

MESMERISM

by
DOCTOR MESMER
(1779)

*Being the first translation of Mesmer's
historic Mémoire sur la découverte
du Magnétisme Animal to appear in
English*

With an Introductory Monograph
by
GILBERT FRANKAU
(1948)



DR. MESMER

MACDONALD : LONDON

INTRODUCTORY MONOGRAPH

By GILBERT FRANKAU

DURING a visit to London's famous "mental institution", Camberwell House, at the invitation of its medical superintendent, that distinguished bibliophile the late Dr Hubert J. Norman, I obtained on loan from his private library an original edition of Mesmer's *Mémoire sur la découverte du Magnétisme Animal*, printed at Geneva in 1779 and published in Paris by the Dauphin's Libraire-Imprimeur, P. Fr. Didot le jeune. The prolonged researches undertaken for a mere tale, *Michael's Wife*, enabling me to realise my find's medico-historical importance, I communicated with the British Museum; and discovered that it had never been translated into English.

Tempted by a layman's vanity to undertake the translation myself, I eventually decided that the task could only be accomplished by an expert; and was fortunate enough to secure the services of Captain V. R. Myers of the Berlitz School of Languages. His rendering of the eighteenth-century French—written by a German-thinking Austrian, and possibly amended by a Swiss proofreader—is all the more praiseworthy when one considers how rapidly the commonest words change their meaning. A simple example of this is our English adjective "dumb", now generally understood to convey stupidity rather than muteness; for a more complex one, see Captain Myers's footnote on p. 50.

Yet the adjective "mesmeric", the substantive "mesmerism" and the verb to "mesmerise" have not changed their meanings since they first became current—posterity's unique tribute to a unique man.

That man, Franz Anton Mesmer, was born in the little Austrian village of Iznang, Lake Constance, on the 23rd of May 1734. To realise his significance in medical history, it is pertinent to remember that the last European neuropath to suffer death for witchcraft had been burned at the stake in Leith, Scotland, only twelve years previously, and that the Abbé Fiard, writing nearly a century later, bracketed Mesmer with Cagliostro as a Satanist. Of such stuff can contemporary opinions be made!

Mesmer's father held a good position, head of the woods and forests department, under the local archbishop. Professor O. E. Deutsch, to whom I am indebted for much information and the loan of Dr Fritz Schürer-Waldheim's rare and invaluable life of Mesmer, privately published in Vienna (1930), notes a brother, Johann, who became a priest. The other children were girls.

Mesmer, also intended for the priesthood, went to a monks' school, apparently till he was fifteen; thence to the Jesuit University at Dillingen in Bavaria; and from there to Ingoldstadt University, where he finally decided that the Church was not for him. "At what university he obtained his degree in philosophy", Schürer-Waldheim tells us, "is not known". In 1759 he arrived at the University of Vienna as a law student; but soon abandoned the law for medicine, passing his final on the 20th of November 1765, three months after the death of the Queen Empress Maria Theresa's prolific husband Francis, among whose sixteen children was Marie Antoinette.

On the 27th of May 1766, just turned thirty-two, Mesmer publicly read the paper *Disputatio de Planetarum Influxu* ("Concerning the influence of the planets") for which the faculty awarded him his diploma and which he refers to in this *Mémoire*, hereinafter called "The Dissertation", that being the correct translation of the word. The paper, to whose title he subsequently added the words *in corpus*

humani ("on the human body"), contains the germ of his famous Twenty-Seven Propositions, also recorded in the Dissertation, about animal magnetism.

That these Propositions, however fallacious, foreshadowed some of our present-day knowledge about the afferent and efferent elements in the nervous system seems to me a possibility. Indubitable, however, is the fact that they led up, through "somniaambulism", as it was originally called, to hypnotism, a word coined by the Scottish doctor James Braid in the eighteen-forties. This fact, I claim, entitles Mesmer to be regarded as the father of modern psychotherapy. Because not only was James Braid the first medical man to formulate the concept of "double consciousness", but because it was only after hearing Velpeau read a paper on "Braidism" that Ambroise-Auguste Liébault decided to found his clinic at Nancy—from which, through Liébault's brilliant pupil Bernheim and the coincidental work of the misguided pathologist Charcot at the Salpêtrière, it is the shortest step in medical history to "the Breuer experiment" under hypnosis, starting-point of the entire concept that still dominates psychotherapy, Freud's.

Present-day spiritualism, also, owes some debt—in so far as it is based on the evidence of mediums—to Mesmer. And so does the Church of Christ Scientist, which was not founded by Mary Baker Eddy until after her treatment at the hands of Phineas Parkhurst Quinby at Boston, Massachusetts, in 1875.

I trust that Christian Scientists will not find this last claim objectionable, or imagine that I give complete credence to the late Stefan Zweig, who alleges in his *Mental Healers* (1932) that the first edition of Mrs Eddy's *Science and Health* was largely a panegyric on Quinby although she subsequently enrolled a guard of virgins to protect her from the malign influence of animal magnetism. That Zweig was apt to let imagination embroider truth is proved by another

passage in the same book which gives currency, almost at novelistic length, to the legend that Mesmer owed his original inspiration to the Jesuit Father Hell—a legend flatly disputed, as you will read, in what follows. That Mrs Eddy, nevertheless, was treated, shortly before her restoration to complete physical health, by Quinby, and that Quinby was an avowed practitioner of animal magnetism, are facts.

How much the author of this Dissertation owed to the iconoclast Paracelsus (1493-1541), first medical man to consider the esoteric properties which might be inherent in the magnet, and van Helmont (1577-1644)—if he was influenced by Malebranche, with whose *Communication des Imaginations fortes* he is alleged to have been familiar—whether or no he had heard tell of the "Stroking Doctor", Valentine Greatrakes, born at Affane, Ireland, in 1628, and performer of many "miraculous" cures in the London of the Restoration, are interesting speculations raised by the perusal of Margaret Goldsmith's *Mesmer, The History of an Idea* (1935),¹ a book to which I acknowledge my indebtedness, trusting, nevertheless, that its author will eventually correct one of its blemishes—the currency she also gives to the legend of Father Hell.

All such speculations, however, are beyond my thesis; and I leave it to the reader to decide how far Mesmer's marriage to the rich and "nobly born" widow, Maria Anna von Posch (also spelled Bosch), which took place some two years after he received his diploma, on the 10th of January 1768, thus freeing him from material cares and giving him the entrée to the best social circles in Vienna (the von Stoerck referred to in the Dissertation was one of those who signed the wedding register), can be taken as evidence

¹ As far as I can discover Margaret Goldsmith's book was the only one entirely devoted to Mesmer written in our language until the publication of Nora Wydenbruck's *Doctor Mesmer* in 1947. A curious sidelight on our insularity!

that, however fanciful his Propositions, he was an absolutely honest clinician, in whose case histories we are bound to believe.

Such evidence, of course, is at best only circumstantial. Had we no more, except the man's own words, to substantiate his contention that he both could and did effect permanent cures of nervous diseases (Margaret Goldsmith says he did not claim to cure any others) it would be difficult to dismiss the charge, so constantly levelled against him, of charlatany. But, from the day he began his treatments to the day he retired into exile, independent witnesses, both lay and professional, to his success were legion—including Wolfgang Mozart, who writes from Vienna on the 17th of March 1780 about that very same "young lady aged twenty-nine named Oesterline" (factually Fräulein Franziska von Oesterling) with whose case history the factual part of the Dissertation opens:

"I write this—where?—in Mesmer's garden on Landstrasse 2—the gracious old lady" (Mrs Mesmer was only ten years older than her husband, then forty-six!) "is not at home—but the former Fräulein Franzl, nowadays Mrs von Bosch" (she had married Mesmer's stepson) "is—she has bidden and is actually still bidding me to send you and my sister a thousand respects—listen, on my honour I hardly recognised her she is so large and so fat—she has three children—two girls and a boy—the eldest girl is called Nannerl, four years old and one would swear she was six—the boy's three and one would swear he was seven—and one would certainly take her three-quarter-year-old baby for two—they're all growing up so healthy and strong".

Admittedly the young Mozart was under an obligation to Mesmer—a staunch friend of his father Leopold, an acquaintance of Glück and Hadyn, and something of a virtuoso on the musical glasses, or glass-harmonica, which two Englishwomen named Davis first demonstrated in Vienna.

Despite the fact stressed by Alfred Loewenberg in his learned article on *Bastien et Bastienne* in *Music and Letters* (July 1944) that we have no first-hand account of it, there must be some foundation for the report that the original performance of that work, Mozart's first effort in opera, took place in the then fashionable doctor's Viennese garden-theatre in 1768. But however great the obligation, even if the story that Mesmer commissioned *Bastien et Bastienne* be true, how can one conceive that the composer of *Così Fan Tutti*, in which Mesmer finds honourable mention—though the “magnetisation” back to life of the two pseudo-suicides pokes gentle fun at his theories—would have attempted to pay off a twelve-year-old indebtedness by penning a deliberate lie to his own father? The mere idea is exploded by a sentence in an earlier letter, dated the 12th of August 1773, “Fräul. Franzl has again been on the point of death”.

The testimony, moreover (printed as a footnote trailing over many pages in its original edition, which I have transferred to an appendix), written by the father of that other, even more famous patient whose case history this Dissertation records at length, Miss Paradis, seems to me even more confirmatory of Mesmer's abilities as a psychotherapist than Mozart's letters. Nor am I much impressed by the fact that this patient was eventually brought *blind* to Paris as a living confutation of Mesmer's claim to have cured her. Because it appears obvious, by the light of modern knowledge, that the girl-pianist and singer was not suffering from a “perfect amaurosis” (loss of power in the optic nerve) but from what is now known as psychogenic amblyopia (blindness dictated by the unconscious)—and both her pension and her publicity depended on her inability to see.

Even more obvious, by the same light, appears the fact that the “imperfect amaurosis, accompanied by paralysis of the limbs which was afflicting Mr d'Oesterwald” must have been psychogenic rather than biogenic—as indeed the

whole “Collection of Cures effected by Magnetism” referred to in Mesmer's footnote on p. 44.

Unfortunately neither that Collection nor the letter of the 5th of January 1775 (addressed to Dr J. C. Inzer of Altona), to which the Dissertation makes several allusions, are available to me for evidence of my contention that its author was no charlatan. But further proof that he sincerely believed his own Propositions to constitute scientific truth is afforded by his reference to the famous exorcist Johann Gassner, “an ecclesiastic, a man of good faith but excessive zeal”, as “nothing but a tool of Nature” which you will find on p. 43.

While for complete proof that the discoverer of animal magnetism did cure what is now known by that misbegotten word psychoneurosis, compound of the presumably immortal psyche and the admittedly mortal neuron, I refer you to the anonymous patient (p. 52), “aged forty”, who suffered from “a general paralysis” which produced “every appearance of old age and drunkenness”. For, thanks to the researches of another of Mesmer's English biographers, R. B. Ince (who, most unfortunately in my opinion, entitles his book *Three Occultists*), I am enabled to quote the publicly sworn statement of that particular patient, Charles du Hussay, Major of Infantry and Knight of the Royal Military Order of Saint Louis (a shellshocked officer of Lafayette's American Expeditionary Force?), which reads in effect:

“After four years of useless experiments by other doctors I consulted Mesmer. My head was constantly shaking and my neck bent forward. My eyes protruded and were greatly inflamed. My tongue was almost paralysed. I could only speak with difficulty. I laughed, involuntarily, for no reason. My cheeks and nose were reddish purple and my breathing difficult. I suffered from a pain between my shoulders and constant tremors. I staggered when I walked”.

Having sworn to these symptoms, du Hussay details the mesmeric crises, "ice coming from my limbs, followed by great heat and foetid perspiration", several of which seem to have occurred during the first month of his treatment, and concludes his statement, "Now, after four months I am completely cured".

Again I am willing to make an admission. The cure may not have been permanent. I submit, however, that this extant evidence proves that Mesmer must have had no mean abilities as a psychotherapist. And the evidence seems all the more incontrovertible, because it is so curiously supported by the experiences of the many medieval exorcists who observed and recorded the same symptom of "foetid perspiration" after a successful "casting out" of the devil. Equally incontrovertible, nevertheless, is the fact that Mesmer remained in complete ignorance of the main source of his abilities—almost certainly some form of pre- or post-hypnotic suggestion—throughout a career whose first apotheosis synchronised with the appearance of the Dissertation, which was put on sale in Paris five years after Louis XVI succeeded Louis XV, one year after the death of Voltaire and the neurotic Rousseau, and ten before the pusillanimous surrender of the Bastille.

I have stressed the historical background because it is important to realise that the Paris in which Mesmer took refuge from the setback he admits himself to have suffered in Vienna, though still the scientific centre of Europe, was already in an intellectual ferment, a perfect seedbed, therefore, for the implantation of a new medical idea. That strange sect, the Illuminati, founded by Adam Weishaupt and his colleagues in 1777, had begun operating there; and it is possible, though not provable, that Mesmer's most prominent supporter, Dr Charles d'Eslon, physician to the Count d'Artois, the king's youngest brother—destined to

become Charles X of France, abdicate to Holyrood and die in Austria—was one of the "illuminated". But that again is speculation, and beyond my thesis.

Factually, thanks to various other treatments no less successful than du Hussay's, to d'Eslon and a few more influential supporters whose belief in animal magnetism was as absolute as his own, Mesmer soon became the rage of Paris and the clinic he established in the Place Vendôme a centre of fashion, not to have patronised which—no matter whether you were suffering from nerves, gout, ennui or mere curiosity—was to argue yourself unknown.

Chief and most discussed feature of this lavishly furnished, gorgeously curtained and carpeted clinic—very first for the practice of group therapy and mass hypnotism?—where Mesmer, armed with a wand, officiated in "anti-magnetic" clothes to the strains of music, was the celebrated "baquet", a large vat filled with water and magnetic material such as iron filings. From this projected metal bars, which the patients, who also held one another's hands as at table-turning séances,¹ grasped during treatment.

The baquet—Margaret Goldsmith states—had been used by Mesmer, along with "magnetised" trees, ponds, etc., since 1775. It seems to have been regarded by the ignorant as a source of electrical energy. The Dissertation, however, states categorically: "The desire to refute such errors once and for all, and to do justice to truth, determined me to make no further use of electricity or the magnet from 1776 onwards"; and it is obvious that Mesmer himself believed the baquet to be some kind of storage tank, as laid down in Proposition Seventeen, "This magnetic property may be stored up, concentrated and transported".

His employment of mirrors, with which the clinic was also lavishly provided, and of music, are explained by Proposi-

¹ Table-turning was "discovered" and became the rage of Paris in the early 1850's.

tion Fifteen, "It is intensified and reflected by mirrors, just like light", and Proposition Sixteen, "It is communicated, propagated and intensified by sound".

And here, since I am dealing with the theoretical basis of Mesmer's activities, I cannot refrain from alluding to a little-known tale by Rudyard Kipling, which will be found in his ultimate volume of short stories, *Limits and Renewals*, under the title *Unprofessional*, and the verses which follow. The chances are that Kipling, an omnivorous reader, was familiar with the Propositions. If not—for they form the very plinth of the tale—the coincidence is one of the most remarkable in the whole history of human imagination.

The furore created by the Mesmer's clinic, at which d'Eslon was also working, may—as some authorities allege—have led to the immediate foundation of the Society of Harmony, pledged to the propagation of his principles. The point, however, is extremely dubious. That rare book, printed from copper plates, *Théorie du Monde et des Êtres organisés selon les principes de M...* which Maggs of Berkeley Square priced at fifty guineas in 1932, and of which I was recently shown a copy by Goldschmidt of Bond Street, was not published until 1784, and is totally incomprehensible without the separate key-page to the secret cyphers used for all important words. This proceeding seems to me far more in accord with the tenets of the Society than with the publicity campaign between 1779 and 1781.

That same year, 1781, Mesmer removed himself, with a handful of patients, to Spa, which was then under Austrian suzerainty. Subsequently, he and d'Eslon quarrelled.

A. V. Arnault's *Biographie Nouvelle des Contemporains*, published in 1824, which treats Mesmer throughout as a charlatan, alleges (1) that d'Eslon claimed nearly the whole credit for the cures, and (2) that Mesmer's action was taken in order to extort money from the government. The first

statement is obviously suspect—d'Eslon was certainly loyal, and Mesmer tetchy. (One cannot help being reminded of a slightly similar situation which arose between Freud and Jung.) The second statement is a downright lie.

What actually happened—my authority is Schürer-Waldheim, who gives chapter and verse for all his statements—appears to have been this:

Between them, Mesmer and d'Eslon had roused the opposition of the entire medical faculty. In vain d'Eslon—under the threat that his name would be "erased from the register" unless he forswore the mesmeric doctrine—appealed to the King's physician, Dr de Lassonne. Whereupon, on the 15th of April 1781, the enraged Mesmer informed his patients that he intended to leave Paris; one of them, the Duchess of Chaulnes, carried the news to Marie Antoinette, and her Master of the Household (*Hausminister*) called on Mesmer to find out on what "conditions" he would remain.

Mesmer's first demand was for "recognition". That refused, no cash offer—Arnault says he was bid 20,000 livres¹ down and 10,000 annually to found a school of animal magnetism—could tempt him to stay.

He left France where he had been making a mint of money (in his own words "a stream of silver") immediately; and did not return as a permanent resident for three years. In the meantime his wife, an extravagant woman whom he was never to see again—she died in 1790—had dissipated most of her fortune.

These facts, I maintain, are more proofs of his intrinsic honesty. That he was both a disgruntled, and a thoroughly misled scientist, is beside the argument maintained by me.

Abandoned by his master, deprived of his professorship for refusing to renounce his beliefs, d'Eslon continued the fight in Paris. As a mere general practitioner he established

¹ The word *livre* is misleading. It means a franc (at the franc's then value) and should be so understood throughout.

another clinic. A year later, having effected various cures, he asked the faculty for a committee of investigation. Hearing of this in Spa, Mesmer wrote a furious protest to the faculty: d'Eslon, a mere pupil, had neither the right nor the knowledge to testify the truth about animal magnetism.

But by then the fight had become a pitched battle; and on the 12th of March 1784 Louis XVI convened a body of nine commissioners under the presidency of Benjamin Franklin, newly accredited ambassador of the United States of America whose independence had just been recognised by Great Britain, which included Jean Sylvain Bailly, the most distinguished astronomer of his day, Lavater, the scientist, and Doctor Guillotin, inventor and subsequent victim of the humane killer that still bears his name. The Royal Society of Medicine protesting that it was not represented, four more commissioners, making thirteen in all, were added to the original number. Among these four was Antoine Laurent de Jussieu, doctor and botanist, whose great book on plants, published five years later, is still the basis of their classification.

Despite another protest from Mesmer, written personally to Benjamin Franklin, the commissioners decided that an investigation of d'Eslon's clinic and patients would suffice their purpose; and their subsequent report on d'Eslon's method of treatment, its successes and its failures, is such a model of objective clarity that one cannot help marvelling why only de Jussieu dissented from the verdict of the majority, "The imagination does everything, the magnetism nothing"¹, until one remembers Charcot's childish dictum, uttered a whole century later, "It is faith which cures" . . . and that, as lately as 1922, our own War Office's Committee of Enquiry into Shellshock dismissed Freud's entire teaching as contemptuously as its civilian successor of 1939, on one of whose secret findings the Ministry of Pensions still relies for its systematic

¹ "Touch" and "imitation" were also given as causes of the phenomena.

refusal of all pensions for nervous disabilities, though thousands of such decisions have already been reversed on appeal.

From the verdict of Louis XVI's commissioners, needless to say, of which 20,000 copies were instantly published, there was no legal appeal; and a personal petition by Mesmer to the King's Parliament did not even receive an acknowledgement. Seventeen of d'Eslon's twenty-one medical assistants, hauled before the faculty, renounced magnetism rather than lose their titles of doctor. But d'Eslon himself remained loyal; and round him gathered a phalanx of enthusiasts, Thomas Onglée, Louis Varnier, Baptiste Bonnefroy, Hervier of the Sorbonne, whom Mesmer had cured of a serious illness, Galart de Montjoye of Philadelphia, Orelut, Kornmann, the banker, and the fiery lawyer from Lyons, Nicholas Bergasse. Thanks largely to Bergasse's efforts Mesmer, backed by the Society of Harmony, returned to Paris for his second apotheosis in that same year 1784.

The original members of this Society, mostly laymen, numbered forty-eight, each of whom subscribed 100 louis d'or. What its funds eventually swelled to is conjectural. Schürer-Waldheim mentions one sum of half a million francs refused by Mesmer for a lecture tour in the provinces, and devoted, at his wish, to the establishment of magnetic clinics throughout France. The *Nouvelle Biographie*'s estimate is 340,000 francs; and the same figure is given in Lewis Spence's *Encyclopaedia of Occultism* from which I have also borrowed my modicum. The pecuniary point, however—even if Mesmer's contention, made when he was nearly eighty, that the French Revolution cost him 400,000 livres be more than a senile boast—is immaterial to the main argument of this thesis; and his personal story from 1789 onwards can be told in the fewest words.

¹ One louis d'or = 24 livres or francs.

From France, in that year, he fled to Baden; from Baden to Karlsruhe; and thence to Vienna, where the murdered Marie Antoinette's brother, Joseph II, is said to have taken the precaution of locking him up for two months as a suspected revolutionary. In 1798 he ventured back to Paris. The extant identity card describes him as, "64 years old. Height 1 metre 76 centimetres." (5 ft. 10½ in.) "Hair and eyebrows brown. Eyes ditto. Chin—double. Face—round. Forehead—high. Nose and mouth—medium". After nearly three years in Paris he moved out to Versailles and entered into negotiations with the Directory; eventually securing, after five more years which seem to have been spent in Switzerland, a small annuity (3,000 florins)¹ as compensation for 500,000 francs-worth of pre-revolutionary Government bonds.

1803 finds him back in Switzerland, at Frauenfeld, south of Lake Constance. To write of him as a "forgotten man" may be a slight exaggeration. He still receives an occasional letter from old French colleagues, an occasional visit from some curious Swiss or German doctor. For animal magnetism is being more and more practised, especially—thanks largely to Lavater—in the various states of Germany. But his original doctrine, Mesmer holds—never did a stumbler towards scientific truth cling more obstinately to an unscientific premise—has been perverted; and the end of 1811 finds him refusing an invitation from Professor Reil, head of the Prussian Faculty of Medicine, to demonstrate his methods in Berlin.

Not until January 1812 does he receive his first letter from Reil's duly authorised representative, Doctor Karl Christian Wolfart, whose friendship and enthusiasm not only irradiated the last three years of his life but ensured the publication of his *System der Wechselwirkungen*. That book—compiled from a mass of notes, half in French and half in German, edited and published by Wolfart—sums up the whole doctrine of animal magnetism as preached by Mesmer. It appeared towards the

¹ The florin or Dutch guilder (value 2/-) was an international currency.

end of 1814. A few months later, on the 5th of March 1815, he died.

Mesmer died at Meersburg on the north shore of that lake in which he must have swum when a boy, having moved to a house in the Vorburg Gasse from his summer chalet at Riedetsweiler, a village nearby; and his young friend Justus Kerner, thanks to whose book, published in Frankfurt on the Maine in 1856, we know so much about his last years, tells us that he died smiling. A strange thing.

Strange, too, is the tale of the magnetisable canary which would fly from its cage, always open, and perch on his head to sing him awake every morning; perch on the sugar basin while he ate his breakfast and anticipate his need by pecking extra lumps into his coffee cup. For the end of that tale, as Kerner relates it, runs: "Next morning Mesmer lay as though he were still alive, but never again did the canarybird fly on to his head to wake him. It ate no more and sang no more and soon it was found dead in its cage".

Far stranger, however, to me at any rate, is the impression I have gathered that, when it came to clinical treatment, the discoverer of animal magnetism pinned his whole faith to the therapeutic value of the mesmeric "crisis", as exemplified by the case of du Hussay, setting little or no value on the mesmeric "trance".

This impression may be erroneous. Schürer-Waldheim does not seem to agree with it. He admits, however, that Lavater's conversion to animal magnetism was largely due to experiments of a hypnotic nature carried out on his own wife, and lists among his many sources of information the Marquis Chastenot de Puysegur's—though he does not, in my opinion, give its author enough credit for his services to science—*Recherches, expériences and physiologiques observations on man in the state of natural somnambulism and of somnambulism provoked by the magnetic act.*

Both the Marquis and his brother Count Maximus de

Puységur had been members of the Society of Harmony. Starting in 1784, both carried on their clinical activities—one is tempted to draw a parallel with Pavlov continuing his investigation of the conditioned reflex during the Russian Terror—throughout the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars. But with the publication in the year 1811 of the former's book—chronicle of his experiments on simple peasantsfolk, mainly women, conducted round an allegedly magnetised tree in his château near Soissons—the spade work, if I may be permitted that expression, done by the Society came to an end; the mesmeric crisis was as good as forgotten, and the mesmeric trance focused every investigator's attention.

Held, not altogether erroneously, to be a form of sleep-walking, the trance retained its name Somnambulism until the publication of Braid's *Neurhypnology or the Rationale of Nervous Sleep considered in relation with Animal Magnetism* rechristened it Hypnotism shortly after 1843.

Meanwhile, as early as 1819, only four years after his death, a Portuguese abbot, José Custodio de Faria, had elaborated Mesmer's theory of a *rapport* between the somnambulist and the somnambulist (note the similarity with Freud); a bare two years later the French surgeon, Doctor Recamier, is alleged to have performed the first operation on a "tranced" patient;¹ Alexandre Bertrand, who died untimely, was gathering material for his *Traité du Somnambulisme*, which appeared in 1823; and a certain Baron d'Hénin, to whose forgotten works the *Nouvelle Biographie* makes the most enthusiastic reference, branded Mesmer, the Puységurs, Johann Gassner, Valentine Greatrakes, and, or so at least one gathers, almost everybody else whose mind had ever gained any sort of ascendancy over his fellows, as *Phantaisicoustaes*—an omnibus word which appears to need the acute accent as little as my English

¹ There is some evidence that a M. Dubois painlessly removed a breast under somnambulism as early as 1797.

equivalent for it, "imaginationmongers", needs a hyphen. Note once more of what stuff contemporary opinions can be made!

Early in the nineteenth century, too, diagnosis by somnambulists—which was being practised in this country as recently as 1941—had become moderately fashionable. And it was mainly to investigate this feature of the phenomenon that the French Academy of Medicine appointed two more commissions of inquiry, the first in 1825—the year, by the way, which saw Mesmer's vicarious patron, the Count d'Artois, succeed his brother Louis XVIII as Charles X.

The first commission sat until 1831, the year after Charles abdicated to Holyrood. Its report, largely favourable, though it ignored Bertrand, was promptly disowned by the Academicians, who refused to have it printed, and appointed the second—under a chairman who had sworn open hostility to all forms of mesmerism—with the desired result. The Academy, however, no longer possessed the powers of anathema wielded by its predecessor of 1784.

A few years later, in 1837, Doctor Oudet of the Academy certified that he had witnessed the painless extraction of teeth under somnambulism—a feat which seemed such news to an English editor of 1946 that it very nearly landed its performer into professional trouble for self-advertisement. And in 1838, Dr John Elliotson, with whose name medical history honourably associates that of Dr James Esdalle of Calcutta, was sacked from London University for preaching and practising—both operated on somnambulised patients—the "gross humbug", as the *Lancet* stigmatised it shortly before the publication of Braid's *Neurhypnology*, of mesmerism.

Braid suffered from various delusions, notably that he could bring about both psychological and physiological changes in a tranced patient by stroking certain parts of the skull. (This process was called phreno-magnetism.) But

with his discovery that "hypnosis" could be induced by the simplest means of fixing the patient's attention it became obvious, even to the most academically minded medico, that, whatever its cause, the mesmeric trance could not be humbug. The hypnotic condition was too well established a fact.

The cause of the condition, nevertheless, remained obscure; and although, in 1843, two English periodicals, *The Zoist* and *The Phreno-Magnet*, were launched, under the editorship of Spencer T. Hall, in support of Braidism, the "fluidic theory" still claimed innumerable adherents. Prominent among these was a Baron von Reichenbach who maintained that he had proved the existence of the fluid by various means, including clairvoyance; and renamed it "odylic force".

Odylic force soon went the way of phreno-magnetism, an untenable hypothesis conceivably hybrid by Franz Josef Gall's *Physiology of the Brain* out of Johann Caspar Speerz's writings on "bumps", both of which date back to the first decade of the nineteenth century. *The Zoist*, however, did not cease publication till 1855—by which time James Robinson's *Treatise on the Inhalation of the Vapour of Ether for the Prevention of Pain in Surgical Operations*, first English book to broadcast the discovery of anaesthesia by Dr Bigelow of Boston, had been on sale for eight years.

As a surgical aid, hypnosis was now *vieux jeu*. Could it be of medical aid? Once again, the academic medicine men thundered their anathematos, "No". "Leave mesmerism and hypnotism and animal magnetism", cried the academicians of all occidental countries, "to conjurers and quacks. Leave them to the dupes of Mr Sludge the Medium." And at first not even the young student who was to become his most fervent disciple, Bernheim, believed the counter-cry of Liébault.

Liébault founded his clinic at Nancy in 1860. In 1884 the appearance of Bernheim's *De la Suggestion*, one of the most

important contributions ever made to scientific psychology, split the schools into three.

The original school, Mesmer's, still preached a modified form of animal magnetism. They believed in what common parlance—music-hall comedians of my own youth still made great play with the word—dubbed "the 'fluence'". And so strongly was this belief held that no less an authority on hypnotism than Moll writes in all seriousness:

"Oberstheimer states that in Austria the law requires army horses to be mesmerised for the purpose of shoeing them. This process was introduced by an army officer named Balassa, and hence it has been termed and is now known as the 'balassieren' of horses".

The second school, Charcot's at La Salpêtrière in Paris, which confined its investigations to a few permanently employed hypnotic subjects whom one is tempted to class with mediums, is said to have been still experimenting with magnets in the eighteen-eighties. Finally making up its mind, however, that the mesmeric trance was a purely pathological, and primarily diseased condition, it declared total war on Nancy—only to be totally defeated by Bernheim, ably aided by Heidenhain of Breslau.

It is largely to Bernheim and Heidenhain that we owe the whole doctrine of "suggestibility" as exemplified by the late Professor Coué, some of whose cures were as indubitable as they were remarkable.

Nevertheless it is partly to Charcot, under whom he studied, that we owe the Darwin of modern psychotherapy—deride some of his theories as you will, you cannot deny the man's medico-historical importance—Sigmund Freud.

Freud, I contend—he also a Viennese—is a direct descendant in the Mesmeric line. In final support of the contention, I cite yet one more book, published at Chicago a whole decade before the coiner of the word psychoanalysis

began to formulate his concept of the conscious and unconscious elements in the human mind.

The date of that book is 1893 and its author Thomas Jay Hudson. Its title page reads : *The Law of Psychic Phenomena. A Working Hypothesis.*

Hudson's hypothesis—briefly that we possess two minds, the one open to, the other completely closed against and immune from the process of inductive reasoning—is, I claim, an unbreakable link in my chain of evidence; as it were the central arch of a bridge spanning three centuries, the long road over which conducts the medical historian straight back from narcoanalysis (for which the hypnotic state is induced by drugs) and electric convulsion therapy (to a form of which, as you will read, Mademoiselle Paradis was also subjected) as practised by psychotherapists in 1948, through Freud's obsolescent psychoanalysis and Bernheim's equally obsolescent suggestion, to Elliotson, Esdaile and Braid. And from Braid, I claim, the road leads straight back to the author of this Dissertation whose hand rekindled in eighteenth-century Europe the torches of a science partly known to its so-called pagan inhabitants and consistently practised by the oriental world through countless centuries. . . .

Once again vanity, both the layman's and the professional's, tempts a conditioned pen. The pen would fain run on. But it has never been conditioned to the writing of medical history. And I must leave the fuller elaboration of my thesis to some writer of more knowledge, and maybe of greater objectivity.

In the meantime, let Mesmer speak for himself.

London.

July 1948.

G.F.

M É M O I R E

S U R L A D É C O U V E R T E

D U

M A G N É T I S M E

A N I M A L ;

*Par M. MESMER, Docteur en Médecine
de la Faculté de Vienne.*



A G E N E V E ;

Et se trouve

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