THE NEW MESMERISM.

I.

The Forgotten Impostors.—The Scientific Studies of Braid, and of Charcot, and his School.—Experiments and Publications of Ernest Hart on Mesmerism, Hypnotism, and Hysteria.—The Rational Interpretation of the Veritable Facts.—Hypnotism, a Subjective Phenomenon.—The Marvels of La Charité and of the École Polytechnique.—Reports of British Journalists Thereon.

I HAVE been spending Christmas week and the early days of the new year in the "Pays des Merveilles." For scenic effects and thaumaturgical performances the wards of Dr. Luys, membre de l'Académie de Médecine, at the Hôpital de la Charité, surpass those to which we have all been more or less accustomed at the theatres of magic and the conjuror's halls on the boulevards of Paris or in Piccadilly. Ordinary hypnotic performances have still enough attraction to draw large audiences in the provinces, but they are growing somewhat stale and out of fashion in the great metropolitan centres. The spiritualistic tricks of the Davenport Brothers, the reading of names and dates in sealed envelopes, and the appearance of corresponding writings on the arms of mediums, such as Foster; the materialisation of flowers and diamond rings out of space; the externalisation of the "spirit form" of mediums such as Katie King; the slate writing of Slade, the levitation of Home, the reinforcement of muscular strength of the Georgia Magnet have all had their day of sham mystery, of pseudo-marvel, and of profitable exploitation. They have in turn retreated into the shadow of obscurity and oblivion or passed to the platform of other conjurers who "show how it is done." But the love of mystery and the pursuit of the unknown are durable elements in what, in order to be quite modern, must perhaps be called psychology of mankind, and "the public" still clamour to be deceived.

Recently attention has been attracted anew to the phenomena which have been known and described in one form or other for centuries under the name of fascination, mesmerism, animal magnetism, or hypnotism, phenomena which were for the first time intelligently investigated and rationally explained by our countryman Braid. Since the time of Braid little or nothing had been added to our knowledge of the phenomena in question until Professor Charcot, thoroughly studying the subject at the Salpêtrière Hospital, convinced himself of the identity of the hypnotic susceptibility with the condition of hysteria in men and women and worked upon these lines.

The long-continued studies of Charcot, and of his pupils Binet, Féré, Déjerine, Richer, Bourneville, Babinski, Ballet, and the long-continued and much frequented public demonstrations at the Salpêtrière, justly attracted great attention to the subject. They have helped materially to define and classify the forms and stages of the hypnotic and hysteric condition.

In a lecture which I gave at Toynbee Hall, and of which the text subsequently appeared in the *Nineteenth Century* of January, 1892, I published for the first time the results of a series of experiments and observations which I had made from time to time during the last thirty years, on the facts and follies of mesmerism and hypnotism. These had convinced me, after the employment of rigid test experiments and methods of control, that the familiar and now well-known phenomena of the hypnotic condition are due to purely subjective conditions; that there is no fluid of any sort and no influence of any sort, tangible or intangible, which passes in these cases from the operator to the subject, except a suggestion by word of mouth or visible indications; and that it is quite sufficient that the subject should have the belief that will is being exercised in order that the acts should be performed and the conditions induced which are supposed to be the result of a transferred influence or an unexpressed will. I have repeatedly ascertained by test experiments, which anyone can repeat, that the will or the "emanations" from the person of the operator, which are so often invoked as causative, have nothing essentially to do with the induced conditions in the hypnotic subject. I have ascertained by repeated experiments that

the making of passes is a senseless and unnecessary mummery, unless it be to impress the imagination; that the introduction of magnets, near or distant, has no real relation to the induced conditions. The sound of a gong or the light of a wax candle, or of a limelight, or an electric light, the striking of notes on a pianoforte, or the vibrations of a tuning fork, a look, or a word, the looking at any bright object—a metalspoon or a coin—or the mere belief, however false and contrary to the fact, that an external influence is being exercised, have in my experience sufficed to produce in what are called susceptible subjects sleep, partial or profound, catalepsy, somnambulism, lethargy, or lucid sleep, and to reduce the subject to a condition of more or less complete automatism. In a more recent lecture on "Mesmerism, Hypnotism, and Hysteria," which has just been republished by Messrs. Smith, Elder, and Co., from the *BRITISH MEDICAL JOURNAL*, I aimed at showing, and as I believe did show, how closely these results to which my experiments had long since led me, were in accord with the elaborately observed facts and conclusions of Professor Charcot and his school, and I illustrated by juxtaposition of photographs and pictures the identity of the phenomena of hypnotism with those of hysteria.

I had of course read for some years past from time to time the statements and publications of a certain school of writers, chiefly French, of whom the most notable is Dr. Luys, physician to La Charité Hospital, and I have had the opportunity of seeing a quaint series of experiments carried out some years ago by Dr. Dumontpallier at La Pitié Hospital, which impressed me only as indicating a surprising credulity and a still more surprising ignorance or neglect of the ordinary phenomena of hysteria. The published lectures and reported demonstrations of Dr. Luys involved so many extravagances and such strange conclusions that I had purposely abstained from going to witness the performances. It was obviously difficult impartially and independently to test them, and they would in the end, it might have been hoped, prove innocuous by reason of their extravagance, and would not seriously affect the mind of any large portion of the intelligent public, as they certainly had not had any success in influencing medical opinion here. Shortly before going to Paris, however, in response to an official invitation to the Pasteur Jubilee, there appeared in the *Pall Mall Gazette* of December 2nd and 15th two articles headed "Hypnotisers and Hypnotised in Paris," in which were picturesquely described, and vouched for in evident good faith, performances of an astounding character in the wards of La Charité and at the École Polytechnique by a gentleman of considerable attainments, I believe, in physical science, and of undoubted sincerity. Other articles in the London papers and in particular two communications on "The New Mesmerism" in the *Times*, gave almost simultaneously still greater prominence to these performances. I determined, therefore, to take the opportunity of witnessing these demonstrations and of learning whatever there might be that was new and verifiable in this series of experiments. They carried the pretensions of the magnetist and the hypnotiser much further in certain directions than they had ever before been put by serious experimenters in modern times. Moreover, and especially, they were alleged to be of the nature of scientific and physical experiment, capable therefore of control and test, which is very often not the case where the phenomena presented pretend only to be the result of new mental endowments, or sharpened and enlarged intellectual perceptions, or the transference of ideas and thoughts by contact or "through space."

The reports of the Psychological Research Society of Great Britain had given only such crude results and inchoate conclusions, that they had never inspired me with much desire to test what I venture to consider the singularly absurd and even puerile demonstrations which they professed to afford of telepathy and thought transference. But here were broad, strongly marked and palpable results averred which, if they bore the test of experiment, as it was declared they did, would prove nearly demonstrative. On my way to Paris I met a medical friend, Dr. Lutaud, formerly resident in London, now hospital physician in Paris, and editor of the *Journal de Médecine*, who undertook to communicate with Dr. Luys, and to ask whether he would be willing to give me a demonstration of his results and experiments of

thought transference, transference of sensibility, externalisation of sensation, influence of medicines in sealed tubes, etc., and whether I could see also the now much-vaunted experiments of Colonel de Rochas d'Aiglun. The occasional correspondent of the *Times* had expressly declared that they were conducted in the wards of the hospital under circumstances which put imposture out of the question. I received in due time a communication from Dr. Lutaud, informing me that Dr. Luys would be at the hospital on the following morning and would afford me the desired demonstration, and that he had further invited Colonel de Rochas to be present and to demonstrate the results at which he had arrived.

Before beginning the narrative of what I saw and of the subsequent steps which I took to verify the causation and to investigate the meaning of these performances, it may be as well to give extracts from these articles, which created a widespread and deep impression on the public mind, in order to explain what it was that I went out to see.

EXTRACT FROM THE *Pall Mall Gazette* OF DECEMBER 2ND, 1892.

Dr. Luys then showed me how a similar artificial state of suffering could be created without suggestion—in fact, by the mere proximity of certain substances. A pinch of coal dust, for example, corked and sealed in a small phial, and placed by the side of the neck of a hypnotised person, produces symptoms of suffocation by smoke; a tube of distilled water, similarly placed, provokes signs of incipient hydrophobia; while another very simple concoction put in contact with the flesh brings on symptoms of suffocation by drowning. The intense congestion that these artificial attacks produce might determine the rupture of a blood vessel or the stoppage of the heart; it is, therefore, unwise to describe the experiments more fully lest anybody should be tempted to try them without proper precautions. But there was an experiment of this nature that should be described, for it serves as a *trait d'union* that will enable me to go from experimental to practical hypnotism. The woman who had been hypnotised earlier in the morning was put to sleep for a second time, and a corked and sealed tube containing 15 grains of brandy was put in contact with her neck. A few seconds later she commenced to make grimaces, and moved her tongue and lips as if she were tasting liquor of some kind. She then began talking in broken phrases: "I'm thirsty; I want something to drink; give me something to drink; my head pains me so; anyone would say I was drunk." She tried to stand on her feet, and fell heavily down into a chair. "There," said Dr. Luys, who had previously taken his visitors out of the room to explain what would happen on contact of the tube containing alcohol with the hypnotised person, "now, a strange thing is that this artificial state of drunkenness can be transferred to another hypnotised person."

A man was brought in from an adjoining room and hypnotised. One of his hands was placed in the hand of the woman, and the passage of a magnet along their arms in the direction of the man sufficed to transfer the symptoms of drunkenness to him. To all appearances he was quite as drunk as the woman seemed to have been a few moments earlier. The transfer of disease to hypnotised subjects is one of the most frequent methods of cure adopted by the doctors in charge of the *Clinique Hypnotérique de la Charité*. It is not every patient that can be hypnotised and submitted to a course of treatment by suggestion, so this alternative way of profiting by hypnotic methods is in vogue.

EXTRACT FROM THE *Pall Mall Gazette*, DECEMBER 15TH, 1892.

I was led to study the exteriorisation of the sensitiveness in this way, and it was the merest chance that it happened. One day it happened that I hypnotised a subject on a velvet-backed chair in my office. The subject was taken across the room, and when she was seated at some distance from the chair I accidentally touched the velvet, and, to my surprise, the woman put her hand to her back and showed signs of intense suffering. It was evident that the earlier contact of the subject and the chair had charged the latter in some way. I then tried with a silk-covered chair, but the same result was not produced. Still, the first observation satisfied me that not only was it possible to exteriorise the sensitiveness of a human being, but that the sensitiveness could be stored up in some other substance. At the *Hôpital de la Charité* you have yourself seen it transferred to a glass of water, and have noticed that while the subject is unaffected by the touch of the hand, or even the pricking of a pin, it suffers excruciating pain the moment you touch the surface of the water with the tip of your finger, though the water may have been carried some distance away from the sleeping person. The water becomes highly charged with the sensitiveness of the individual, but loses it in a comparatively short time. On the other hand, a fat or greasy substance will retain the sensitiveness longer; while, if transferred to a liquid, which is afterwards crystallised, it impregnates the mass for a fortnight, or even longer; and during the whole of that period the person, when within a reasonable distance, would be conscious if I touched the charged substance, and would suffer pain if I pinched it violently or attempted to stick a pin into it.

EXTRACT FROM THE *Times* OF DECEMBER 28TH, 1892.

There remains, however, one set of recent experiments which, from their novel and startling character, deserve special attention. I refer to the transference of sensibility from a hypnotic subject to inanimate objects. I have been fortunate enough to witness some of these experiments, and will describe what I saw. They were not carried out by Dr. Luys, but by an amateur who attends his clinic. This gentleman had a roughly-constructed figure, about a foot high, resembling the human form, and made of gutta-percha or some such material, and he experimented with it on a hysterical young woman, one of the hospital patients and an extremely sensitive subject. She was placed in an arm-chair and

hypnotised, and he seated himself immediately opposite in close contact with her, their knees touching and her hands placed upon his knees. After some preliminary business of stroking her arms and so forth, he produced the figure and held it up in front of her, presumably to be charged with her magnetism, for these experiments rest on the magnetic theory. Then he placed it out of her sight and pinched it. Sometimes she appeared to feel it and sometimes she did not, but he was all the time in actual contact with her. Then he held it where she could not see it, and this time she obviously suffered acutely whenever he touched the figure and in the place where he touched it, although she did not look at it or seem to observe it. Especially when he touched the sole of the foot it evidently tickled her beyond endurance. Then the figure was placed aside on a table out of sight both of the girl and of the operator, while another gentleman put one hand on the operator's back and the other on the image. I was in such a position as to see them all, and whenever the second gentleman touched the figure the girl felt it. Then she was told that she was to feel it just the same after being woke up, and an attempt was made to wake her, but she was by this time very profoundly affected, and the attempt was only partially successful. In this state—that is, still somnambulistic—she stood up and moved from her place. The operator did the same, and being separated from her by some feet he turned his back to her and held the figure in such a position that she could not possibly see it. Then he pinched at the back of the neck and she felt it at same moment, but in the wrong place. The place where she did feel it caused her some embarrassment, though harmless enough, as she informed him of the locality in a whisper which I overheard. I can answer for it that she felt something at the moment when he touched the image, and that she could not see it and was not in contact with him, because I was standing almost between them. But she felt it far more acutely when he pinched his own wrist under the same circumstances. That brought the experiments to a conclusion. They occupied at least half an hour, and included a number of interesting details which I have been obliged to omit.

I shall only offer one comment on this exhibition, which was perfectly genuine. To my mind it in no way proved the transference of sensibility to the image, but it did prove that suggestions and impressions can be conveyed from one person to another by mere contact and even across an intervening space. But that is no new thing in mesmerism. Abundant proof of its occurrence is on record, explain it how you will.

Other reports of a similar character had appeared in *La Justice*, *L'Écho de Paris*, and other French journals.

In subsequent articles I shall describe and illustrate the extraordinary performances here referred to. I have been able (by control experiments on the very subjects here described, and on others who have furnished the basis of many of the lectures and publications by Dr. Luys and Colonel de Rochas), to unmask the fraud, deception, and credulity which have given rise to these strange proceedings. An extensive and pretentious mass of literature has accumulated around them, and both from the Continent and from this country many persons have been attracted to them, and led to attach to them a scientific value of which I shall show them to be wholly destitute. It is, therefore, a case in which firm and plain words need to be spoken; and I cannot shrink from speaking them. It is lamentable that such proceedings should be carried on in the name of science, and that one of the greatest of the Paris hospitals should be made the theatre of such inanities and frauds. The scientific reputation of a department of a great State institution is seriously affected by these mummeries, and the honour of French medical science is injured before the world when the able journalists of the Continent and Great Britain are hoodwinked by impostors acting under the shelter of the name of a physician, who has allowed himself to be their unconscious dupe and enthusiastic patron. Colonel de Rochas is a gentleman of the most undoubted good faith. No one can for a moment doubt the honour and good faith of Dr. Luys, however much we may regret and even blame the persistent credulity which he has shown and the inadequacy of the means which he may have to take to protect himself and his pupils, his foreign visitors, and his right-minded patients from a very mischievous fraud, and from contact with a certain number of persons, all contact with whom ought, for many serious reasons, to be shunned. For in connection with some of the subjects of demonstration there are underlying questions for the police and for the correctional tribunals to which I desire to call the attention of M. Monod and of the Council of the *Assistance Publique* over which he so ably and worthily presides.

ERNEST HART.

PROFESSOR RUDOLPH VIRCHOW has been elected a second time President of the German Anthropological Society. The membership of the Society now numbers 674, of whom 6 are honorary and 110 corresponding members.