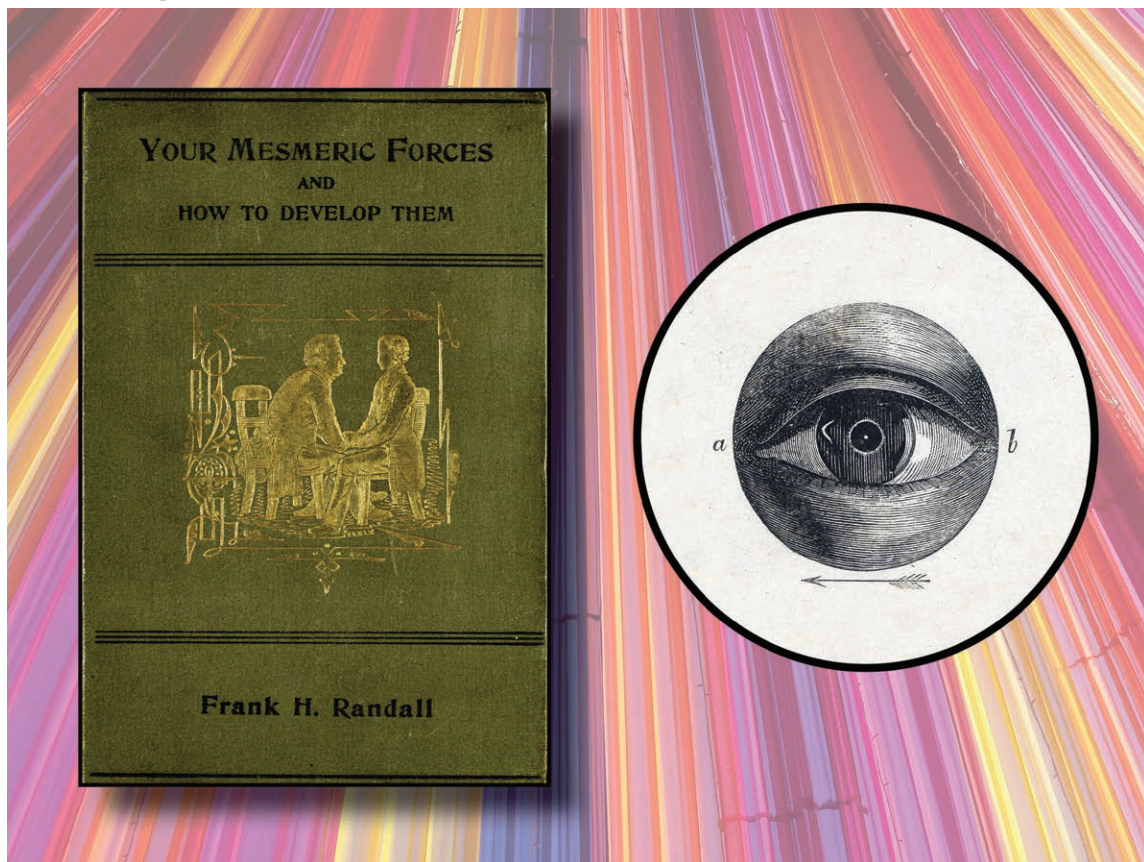


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ANESTHESIOLOGY REFLECTIONS FROM THE WOOD LIBRARY-MUSEUM

Painless Surgery Did Not Mesmerize Robert Liston until Ether Caught His Eye



After he demonstrated ether anesthesia in December 1846, famed London surgeon Robert Liston (1794 to 1847) exclaimed, “This Yankee dodge, gentlemen, beats mesmerism hollow.” Mesmerism was popularized by German physician Franz Anton Mesmer (1734 to 1815), who posited that the magnetic force streaming through the heavens, earth, and “animated” bodies (including people) was *the* medical panacea ensuring overall health. This force could be controlled by magnets, ocular engagement, or body maneuvers wielded by trained operators. Facing broad and enduring academic opposition, mesmerism prospered somehow for over a century, thanks to popular books like *Your Mesmeric Forces and How to Develop Them* (1901, left) by Frank H. Randall. Mesmerism inspired the practice of hypnotism and influenced modern psychology’s early concepts of the subconscious. Psychology and anesthesia crossed paths for this brief time in Lister’s mid-19th-century London. Though surgical mesmerism was ultimately discredited, it sparked cultural interest in pain relief, which set the stage for accepting surgical anesthesia. (Copyright © the American Society of Anesthesiologists’ Wood Library-Museum of Anesthesiology. www.woodlibrarymuseum.org)

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