Biographical Sketch

Friedrich Daniel von Recklinghausen, MD (1833–1910)

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Abstract This biographical sketch on Friedrich Daniel von Recklinghausen corresponds to the historic text, *The Classic: Studies on Spina bifida* (1886), available at DOI [10.1007/s11999-010-1729-2](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11999-010-1729-2).

Friedrich von Recklinghausen was born in Gütersloh, North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany, in 1833 [3]. He began his medical studies in Bonn in 1852, continued them in Würzburg, and completed his doctorate in Berlin in 1855. Subsequently, he studied pathology with Rudolf Virchow, after which he traveled to Vienna, Rome, and Paris for further study. He returned to Berlin in 1858 and served as an assistant in Virchow's Institute for Pathology until 1864. In Königsberg, he was briefly appointed as Professor Ordinarius—without having gone through the usual academic steps of Docent and Professor Extraordinary—until six months later, when he went to Würzburg until 1872 [2]. He was then appointed Professor at the new university in Strassburg. He became Rector of the university in 1877, and remained there until his death in 1910.

Recklinghausen was well known for many important contributions, including early descriptions of hemochromatosis, bone lesions in hyperparathyroidism, and, of course, a number of eponymous conditions: von Recklinghausen's Disease, von Recklinghausen's tumor (adenoleiomyofibroma on wall of the fallopian tube or posterior uterine wall), and von Recklinghausen's canals (lymphatic canaliculi). He developed a silver nitrate stain to allow visualization of cell structures.

According to one source [3],

“Recklinghausen was quite a colourful personality and pleasant colleague. He opposed Robert Koch's concept that the tubercle bacillus was the cause of tuberculosis. He would argue that to say that

Fig. 1 Prof. Friedrich von Recklinghausen is shown (from <http://www.hoslink.com/history2.htm#vonrec>).

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tuberculous lesions contained Koch's bacillus and therefore the bacillus was the cause of tuberculosis was like saying that the pyramid-like piles of horse manure (a frequent sight in Strassburg streets before the advent of the motor car) were due to sparrows which perched on top of them."

While von Recklinghausen was not the first to recognize spina bifida (the first description was apparently in 1641 by Fulpius, who coined the term [1]), he was one of the first to provide such a complete description. We reproduce here a brief abridgement of his classic article, "Untersuchungen über die Spina bifida," published in 1886 [4]. We have retained the detailed descriptions based on an autopsy. Among the interesting aspects of his article is his

connecting this entity with mythological characters, the satyrs: Hahn and Virchow, he noted, proposed the notion that these characters were based on humans who had a hairy patch similar to that seen in patients with spina bifida.

References

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