

6-1956

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### Recommended Citation

Fox, J. DeWitt (1956) "The Brevity Of Babinski," *Henry Ford Hospital Medical Bulletin* : Vol. 4 : No. 2 , 114.

Available at: <https://scholarlycommons.henryford.com/hfhmedjournal/vol4/iss2/12>

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## THE BREVITY OF BABINSKI

J. DEWITT FOX, M.D.\*

If you'd like to launch yourself into immortality, probably the brevity formula of Babinski is the best plan. The "big toe" sign known to every medical student and physician the world over was first described by M. Joseph Babinski in 1896 in *one short page*.

Just a paragraph or two at the bottom of page 207 carrying to top of 208 in the *Comptes Rendus de la Societe de Biologie*<sup>1</sup> did it. In a follow-up of a two-page article two years later in *Semaine Medicale*,<sup>2</sup> Babinski elaborated a bit, describing fully the appearance of dorsiflexion of the great toe in pyramidal tract diseases, and pointed out that it was also present in infants, in whom the pyramidal tract has not yet developed.

An open-eyed physician who boils down his observations is likely to hit the mark squarely. Next time you scratch a foot and elicit the Babinski sign, remember the beauty of Babinski's brevity and the place it won him in immortality; which bears out the old adage: "He who thinketh by the inch and speaketh by the yard ought to be kicketh by the foot."

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### REFERENCES

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2. Babinski, J.: Du phenomene des orteils et de sa valeur semeiologique, *Semaine med.* 18:321, 1898.