc.—a capacity to organize itself for growth and well-being. This capacity depends greatly on attitudes, expectations, and conscious and unconscious goals. These in turn depend on the environment, social and personal.

Attitudes and expectations, then, largely determine mental and physical health and hygiene; and they are in very large measure a function of education, widely understood—church, body politic, family interactions, among others.

Regarding hypnosis, Munro writes, "Hypnotism is the art of persuading an individual to act upon or execute an idea or series of ideas, either consciously or subconsciously. The condition is brought about by suggestion" (14, p. 11); and "hypnotism (is) the induction of a mental and physical condition in which the subject is more amenable or susceptible to suggestion" (14, p. 18).

Always stressing the inter-relatedness of mind and body, Munro deals with hypnosis and suggestion in connection with childbirth, anesthesia and pain control generally, placebos, sex, religion, personality formation, education, physical and mental hygiene, among others.

With and underlying all the physical means directed toward the organism's machinery, the healer, then, has at his disposal the powerful and widely applicable tools of "suggestive therapeutics" or "psychotherapy"—of suggestion.

Munro writes of societal factors in the development of attitudes hindering or furthering mental and physical health and hygiene in an almost Marxist manner: ". . . environment has been the actual creator of man"; "capital(ists) . . . disorganize . . . equilibrium (to) better control the ignorant laboring classes. . ." (26).

Munro explicitly addresses himself to the ordinary general health provider. Indeed, he censures authorities like Janet, Binet, Dubois, Prince, Putnam, "and many others," because they "apparently would limit the field of psychotherapy to neurology and psychiatry when it is equally applicable . . . in all classes of professional work" (15, p. 28). Munro contrasts the restrictedness of Freud's theory and method, quoting Freud (6), with the wide applicability of Munro's teachings.

The healer always affects patients through suggestion by his personality and demeanor. He should learn about this tool and use it deliberately and efficiently. Munro stresses that psychotherapy (as he uses the term) is one, albeit powerful, tool, not a system of therapy.

Munro writes in so many words that he hopes to get the readers to act on his ideas (14, p. 12), i.e., by his definition, to hypnotize them. He tries to influence his audience also by suggesting—again, in so many words—that the money going into charlatans' pockets could and would go into theirs, if they followed his advice (16, p. 162).

Munro writes he had read the old writers on hypnotism. It seems obvious, already from his book's title, that he was familiar with Bernheim (e.g., 2). Munro at times still writes of hypnosis as a kind of sleep, following Bernheim (2) and others; but Munro uses this quite perfunctorily. And Munro stresses even more strongly than Bernheim that hypnosis is itself also due to suggestion. He insists it is a function of the subject, not of the hypnotist. Munro displays a strongly patient-centered attitude, though his technique is fast and brisk.

Munro clearly was a highly skilled hypnotist; according to one report, he once convinced a skeptical audience by taking dozens of people randomly off the street and hypnotizing all of them in short order. An eye witness reports seeing Dr. Munro hypnotizing a male subject rapidly and fully, in 1918; throughout, Munro used nothing but a firm, soothing voice, some arm and hand motions, and eye contact.

Apparently Munro acquired his skills from entertainers; an old photograph has been described (by people who saw it) of Munro with a comfortable and unconcerned looking youngster with many pins stuck into him. However, while reporting that he had used hypnosis for entertainment, Munro repeatedly and strongly declares such use of hypnosis absolutely unacceptable.

Originally, Munro's technique was in line with Kroger's statement that the technique rests to quite an extent on misdirection (10, p. 7); but Munro wrote later (15, p. 72), ". . . the methods which are here described are not those I am presently employing in my practice, for in no case now do I use the least bit of deception."

Munro anticipated modern thoughts and findings in many ways. For example, Glass and Barber (7) report that a placebo can be as effective as traditional trance induction—Munro uses placebos routinely in rapid procedures (14, pp. 23, 217, and *passim*); Barber and Calverley (1) find that the operator's tone of voice can affect suggestibility—Munro suggests similarly (14, pp. 161, 257).

Kroger writes:

. . . hypnotic responses . . . are due to *subjective* mechanisms inherently present in all individuals. . . . It is indeed a wise hypnotist who knows who is hypnotizing whom! (10, p.8);

and

. . . the patient actually induces the hypnosis through his own convictions (10, p. 31).

Over fifty years before this, Munro wrote:

How frequent it is that the operator becomes hypnotized instead of the subject,

thinking that it was some power he was exerting over the hypnotized individual, rather than the use of an inherent quality . . . within the individual himself (14, p. 38).

Also, he wrote of the necessity to “secure the accord of the patient” (14, p. 131). Further, “Hypnotism is a self-induced psychological condition. You do not hypnotize an individual—you simply get him to do it himself” (15, p. 162).



HENRY SUMNER MUNRO

Henry Sumner Munro was born April 19, 1869, on his family's 3000 acre plantation at Putnam, Georgia, a small place seven miles from both Buena Vista and Ellaville, small communities not far from Americus, Georgia. Putnam served this plantation, Springdale Farm, and a similar, neighboring one, Peachtree, belonging to the family of Munro's mother. Today Putnam is just a name. Munro was the fifth of six surviving children.

Munro's family originated in Scotland, France, and England. They were unconventional, moving about a great deal; usually they exhibited intellectual aspirations and capacities. Among Munro's many interesting ancestors were Tories and his great-grandfather, Dr. Joseph deLespine, French army surgeon, who came here in 1778 with a French fleet supporting the American Revolution.

Munro's father, George Washington Coe Munro, self-educated, explosive, was a progressive farmer, a kind of pioneer of the New South; his mother, of the prominent Stevens family, a gentle but powerful woman.

Munro began his education in a one-room schoolhouse built on the plantation, where his eldest sister taught her siblings, other relatives, and neighborhood children. This school soon moved to larger church premises.

Munro attended what was then Emory College, 1885-7, where he successfully engaged in public debating. He wrote later that he did not finish for lack of funds; that back home he "studied medicine" by poring over the *Pharmacoepectia* in the Ellaville drugstore.

Still, in 1891 Munro graduated from the University of Maryland School of Medicine and College of Physicians and Surgeons. In that same year, he married the daughter of a prominent local physician. He practiced with him for a while, then in his own practice in Ellaville.

Early in 1895, Munro undertook three months of post-graduate study in New York.

At some times, Munro practiced in Americus, probably around 1896 and around 1906. Mostly his practice was in Ellaville 1891-1909, where by 1907 he had had quite an imposing home and office built, apparently with help from his father-in-law. Known as the Gingerbread House, it stands today, with a caduceus prominently chiseled over the entrance.

Munro became "impressed with . . . the psychic factor in therapeutics" about 1892 (14, p.5). In 1899, he started lecturing to physicians' groups all over the country (*ibid.*). For example, in 1907 Munro lectured in Rochester, Minnesota, where he met the Mayos' anesthetists; probably in Fargo, North Dakota; in St. Louis, Missouri, to "75-100 leading physicians"; in Chicago. His *Handbook* . . . (13, 14, 15, 16) is an outcome of these lectures.

Munro clearly was away from Ellaville a great deal. Even so, his practice became known as a "hypnosis clinic," where he treated quite a number of patients from far away, apparently referred by physicians who had heard him. He called his Ellaville practice "Poplar Grove Sanatorium," himself its Superintendent (see 18). The telephone number is said to have been "1." Poplars (actually, sycamores) still stand around that house.

In April of 1909, Munro and his family, including now six children, moved to Omaha, Nebraska. Munro leaving the family, Mrs. Munro and the children, aided by her family, soon returned. Divorce proceedings, instigated by Munro and decided firmly against him, followed in 1915.

From 1909 to 1916, Munro lived and practiced in Omaha; he had offices in the Brandeis Theater Building.

By 1916, Munro's specialty is listed as psychiatry in the *American Medical Dictionary*. Among other things, he served as medico-legal expert; he appeared in a number of cases for elderly persons whose families were trying to have them declared incompe-

tent. He used hypnotic techniques to demonstrate their competence—at least, physical—quite dramatically in court. He reports receiving \$500 for one such case.

In 1917, Munro married his second wife. In 1918, the Munros moved to Lincoln, Nebraska.

For the birth of the first daughter of this second marriage, 1918, Dr. and Mrs. Munro returned to Putnam, where his eldest sister now ran what was left of the plantation. Munro attended his wife's confinement; in line with his—and present—teachings, Mrs. Munro was up and about three days after giving birth, to the surprise, even scandal, of local opinion.

From 1919 to 1942, Munro lived in Portland, Oregon. In 1921, his last child was born. In 1923, he worked on a new, fifth, edition of his *Handbook*; he wrote later that, feeling provoked and disadvantaged by the publisher, he aborted this effort.

Though listed many years as a physician in the City Directory, Munro did not take out medical license in Oregon, feeling at odds with the medical establishment by this time. He continued lecturing, probably until about 1927. He produced literature to educate the public to his ideas of health and hygiene (e.g., 30). Around 1935 he produced a tonic in his home, the "Eutrophic Research Laboratory." Indeed, in 1932 he was convicted of practicing medicine without a license; however, neither the judge in the case nor Munro seem to have taken the conviction very seriously. At any rate, Munro carried on as before.

The depression hit the Munros very hard. He lost his home. In 1936, he was working in a quarry, almost certainly on a WPA project. Relations within the family were very difficult.

In 1942, Munro moved by himself to Hood River, Oregon; received welfare. Old age assistance began in 1945. By 1945, Munro resided in a Hood River hotel. In 1953, divorce occurred again.

On March 1, 1958, Henry Sumner Munro, M.D., died, aged almost 89, in a Hood River nursing home.

Obviously, Munro's life was characterized by much strain and difficulty, due considerably to his own unconventional and awkward personality. Even so, into advanced age Munro was vitally interested, physically and mentally vigorous, and proud of it, and angry.

Munro's teachings about holistic health care and about hypnosis and suggestion were controversial, but for a considerable time not out of the main stream.

Munro received a hearing. His wide lecturing provided a reasonable income. His *Handbook* went through four editions. It is probable, though unconfirmed, that the *Handbook* was used at Tulane University. Munro had the approval of many colleagues, quite a few prominent. For example, in 1914 he presented a paper (25) to the national meeting of Alienists and Neurologists, apparently at the request of the president of the Chicago Medical Society; Munro was appointed to a committee of five to draft recommendations, endorsed unanimously, for the prevention of insanity in the United States. Munro was not alone; see for example Magaw (11), one of the Mayos' anesthetists, whom Munro quotes—she quite unconcernedly stresses suggestion in anesthesia.

At the same time, Munro was fighting opposition and disapproval. He attacks medical education, over-specialization, professional narrow-mindedness. After about 1919, Munro wrote later, the medical school—presumably in Omaha—tried to quell him.

Munro's holism became less and less part of the mainstream. The knowledge of the machinery of the body and of technology improved; the healer was seen, and saw himself, largely as mechanic. Hypnosis and suggestion, too, was handled mainly in the laboratory and in elaborate theory building, if it was dealt with at all by respectable scientists.

At the same time, Munro's writings and his life indicate he was difficult, offensive, often quite shrill, perhaps a bit paranoid. Observers of the family agree the Munro men were intellectual, but "mean," "lacked common sense."

At any rate, Munro became more and more isolated, disappointed and disgruntled.

However, this development also reflects what went on generally, as becomes clear, for example, from Oberndorf (31) and Hale (9). Indeed, it seems a reflection in microcosm of the tensions and conflicts pervading the field (see, e.g., 5); and, of course, they still go on (e.g., 34). They may be adumbrated by the tension between generalist and specialist, synthesis and analysis, mental and physical, holism and reductionism.

Here, then, is a physician outside the prestige and power centers of medicine and psychology. Whatever his weaknesses, he used an original and powerful mind, brought a messianic fervor to bear, exhibited courage and strength.

He began over eighty years ago to bring one approach to the person to the general worker in health and hygiene, and continued this for over twenty years, achieving and propounding important insights.

In the end, the mainstream left his current, and he was forgotten. Recently, the field he cultivated strenuously has been worked again.

So, Dr. Henry S. Munro, pioneer in holism and in hypnosis and suggestion, can be appreciated again.

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