

The New Epidemics

by Anonymous

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Cholera, diphtheria, politics — all the evils of the century — are thrown into the shade by the one ever-growing calamity, the new plague sent by Providence to punish us for our unbelief! Psychology is its name. Under the baleful influence of this new scourge, men and women are changed suddenly, without warning, between morn and noon, or the afternoon walk and dinner, into incurable maniacs. They become assassins, dishonest and immoral — criminal! It is an invisible, terrible influence; one that respects neither age nor sex, station in life, talent, late virtues, faith, or nationality, all who are drawn into its current become drivelling idiots or raging lunatics.

Our jurymen, who, for the last decade, have been letting go unpunished every kind of criminal under the sun, are wise in their generation, as a verdict of guilty would have only reached irresponsible victims of "Psychology".

"Monomania does not exclude reasoning powers, while it develops craft and cunning to quite an extraordinary degree", we were told by the old allopaths. "Psychology" stands several degrees higher, especially when it is "collective", or, in other words, when a group of apparently sane individuals are moved to exercise it mutually upon each other. The psychological *bacteria* love to attack the great and the intellectual of the land, and fasten themselves in preference upon the cultured classes of society. Thus we see it forcing one nation to throw glamour upon another, often its ally and friend; and the other nation biologising the rest of the powers into the belief of its righteousness. It moves one crowned head to bewitch another, whose possessor, thus *envouté* by diplomacy, exercises his hypnotic power on his next-door neighbours, the rival politicians. Physicians psychologise their patients, advocates their clients, and the latter their creditors. Moliere's famous query: "Lequel de nous deux trompe-t-on ici ?" ["Which of us two deceives the other?"] is reflected in the restless, suspicious eye of all one meets in society. The daughter's confidence in her mother is shaken, the father dreads his son, lest he should psychologise him out of a cheque, and the wife avoids her husband for fear she should be hypnotised by him and made to tell her secrets. No more confidence is possible, for mutual trust and primitive innocence are things of the past! Friendship is dead, society disorganised, the world shaken to its foundations, and things in general turned upside down !

Why all this ? Because the medical faculties of inquisitive Europe have made an international conspiracy to pry simultaneously into Mother Nature's secrets. Dr. Charcot hypnotised his colleagues into investigating psychic mysteries; those in their turn deluded the London and Russian faculties; then they psychologised Germany, and tricked innocent, classic Italy into following in their steps. The result of their collective efforts was to dethrone Mesmer, to show definitely the "Grand Albert" a thimble-rigger,

Apollonius of Tyana an hysterical sleight-of-hand man; and the whole brood of modern mediums, sensitives and theosophists a little worse than epileptic visionaries and frauds.

The noted — and, by the grace of God, long defunct — Commission of 1784, for the investigation of Mesmer's phenomena, had this suggestive sentence in its report to the French Academy: "We thought it best not to fix our attention upon those rare, isolated, marvelous facts that appear to contradict all the laws of physical science, as those cases seem to be always the result of very complicated causes — variable, hidden [occult ?] inextricable", etc. [It is very unphilosophical to deny the existence of magnetic phenomena, only because in the actual state of our knowledge they are inexplicable to us; for they (phenomena) cannot be imagined". (Laplace "Calcul des Probabilités", p 348. "These effects obtained on persons in a state of trance (*en syncope*) do not permit the doubt that . . . there exists an effect very real and quite independent of any participation of imagination. It is clear that they (the effects) are due to some communication established between their nervous systems" (of the magnetised and the magnetiser). (Cuvier, "Lessons of Comparative Anatomy")]

Such a method adopted, all was delightfully easy. The members of the committee had a good time of it. Hence the conclusive lines of the report, signed by Bailly, Franklin, and Darcet, stating that "the mesmeric fluid having failed to reveal itself to any of the senses of the committee-men, that fluid could not be demonstrated and proven to them."

The *naïvetés* of the committee, or of some of them, anyhow, were unique. Thus Dr. Bailly discovered that all those "incomprehensible effects" and "prodigious results" that "contradict physical laws" were the product of imagination. [See Arago's *Annuaire*, p. 420 : *Vis quaedam in imagitiatione!*] This new theory of "imagination" was very soon after declared by Laplace, Cuvier, Jussion, and even Dr. Gall very poorly imagined. [Perpetual Secretary of the Academy of Medicine; author of several works besides the one from which we quote: "Histoire Académique du Magnétisme Animal"] This puerile sophistry was repeated by Dr. Dubois of Amiens, who concludes his great work [page 89] with these words: "General conclusion — the magnetic fluid does not exist, and the means to make it act are dangerous". To make something that does not exist act, and moreover act so as to be dangerous, is quite a priceless discovery. It reminds one of Dr. Majendie's later fallacy when, denying on one hand the reality of mesmeric phenomena, he asserted in the same breath that he had seen several persons who had died under the influence of that art". [See letters, by Dupau]

This Academical report having been analysed by Arago in 1853, [Page 13] Mesmer's name was hooted out of academical circles by the men of science. It was left for Dr Charcot to resurrect the same thing under another name, and Dr. Braid's "Hypnotism" became the new slogan. Very soon Hypnotism became the happy parent of Hallucination, Delusion, Suggestion, Thought-transference, and Psychology — last and greatest of the litter.

Those who have grumbles against science for neglecting psychic phenomena have no more cause for doing so. The *savants* have analyzed them chemically and physically; weighed and measured, dissected them; and invented new names for psychic gestures and psycho-physical terms for things unseen. They exerted their intellectual faculties to the utmost stretch to perceive telepathically the "pale imprisoned form" called soul, but succeeded only in finding the seat of Hysteria, the universal generator of all phenomena — objective or subjective. Sad, yet not disappointed, for they had never supposed for one

moment there was anything external to man himself in the phenomena, they finally caught the dreary epidemics, and hanging their medical harps on the willows of the Salpêtrière, rested upon their laurels. They had thoroughly psychologised themselves into the belief that they had done good work, that they had nailed the shadows to their proper places, and labeled correctly every important phases of Hysteria, Hallucination, Thought-transference, Delusion, Illusion and Suggestion.

But it never struck our investigators, we fear, that they may be as incompetent to handle their psychic microscope as the famous Chancellor was to use his telescope. At any rate, they act as though they had found out the last word of psychic phenomena. To our eye they appear to have made themselves immortal in a certain fashion. For this is what they have done: Hemmed within the magic circle of their physical limitations, our great investigators seem to have worked out a complete schedule of the phenomenal hallucinations. Of the highest interest to the world in general, it is especially so to those who would like to conduct their experiments upon those lines. Thanks to them, the world has come to know that (1) a man had no need to be a regular madman, or to pass for one in the eyes of his next-of-kin and neighbour, to be labouring all his lifetime under chronic delusion; (2) a person may look terribly like a lunatic — *i.e.*, he may be positively hallucinated, yet still retain, without one moment's interruption, the full possession of his reason and senses; (3) for he can be a full-blown visionary, and at the same time the severe magistrate sitting in judgment over the tricks and pranks of his own nervous centres and brain pulp!

This category, of course, includes only those abnormal sensitives who, on account of their social position, high character, and generally recognised public and domestic virtues, could not be very conveniently branded as frauds or liars.

Mediums and "somnambules" are treated with less leniency. There [Page 14] are two varieties in this family of "abnormals" — professional and other mediums. "A medium may be, though generally he is not, an honest man or woman. In this case he may be producing all his life fraudulent phenomena, with or without confederates, and help other mediums to produce the same, firmly believing all the while that these manifestations are produced by spirits." [Pathological Essays, "On Mediums"] In the other variety the medium is consciously and thoroughly dishonest, an " abnormal development of cunning allowing him to perform unaided a mass of most wonderful phenomena." The hundreds and thousands of his patrons, the spiritualists and stray *gobe-mouches* remaining, of course, firmly convinced of the reality of his manifestations, " under mutual psychological influence and a collective temporary delusion". [Andrien's Phenomena. See Dubois' History, etc., op 34.] (*sic*), which amounts to saying that a man may assure large crowds of sane people that he is sitting on his own shoulders, and those "often respectable and highly cultured witnesses" believe him on his word

As to the Theosophists and Occultists, recent developments have shown what they can be made to appear.

The group being *sui generis*, a special notice is taken of them and a special catalogue prepared. Thus we learn that :—

1. A Theosophist can be "a very honourable man, truthful and thoroughly reliable". Withal, he may help

towards the production of *bogus phenomena*, remaining convinced himself of the reality of that he aids in performing by tricks. In this case he is simply "acting under chronic or temporary psychological influence".

2. An Occultist, or a candidate for becoming one, may be a deeply-deluded maniac under every circumstance of his life. Nevertheless, this affliction does not stand at all in his way of being a wonderfully clever man — often a genius.

The following case will be found of paramount interest to all who would avoid falling victims to the epidemic of the age; —

3. An Occultist of the modern type is an out-and-out trickster, a fraud in a clear crystal, suspected by all, known as such by the few. He is not even a medium; in short, has no psychic powers whatever". Yet he may, upon entering unexpectedly, and for the first time in his life, a room full of strangers, and a stranger himself to all, "cause several persons in the assembly, who were unknown to him to that day, to see one and the same personality near him — a personality having no real existence, and solely generated and bred in his own vicious brain". [Extracts from private letters from an "Investigator" to the Editor of the THEOSOPHIST]

Such are the modern powers of hallucination and psychology. If the [Page 15] learned gentlemen who have worked out the programme are asked: "But how can one with no psychic powers whatever, a suspected fraud, produce such good results?" the answer is ready: "The group of persons hallucinated into seeing simultaneously that which was nowhere save in the brain of the trickster have deliberately produced their own delusion — perhaps in a fit of unmanifested hysteria". "But the victims were unaware of the arrival of that remarkable impostor, nor had they been previously acquainted". Oh, well — yes, quite so. "Yes, but then even this can be very easily explained: They may have acted under the law of suggestion. Their seeing the apparition was put previously into their heads" — "By whom, since they were naturally strangers to each other?". "Oh — well — well — by themselves of course" (*sic*).

Quite so. The programme is offered to those who will accept it. Of course, the really scientific men may be fathered with only a certain portion of it — namely, "hallucination" resulting from physiological causes. The several other paradoxical enunciations belong simply to their imitators — the smaller fry of science. But then one has not always to do with a Dubois-Raymond, a Huxley, or a Charcot.

Yet even these great men are not the inventors or the discoverers of the double action of the brain. Mysterious cases of neuropathy — as they now call it in France — have occurred in every age. Even during the relative infancy of western exact science, Father Malebranche, a learned monk and physician, wrote that "the nervous filament may be moved in two ways, either by the end which is outside the brain, or by the extremity that plunges into the mass (of the brain). If those filaments are moved by whatever influence within the brain, the soul perceives something outside the body". Therefore, the mediaeval physiologist knew as well as the modern that there was a difference between an optical phenomenon and a cerebral intuition.

The mediaeval men of science knew something more, as also did their predecessors in the hoary antiquity. Unfortunately, they had to keep it to themselves, unless they would consent to attribute the phenomena to satanic influence, when their testimony became a marketable commodity. The devil being now discarded and discredited, the investigators have to fall back on Diabolus Hallucination, pure and simple, the effect of "malignant psychology". This squirrel-like method of ever traveling round the same wheel, when once set in motion by a physiological suggestion, is naturally calculated to make the heads of our investigators rather giddy, and to haze their ideas. But if they sincerely believe that they are progressing thereby in the right direction, and are instructing humanity, we have no quarrel with them, but rather wish them sincerely God-speed in their "collective hallucination". Thanks, gentlemen, for that word.