

# HYPNOTISM

## Is Not a "Mystic Force" . . . Is Akin to Sleep-Walking and Insanity . . . Mainly of Use to the Psychologist . . . Other Uses are Very Limited

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ONCE I won a bet. It happens so seldom that this particular occasion has always stuck in my mind. The bet dealt with hypnotism and its relation to crime. So one day, having duly warned my opponent, Mr. X, that he would lose his five dollar bill within the month, a friend and myself stopped in for tea. A pleasant time was had by all. That evening I called and collected the five dollars, for the chap who accompanied me to tea had been deeply hypnotized all the time, and Mr. X never detected it. Moreover, my friend swore up and down that he had not been to tea at all but had been playing bridge with a Mr. Y, 40 miles away. Furthermore, Mr. Y swore this was a fact—he also was a good hypnotic subject—and they both believed it. A nice little tangle for a jury to unravel if a crime had been committed in Mr. X's apartment that afternoon.

WHAT is hypnotism? It is not a mystic force flashed over hundreds of miles by the power of some dark hypnotic eye. A hypnotist may be a pure nordic and he doesn't even need long hair. In fact, so commonplace has hypnotism become that we now do a great deal of our work by means of a phonograph record. The best analogy we have with the hypnotized person is that of the individual who walks in his sleep. We call the sleep walker a somnambulist and refer to his condition as one of natural somnambulism. The deepest stage of hypnotism we term artificial somnambulism. In fact, if you can find a person who is walking in his sleep, and can start a conversation without waking him—it can be done at times—then that person is hypnotized just as effectively as if the work were done by the best psychologist in the country. You are in touch with the unconscious mind of the subject, which is just as capable of handling the body and is just as acute as is the individual's conscious mind.

How is hypnotism induced? Obviously we can't wait until we find someone walking in his sleep. As a matter of fact we use a very simple technique, described in any good book on hypnotism such as "Hypnotism" by Moll or "Suggestive Therapeutics" by Bernheim. The subject reclines on a couch and the operator "talks sleep" for five or ten minutes. If this is repeated several times we find that about one out of every five or

six adults will literally go to sleep and keep on talking in their sleep. We should add that women are no more susceptible than men, despite certain notions as to their love of talking.

This simple technique puts you in touch with the unconscious mind of the subject, which explains the spectacular results which are obtained. First of all, this unconscious mind is extremely suggestible. By that we mean it literally tends to believe anything it is told. The critical faculties are largely wiped out, so that if you tell the individual that he is Alexander the Great, that you are King George, or that Mussolini is a pacifist, it is quite satisfactory to him. He accepts the statement and behaves accordingly.

But suggestion is only the key by which we unlock the real mysteries of hypnotism—for they are mysteries, not in the sense of being supernatural but because we just cannot see how the unconscious mind can do such strange things with the body. For example, we can always get "hallucinations" in any good hypnotic subject. These we define as false sense impressions, and they can be obtained in any of the senses. I tell the subject that there is a pink elephant standing in the corner of the room. He sees and describes it. Similarly he can be made to hear the Metropolitan Opera, taste the most glorious wine, or smell a skunk next door. He will shiver with cold or protest that it is suffocatingly hot, all within a minute's time and in the same temperature. Moreover, and closely akin to these phenomena, he will mix things up. Soap will pass for chocolate, if you tell him so, ammonia for eau de Cologne, and the whine of a motor engine for a college band.

THEN we can produce anesthetics in a good subject. Tell him there is no feeling in his hand and you have a stick of wood. You can prick it with a pin, burn it, even amputate a finger without pain. In the old days they used to perform major operations under hypnotism.

This was before the time of ether and chloroform, which rapidly replaced hypnotism, owing to their greater convenience and greater certainty.

Not only can we remove the sense of pain by suggestion but we can treat any other sense in a similar manner. Blindness can be so produced, as can also deafness. The sense of taste can be completely obliterated and the strongest ammonia pass unnoticed if held before the nose. We shall see later that these conditions are closely related to certain mental disorders such as hysteria and shell-shock.

PARALYSES of any muscles in the body are easily produced. Suggestion can render an arm or a leg useless, while the whole talking apparatus can be similarly paralyzed.

One of the interesting and instructive phenomena in hypnotism, as it ties in with our study of mental disorder, is the delusion. This type of mental reaction can be obtained in the most interesting and absurd form. Tell an individual he is Napoleon and he behaves as such, imitating the character far better than he could do in his normal state. He will take the part of inventor, gangster, college president, or garage mechanic, on demand. What is far more important, he is not only acting a part—he believes it. He *is* the individual in question and defends his identity with the same heat that you would display if anyone questioned your right to your own home. Two of us spent one hour cross-questioning a man of 25 who claimed he was a captain with the American forces in the last war. He was seven years old at the time. Then we gave up. He still stuck to his story, so the delusion was removed with no ill effects.

It is a very curious fact that the working of body organs can be controlled in hypnotism. A very good subject is required for these experiments, but the heart beat can be hastened or retarded, body temperature can be raised or lowered in some cases and digestion inter-

ferred with. Indeed, some go so far as to claim that bleeding can be produced in any part of the body by means of suggestion, and that blisters can be raised simply by applying a postage stamp and assuring the individual it is a mustard plaster! Such claims are as yet not proved to the satisfaction of psychology, although there seems to be a reasonable chance that they may be true in the case of a few very excellent subjects.

Bergson quotes an unusual case. He had a very good hypnotic subject, a boy of 12 who could do the following stunt: The subject would stand facing Bergson, who would hold an open book behind the subject's head. The boy, according to Bergson, would then read from the book. Bergson at first thought this was an example of mind reading, since he also read the book at the same time. It turned out that the subject was reading the reflection of the book in Bergson's eye. This would require a keenness of vision which would be microscopic. Such reports are rare and cannot be accepted without further proof.

There does seem to be little doubt but that we do get a definite increase in muscular strength during hypnotism, especially in terms of resistance to fatigue. An individual can really show amazing physical endurance but this has not the obvious application you may think. It would be very foolish, for example, to have an athlete break his mile record—and die of heart failure. Your body is a machine and fatigue is simply the warning whistle which tells that the gas is running low. Disregard it and the machine may suddenly stop.

**F**INALLY, the individual, when hypnotized, has a remarkable memory for events which he has long since forgotten. This is a very curious thing and of great importance to psychology, since many cases of mental trouble are based on experiences of childhood. It is a very strange thing that an individual in the hypnotic trance can recall the events of his early years which have long since slipped from his conscious memory. This method of delving into the unconscious we call "hypno-analysis." Linked with the technic of psycho-analysis, it sometimes yields excellent results in curing some mental ailments.

Hypnotism, in and of itself, has a certain interest to psychology but its great importance is due to the light which it sheds on the so-called functional nervous disorders. So great is its use here that we sometimes refer to hypnotism as the laboratory of abnormal psychology. Perhaps our best way of showing this linkage is to proceed as follows:

Every phenomenon that we can obtain in hypnotism we can get by means

of the so-called post-hypnotic suggestion. For example, I suggest to my subject that he sees his brother standing in a corner of the room. He does so. But I can also suggest to him that, tomorrow afternoon at three, or two months from today, or next Christmas eve, he will see his brother in that same corner. Strange to say, he will do so. At the time specified his brother will appear before his eyes and he will act

**J**UDGING from letters received at various times by the Editor, there is still some confusion regarding hypnotism. Is hypnotism scientific or pseudo-scientific? Unfortunately, many persons have not seen and do not know of its use elsewhere than on the stage, where it is often surrounded with added "frills" in order to make of it a more entertaining show. That it is used in the psychological laboratory, and has been used by physicians, are less widely known. A good account of these uses will be found in the accompanying article, also in the Encyclopædia Britannica, under "Hypnotism." Even stage hypnotism is not essentially pseudo-scientific. It is not, as many have suspected, a fake or a trick, for it has no need to be, because the genuine is easier to put on than a good imitation.—*The Editor.*

in every way as if this person were actually in the room.

Similarly, we can reproduce any of the curious hypnotic phenomena after the trance, and apparently time is of little consequence. We have examples of these post-hypnotic suggestions being carried out after a whole year's lapse of time—they would probably work just as well after five years. Paralysis can be made to hang over in this manner and the same applies to anesthetics. Delusions will do the same. One subject startled a group by announcing that he was Lenin restored to life and called to head a Bolshevik revolution in America. A psychiatrist present—it was all for his benefit—was ready to swear as to his insanity when the post-hypnotic suggestion was removed and the doctor realized he had been "framed."

These suggestions have two very curious characteristics which are worth noting because of their bearing on mental disorder. First, the subject will always rationalize. He never knows why he acts as he does, but will always give a plausible excuse for his actions—and he believes it. If he finds himself singing the Star Spangled Banner, it is because he heard it played that morning. If he deliberately breaks his cigarette

holder it is because he cut his lip on it yesterday, and if he has a sudden impulse to leave for New York City it is because he promised a friend three months ago that he would meet him in the Grand Central Station tomorrow morning—and believes it. Very rarely will he realize that his actions are the result of a suggestion given in hypnotism.

Secondly, the post-hypnotic suggestion acts with a peculiarly compulsive force. It *must* be carried out. If the subject is told to occupy a certain chair on a given signal he will do so. If someone else is in the chair he will insist on his getting up, even going to the extent of physical violence if necessary. One of the most curious of these developments is to give the subject such an order, then tell him that it is a post-hypnotic suggestion and dare him to resist. I have collected several bets from subjects who thought they could do so. This compulsive power of the post-hypnotic suggestion, as well as the subject's tendency to rationalize, bear a striking resemblance to the symptoms in some nervous disorders.

**W**E must now note a further development. Anything which you can get in hypnotism or in the post-hypnotic suggestion you can also get by means of auto-suggestion. This is simply the technic of relaxing into a drowsy state and talking to yourself. Do you recall Coué's famous formula: "Every day and in every way I'm getting better and better"? That contains the general idea. (By the way, when Coué returned to Europe he said this formula was of little use in America. It took too long to say. Americans just cut it down to "Hell, I'm well.")

But if you develop the technic as described by Coué or by Baudoin in his "Suggestion and Auto-suggestion," you can actually get not only suggestions but post-hypnotic suggestions by means of auto-suggestion. It is very curious, for example, to awaken at 2 A.M. and listen to an orchestra, all the time fully conscious that it is the result of your suggestion to yourself before going to sleep. When in hospital after the war I had a pet polar bear who would parade around the ward in a most convincing fashion. He also illustrated the dangers of playing with these forces, because he developed the habit of coming uninvited and would not always go home when told, so he was banished forever.

It is here that hypnotism ties in with mental disorder. Anything you get in hypnotism, the post-hypnotic suggestion, or auto-suggestion you can also get in everyday life. You then say the individual has some type of mental disorder, all the way from "peculiarity" to "insanity." Under the influence of strong emotion, especially fear, you are literally

hypnotized. Any impression which strikes your sense organs at that time will give results exactly resembling the post-hypnotic suggestion, for emotion sensitizes the camera plate of the brain.

For example, a soldier in a moment of intense fear had his eyes glued on a German helmet. Result: A case of "shell-shock" wherein the soldier had constant terrifying visions of this helmet and the face beneath. A corporal was turning the elevating screw on a field gun when a shell hit it, killing everyone but himself. Another case of shell-shock in which the soldier could not stop his arm from rotating, for this activity was uppermost in his mind at that moment of intense fear. A child finds himself locked in a narrow alley with a dog which attacks him. The result in later life was claustrophobia or a fear of closed spaces, since the idea of escape was uppermost at the time. Another child is badly frightened by a man with red hair. As an adult he developed a "compulsion neurosis," in this case an irresistible desire to strike every red headed man he saw.

You will note that results here are a little different and the technic is not the same, but if you will just bear in mind the fact that under strong emotion the individual is, to all intents and purposes, hypnotized—witness the bird and the snake—then you can see that all these symptoms of "insanity" are really "suggested" and are first cousins to the post-hypnotic suggestion. For that reason the study of hypnotism is of tremendous importance to the medical profession.

**T**HESSE facts being as they are, what does it all mean to the reader? Exactly the same as an article on medicine, engineering, aeronautics. In other words, don't start "experimenting." Hypnotism in the hands of an expert can do no harm. Used by an amateur it may do a great deal. It is a nerve-racking process to have a subject just refuse to wake up, or develop hysterical symptoms after awakening, or insist on going asleep again whenever you glance in his or her direction. Any suggestions of immoral or anti-social nature, even if given merely as an experiment and rejected by the subject, involve strong mental conflict. Then the subject may easily become so susceptible to hypnotism that he will go into the trance for anyone. These problems and others are easily met by the trained operator but may get the amateur into serious difficulty.

Remember also that we have no sure method of telling whether or not a person is hypnotized or is just bluffing. I have seen some ludicrous performances in college, where a good student actor proceeded to "take across" the student hypnotist. One such séance ended in

the "subject" pursuing the operator all over the campus with a carving knife, to the huge delight of everyone. On another occasion the subject was made to pose on a chair, as the Statue of Liberty, while the hypnotist pulled the hairs out of his leg one by one, to prove he was hypnotized. This was too much for even the best of good natures and the Statue's arm suddenly dropped on the operator's head with painful results.

**A**S the author states, hypnotizing is not a safe kind of experiment for the average layman to perform, and the damage, if done, is done to a difficult thing to repair—a human being. In presenting the accompanying article this magazine dissociates itself from all responsibility for injuries which may result from misuse of its content.—*The Editor.*

There is not much danger from criminal or immoral suggestions. Authorities in general agree that the subject will do nothing against his moral code. You must bear in mind that the unconscious mind is very keen. It can do mathematics, write poetry, or memorize history quite as well as the normal mind. The hypnotic subject is also a born actor and will do a great deal to give satisfaction. Give him a rubber knife, a suggestion of murder and he is most convincing. Ask him to forge a check and he will do so. He knows it is a joke and plays the part. Give him a really immoral suggestion and, provided he is a moral individual, one of two things happens. He gives you a point-blank refusal or he wakes up. The hypnotic subject very definitely has a will of his own. He may allow you certain liberties but the dead-line is always very distinct.

Hypnotism is then a condition closely akin to sleep walking. The unconscious mind is in control of the body. In the hypnotic trance, however, this unconscious is also in touch with an operator. This accounts for the curious results, for the unconscious is very open to suggestion and has a remarkable power over the entire body. It can produce visions, anesthetize an arm, paralyze a leg, eliminate fatigue, or regulate the heart beat. In addition it is quite as keen as the conscious mind when it comes to mathematical problems or writing—very easily its superior as a play actor. And the hypnotic subject likes nothing better than to perform fake murders or write "phony" checks—for the psychologist will tell you that the unconscious mind is a childish mind, with all the child's love of "show off."

The practical uses of hypnotism? Really very limited. Several students

have made the bright suggestion that I hypnotize them and make them do their studying while in this state, with the suggestion that they remember everything on awakening. If laziness is the mother of invention, America is going far, fast. Equally brilliant is the suggestion that the student write his examinations while hypnotized. Now that I come to think of it, some of my own pupils may have tried this. They certainly were not noticeably conscious.

Seriously, hypnotism has no great practical use. As an anesthetic it can never compete with the various drugs. I have seen some very excellent work done on alcoholism and drug addiction in general. Also some very good, as well as some very discouraging, results with stammering. It certainly is no cure-all, and the wild claims of some enthusiasts are based on inexperience.

**T**HE great use of hypnotism lies in the field of research, for with its aid we can reproduce most symptoms of insanity and study them in the laboratory. Our need here is much the same as in medicine. The problems of research are greatly simplified if the germs of tuberculosis or typhoid fever can be grown in the laboratory *outside* the human body. We can then work at our leisure, without worry as to the individual sufferer. Hypnosis brings the symptoms of insanity into the laboratory. We can study these also, in our own way, without fear of producing or aggravating any mental trouble.

But bear in mind that hypnotism, like many things, is only safe in the hands of the expert. The story is told of an old darky who was sent out to Paris-green potato bugs. It was the first time he had ever seen the poison, and half an hour later he was found rolling over on the ground in great pain. It seems that one of the bugs had flown down Sam's throat and he promptly drank a cup full of Paris green to kill the offender. Your own treatment of symptoms by hypnotism might be just as crude and ludicrous, for the human mind, like McGinty's mule "ain't near as simple as he looks."

Leave hypnosis to the psychiatrist in the hospital. He has both the knowledge and the facilities. Many colleges and universities have a rule against its use within the walls. It is so at my institution. While there is no danger attached to the use of hypnotism by an expert, there is, nevertheless, a very natural prejudice against its use in certain spheres. Where the prejudice exists, it should be respected. Hypnotism has been unfortunate in that it has been too often associated with stage performances. While these are not of necessity fraudulent, many of them can hardly be called elevating or scientifically valuable.