

ALTERNATING PERSONALITIES.

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The discussion of those cases in which the expression of character undergoes very marked alterations, to the extent it may be of complete reversal of a recognized disposition, involves several distinct theories of causation. We have, for instance, the hypnotic or suggestion theory, which would appear to go a long way toward accounting for the changes. In this we must assume a modification of the relation and activity of the mind faculties, a re-grouping of the forces dominating in the life of the individual, so that traits previously marked in the conduct become passive or subdued by the energetic expression of traits or qualities that had hitherto performed a secondary or indifferent part. In other words, what was strong and salient has become suddenly weak in influence, and what was weak has become strong and dominant. Such a change would give necessarily the appearance of a new personality to those acquainted with the individual, and operate as a surprise, even to those most familiar with him. We may assume that suggestion in many such cases acts immediately; that some person known to the individual under hypnotic control is the object or model of imitation. Of course the same result may obtain in auto-suggestion, although it is but rational to assume that there was some powerful exterior influence that gave direction to or colored the suggestion.

That was a very interesting case—in which Prof. James, of Harvard, took part in investigating, of the man who suddenly left his home in Northern Massachusetts, and went to Norris-town, Pa., where he engaged in the hat and cap business successfully for three years, under a name entirely different from his own.

One day, while at the table in the hotel where he was boarding, he suddenly astonished those present by asking where he was, and insisting that his name was not that by which he was

known in Norristown, but that it was so and so, and that he lived or belonged to a certain town in Massachusetts. The three years he had spent in the Pennsylvania city had suddenly become a blank in his memory.

This we know to be the case as a rule in the transfer of consciousness, that there is a complete loss of memory of what occurs in the secondary state or personality. However, in experiments with hypnotized persons, the trance state may present degrees of advancement in which the two memories, so to speak, of the normal mind condition and of the secondary, may be associated. This occurs, so far as my experience goes, in cases of incomplete hypnosis, the state of trance presenting a passive, mechanical docility on the part of the hypnotic.

The Norristown case belongs, doubtless, to the category of auto-suggestion, its events indicating a cumulative result. The man had been accustomed to dwell upon the necessity or expediency of making some change in his business and social relations, led to this, we may assume by certain, to him, unpleasant circumstances. The intensity of his thought in this direction finally terminated in a crisis of physical experiences, and a mental revolution. This hypothesis would largely resolve the riddle of it.

The theory of inhibition or suspension of activity of certain faculties has its advocates in an attempted explication of the phenomena of change in personality. In somnambulism we may have the induced trance and the subjected will, so far, an inhibition of self-control, but I am not so sure of the suspended activity of a group of faculties; for the somnambule may exhibit an exaggerated degree of intellect and emotion, and greatly exceed the mental capacity of the ordinary state. "How," as one writer pertinently asks, "Can the mental faculties be increased by rendering some of them inoperative?" We may speculatively answer the query by saying that the controlling stress of certain faculties being removed, the others operated with greater vigor in response to the suggestions given. Just as in uncompensated muscle effects.

Another hypothesis that seems to have its supporters among persons of reputation for neurological ability, is based upon the idea of atavism, or ancestral influence, in the organization. According to this, physical peculiarities, tendency to certain diseases, peculiar characteristics of mind, and special habits derived from a remote parent, may crop out, after having

skipped over several generations. Dr. K. O. Mason puts it in this way: "Suppose, for instance, there appeared a man of marked and thoroughly bad characteristics, married to a right-minded, moral, even religious, woman; that he was a vilifier of morality and religion, profane and vicious in life, and unscrupulous in his dealings with others; that the generations which immediately succeeded him came under influences which, aided by inherited characteristics from the mother, led to lives of morality and uprightness, or even conspicuous piety. In the fifth generation, however, appeared a man who, in the midst of these moral and religious environments, was conspicuous for his profanity, vicious life and unscrupulous conduct, so identical with his remote ancestor as to make the connection undoubted."

What became of "the black drop" in the blood of the intervening generations is accounted for in this fashion by the same writer: "In the fourth generation was a mild, religiously inclined woman, but of unsound health, and perhaps of unstable personality. Some sudden shock, syncope or loss of consciousness occurs and, as in the case of Felix X, on recovery an entirely new and different personality is found to have taken the place of the original one. It professes to be a man, and to the horror and consternation of the good people surrounding her, she commences to curse, to vilify everything good, and uphold sentiments and practices of the most offensive and criminal character. This person has a chain of memories and a personal history entirely foreign and unknown to the primary self, but quite consistent with those of the remote ancestor whom we have considered. In an hour or a day the primary consciousness has returned, but there is not the slightest knowledge or recollection of the character which she has represented in her second personality, and very likely the case is diagnosed as temporary insanity; in a more primitive age it would have been called possession by an evil spirit. It was in reality the strongly impressed characteristics of a distinct personality which had lain dormant in the sub-conscious self for three generations, now coming to the surface temporarily under favoring circumstances in the fourth. In another generation it actually appeared, an atavism, as the primary and usual personality. In like manner a personality of conspicuous goodness or conspicuous talent might pass over many generations of mediocrity or of evil-doers, and appear, a pleasant atavism, after one or

many generations had intervened. Less extreme personalities might be formed in like manner, and more than one might be impressed upon individuals in successive generations, giving rise to the perplexing and much debated condition of multiplex personalities. Kraft-Ebing, as we have seen, found in his patient 'three psychical existences' or personalities. Professor Janet's patient, Madame B., possessed three widely differing ones; while one of my own cases presented three and another two, alternating spontaneously at longer or shorter intervals, not including the cases in which changes of personality were brought about by hypnotism."*

Accept the theory of atavism, of an hysterical crisis, and the case seems well made out. But on the physiological side may we not extend our reasoning farther and see in these differing expressions of character the modifying effects of a changed relation of the psychic centres of the brain?

In the case of Prof. Janet's patient, his differing personalities were the sequence of hypnotic suggestion, influencing a sensitive mental organism. These personalities were imitations or assumptions of characters known to the patient, and she, possessing doubtless a good degree of the power to mimic others, readily exhibited it. We speak of people as having different moods which merely express differential action of their mental faculties. We have only to intensify a mood to produce what may appear to be a personality of a kind that may contrast strongly with the character as known.

* Question of responsibility here opened by the jurisconsult, if we are to accept this theory of atavism to account for criminality.