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FOR SALE BY THE AMERICAN BRANCH OF THE
SOCIETY FOR PSYCHICAL RESEARCH,

5 BOYLSTON PLACE, BOSTON, MASS.

REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON HYPNOTISM.

MANY hours have been spent in work upon this subject by the members of the committee, for the most part singly. Mr. Cory has no report to make at present. Messrs. James and Carnochan's experiments were confined almost entirely to students of Harvard College. Out of between fifty or sixty of these, who were operated on, a dozen, more or less, were influenced at the first sitting, being a proportion of about one in five. Two men were so much better subjects than the rest, that they ended by receiving almost exclusive attention.

The comparatively small amount of time at our disposition for these investigations, and the variations of some of the subjects from one day to another, necessitating many repetitions of the same experiment, make it impossible to report any thing definitive this year. A few of our notes may, however, be of interest, although nothing essentially novel is contained therein.

The need of "guiding sensations" for voluntary motion was proved by the artificial reproduction of a rare pathological state. In two persons (one of them being the Mrs. P. who is mentioned in the report on mediumistic phenomena) an arm was made absolutely anaesthetic, whilst retaining its muscular contractility. Under these

circumstances, the subject could execute a commanded movement, — such as raising the arm, clenching the fist, writing the name, etc., — but only when the eyes were used to superintend. With closed eyes the movements were feeble and ineffectual, and the patient quite uncertain whether the purpose had been accomplished or not. Passive movements communicated to the arm and hand were then unrecognized or misunderstood.

Much time was spent in a quest (as yet only advanced enough to show how far from simple the conditions are) of what the psychical modification is in the hypnotic trance. Is the anaesthesia, for example, produced by suggestion, due to an abolition of sensation or an abolition of "apperception"? Does the subject not *feel*? or is he become incapable of *noticing* what he feels? or is his state something more peculiar still?

That the sensorial process¹ occurs, seems proved by after-images. Two of our subjects who were made completely blind to a red patch laid on a piece of paper immediately saw a bluish-green patch when the red patch was removed.²

That the process of apperception, assimilation, or recognition of what the impression is, does also occur, seems proved by observations of a somewhat similar sort on the same two subjects. Make a stroke on paper or blackboard, and tell the subject it is not there, and he will see nothing but the clean paper or board. Next, he not looking, surround the original stroke with other strokes exactly like it, and ask him what he sees. He will point out one by one all the new strokes, and omit the original one every time, no matter how numerous the new strokes may be, or in what order they are arranged. Similarly, if the original single stroke to which he is blind be *doubled* by a prism of sixteen degrees placed before one of his eyes (both being kept open), he will say that he now sees *one* stroke, and point in the direction in which the image seen through the prism lies.

Obviously, then, he is not blind to the *kind* of stroke in the least. He is blind only to one individual stroke of that kind in a particular position on the board or paper, — that is, to a particular complex

¹ By sensorial I do not necessarily mean retinal exclusively. M. Binet, in his excellent little *Psychologie du Raisonnement*, considers that after-images involve cerebral as well as retinal processes. If, namely, the right eye look fixedly at a colored stripe whilst the left eye is closed, the left eye will get an after-image of the stripe when we open it and look at the background, closing in turn the right eye. A student, Mr. R. W. Black, to whom I was showing the experiment, suggested that the after-image might still belong to the shut right eye, combining its darkened field of view with the open left eye's brighter one. This objection to Mr. Binet's interpretation of the process as non-retinal is, at least, plausible. I have as yet been unable to devise an experimental combination for deciding conclusively between the two views. — W. J.

² That this was not due to suggestion or expectation, seems proved by its not invariably taking place with the same subject.

object; and, paradoxical as it may seem to say so, he must distinguish it with great accuracy from others like it, in order to remain blind to it when the others are brought near. He "apperceives" it, as a preliminary to not seeing it at all!¹ How to conceive of this state of mind, is not easy. It would be much simpler to understand the process, if adding new strokes made the first one visible. There would then be two different objects apperceived as totals, — paper with one stroke, paper with two strokes; and, blind to the former, he would see all that was in the latter, because he would have apperceived it as a different total in the first instance.

A process of this sort occurs sometimes (not always) when the new strokes, instead of being mere repetitions of the original one, are lines which combine with it into a total object, say, a human face. The subject of the trance then may regain his sight of the line to which he had previously been blind, by seeing it as part of the face.

When by a prism before one eye a previously invisible line has been made visible to that eye, and the other eye is closed or screened, its closure makes no difference; the line still remains visible. But if then the prism is removed, the line will disappear even to the eye which a moment ago saw it, and both eyes will revert to their original blind state.²

We have, then, to deal in these cases neither with a sensorial anaesthesia, nor with a mere failure to notice, but with something much more complex; namely, an active counting out and positive exclusion of certain objects. It is as when one "cuts" an acquaintance, "ignores" a claim, or "refuses to be influenced" by a consideration of whose existence one remains aware. This, at least, expresses a provisional hypothesis which may reveal new facts by suggesting new observations to test its truth.

The delicacy of discrimination shown in recognizing the invisible line is often very great. The extraordinary mixture, in the hypnotic trance, of preternatural refinement of discrimination with the grossest insensibility, is one of the most remarkable features of the condition. A blank sheet of paper with machine-cut edges, without water-mark or any thing which could lead to the recognition of one side or edge from the other, is shown to the subject, with the statement that it is a photograph of a well-known face. As soon as he distinctly sees the photograph upon its surface, he is told that it will float off from

¹ M. Ch. Féré was, so far as I know, the first to make this remark.

² The phenomenon is described as it most frequently happens. There have been some exceptions, and there are some curious variations in the visibility of the finger with which the subject points out the line he sees when he looks at it with both eyes open and the prism before one; but these we reserve for further study.

the paper, make a voyage round the walls of the room, and then return to the paper again. During this imaginary performance, he sees it successively on the various regions of the wall; but if the paper is meanwhile secretly turned over, and handed to him upside down, or with its under surface on top, he instantly recognizes the change, and, seeing the portrait in the altered position of the paper, turns the latter about "to get the portrait right." Here, then, is an hallucination, which, in traversing the room, can conquer the most discrepant backgrounds, but which peculiarities in the look of a sheet of paper, perceivable by no normal eye, can turn upside down! Sheets of paper absolutely indistinguishable by the bystanders, or by the subject himself when awake, are identified in trance, no matter how much they may be shuffled and mixed together, by the imaginary pictures they are supposed to bear. The hallucination is presumably determined by minute peculiarities in the paper, and yet it negates completely the paper's most flagrant characteristic, which is the blankness of its surface. We have no comment to make on the psychic condition here, except to suggest its complexity, and its analogy to the psychic blindness previously described. Both states imply a preliminary process of discrimination and identification of the object really present, followed by its *apperception* or *conception* in falsified form. The conception is what the subject believes, and on it he acts. To what degree it carries actual *sensorial* brain-processes with it, is a matter for future research. That it can carry them is evident; for, as we have verified, the hallucination of a colored patch on a real white ground will sometimes be followed by a negative after-image when the gaze is transferred to another place. But, on the other hand, when subjects are asked to trace their hallucinations with a pencil, or even to describe them minutely, they often show a vagueness and uncertainty which their previous expressions and actions would hardly have led one to expect.

Another very simple observation shows the delicacy of visual discrimination in the trance state. If a sheet of ruled foolscap paper, or a paper with a fine monotonous ornamental pattern printed on it, be shown to the subject, and one of the ruled lines or elements of the pattern be pointed to for an instant, and the paper immediately removed, he will then almost always, when after a short interval the paper is presented to him again, pick out the indicated line or element

¹ This reminds us a little of the state of mind in those perceptions called by Aubert "*secondäre Urtheiltsduschungen*." The moon, e. g., appears to most people small through a telescope. The instrument enlarges all its details so that it seems near, so near that we apparently think its retinal image ought to be larger if it were the same moon. Ergo, we deem it a smaller moon. In other words, our conclusion turns round and destroys its own premises.

with infallible correctness. The operator, meanwhile, has either to keep his eye fixed upon it, or to make sure of its position by counting, in order not to lose its place.

This puts us on the track of a distinction between the normal and the trance mode of perception, which partly explains the latter. The evolution of man's mind is altogether in the analytic direction. He deals with objects by picking out their "essential" character, tracing its consequences, and ignoring other features. He remembers a house in a street by the one little inconspicuous detail of its number, very likely observing nothing else about it; and similarly he retains the line on the foolscap paper by not dispersing his attention over the sheet, but counting the number of lines between the one selected and the nearest edge. The number thus obtained is a permanent part of the mind's possession, and is obviously for practical purposes more exact than any reminiscence of the "general look" of the line in its place would be.

The trance-subject, however, surrenders himself to the general look. He disperses his attention impartially over the sheet. The place of the particular line touched is part of a "general effect" which he gets in its entirety, and which would be distorted if another line were touched instead. This general effect is lost upon the normal looker-on, bent as he is on concentration, analysis, and emphasis. What wonder, then, that, under these experimental conditions, the trance-subject excels him in touching the right line again? If he has time given him to count the line, he will excel the trance-subject; but, if the time be too short to count, he will best succeed by following the trance method, abstaining from analysis, and being guided by the "general look" of the line's place on the sheet. One is surprised at one's success in this the moment one gives up one's habitually analytic state of mind.

Is it too much to say that we have in this dispersion of the attention and subjection to the "general effect" something like a relapse into the state of mind of brutes? The trance-subject never gives any other reason for his optical discriminations, save that it "looks so." So a man, on a road once traversed inattentively before, takes a certain turn for no reason except that he *feels* as if it must be right. He is guided by a sum of impressions, not one of which is emphatic or distinguished from the rest, not one of which is essential, not one of which is conceived, but all of which together drive him to a conclusion to which nothing but that sum-total leads. Are not some of the wonderful discriminations of animals explicable in the same way? The cow finds her own stanchions in the long stable, the

horse stops at the house he has once stopped at in the monotonous street, because no other stanchions, no other house, yield impartially all the impressions of the previous experience. The man, however, by seeking to make some one impression characteristic and essential, prevents the rest from having their effect. So that, if the (for him) essential feature be forgotten or changed, he is too apt to be thrown out altogether. The brute or the trance-subject may then seem to outstrip him in sagacity.

It ought to be said, that, in trying to verify in other ways this hypothesis of the trance-subject's non-analytic state of mind, we have met with exceptions which invite to further study. Certain it is that, when expressly stimulated thereto, trance-subjects will reason and analyze acutely. We therefore publish the above notes as suggestions to inquiry rather than as records of results.

The habitual psychic stagnancy of the trance-subject is shown by another simple test. If a lot of dots or strokes on a piece of paper be exhibited for a moment to a person in normal condition, with the request that he say how many are there, he will find that they break into groups in his mind's eye, and that whilst he is analyzing and counting one group the others dissolve. In short, the impression made by the dots changes rapidly into something else. In the trance-subject, on the contrary, it seems to stick; and, if the dots did not much exceed twenty, our patients counted them off in their mind's eye with ease.

This is all we can say at present of the hypnotic subject's mental state,—a topic whose investigation will tax the wit, but certainly reward the industry, of the most ingenious psychologist who may devote himself to its elucidation.

There was no sign of any sort of clairvoyance in either of the two advanced subjects above mentioned, nor, as tested by card guessing, in Mrs. P., the medium, when in the hypnotic condition. A very good student-subject, discovered by one of his comrades, was reported, on what seemed not bad evidence, to have named in his trance objects hidden from his sight; but, in the two sittings we had with him, nothing of the sort occurred. Indeed, on the second of these occasions, he was with difficulty kept entranced at all.

The only quite mysterious case of perception we found was with

¹ The stagnancy of mind is also shown by the tranquil way in which the most incongruous suggestions are adopted. A large silk handkerchief was made invisible by suggestion to one of our subjects, and then thrown over the body of a gentleman so as to hide all between his head and his knees. Naturally, as it was opaque as well as invisible, it made invisible whatever it covered. "Is C. still in the room?" the subject was then asked. "His head is here," was the reply, made in a perfectly indifferent tone. "I don't know where his body is."

another subject, who in either six or seven different trials picked out from a heap of silver and copper change, consisting of from fourteen to twenty-two pieces, the one coin which had been contributed by his operator to the heap. He never made a false guess on the evenings when these successes occurred; and the only reason he could give for his choice was either that the coin felt as if it were the right one, or that it "felt heavy." The coins were of course arranged out of his sight; and in some of the later trials, though not in the whole series, express care was taken to see whether he might not have been guided to his choice by the right coin being warmer than the rest, but with a negative result. On one evening he altogether failed in this experiment. With handkerchiefs he was less uniformly successful. We shall continue these experiments, so as to ascertain, if possible, the nature of the clew which determined the subject's choice.

A direct difference in the effects of upward and downward passes, independent of suggestion or expectation, has always been part of the orthodox "magnetic" creed. But the recent flood of "scientific" literature on the subject is almost mute on this point. Dr. W. K. Mitchell of Philadelphia, a contemporary of Braid, whose caution, clearness, and cool head ought ere now to have secured for him a prominent name in the history of hypnotism,¹ admitted that the different effects of upward and downward passes were the only sign of a direct physical influence of operator upon subject which he was able to find. Our own experiments verified the difference in question in cases too numerous to be plausibly ascribed to accident. The young men upon whom the passes were made knew nothing of what we were seeking to test, and as often as not answered wrongly when asked later if they knew the direction in which the passes had been made. Yet in five or six individuals, upward passes, the first time they were tried, awoke the patient, or restored his hand, arm, etc., to its natural state, whilst downward passes had a precisely opposite effect. It is a curious thing to see the face of a man whose eyes and mouth have been shut tight by suggestion, and over whose face the operator makes passes in an upward direction on the right side, whilst he makes downward passes on the left. On being told to open their eyes and whistle, two or three such patients have opened upon us only the right eye, and whistled out of the right corner of their mouth. Others showed no difference whatever in their reaction to the different passes. The matter must be prosecuted further. Obviously, so long as it is under dispute, experi-

¹ See his Five Essays, edited by Dr. S. Weir Mitchell, Philadelphia.

Report of the Committee on Mediumistic Phenomena.

ments, to prove any thing, must be made with ignorant subjects, and must succeed the first time they are tried.

Besides the observations we have recorded, we verified most of the now classical and familiar phenomena of trance. A few curious observations on the *rapport* between operator and subject, and on the influence of magnets, had better be treated as coincidences for the present, because not found in the subject at different times. Our experience has impressed upon us the variability of the same subject's trance from one day to another. It may occur that a phenomenon met with one day, but not repeated, and therefore accounted a mere coincidence, is really due to a particular phase of the trance, realized on that occasion, but never again when sought for. To decide definitely between these alternatives, in the case of any special phenomenon, would obviously require many sittings and consume much time.

WILLIAM JAMES.
GOUVERNEUR M. CARNOCHAN.