

**HYPNOTISM AS A THERAPEUTIC
AGENT, A PAPER READ BY REQUEST AT
THE TWENTY-THIRD SESSION OF THE
VIRGINIA STATE MEDICAL SOCIETY,
SEPTEMBER 13TH, 14TH, AND 15TH, 1892**

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Hypnotism as a therapeutic agent, a paper read by Request at the Twenty-Third Session of the Virginia State Medical Society, September 13Th, 14Th, and 15Th, 1892 by William Lee Howard

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WILLIAM LEE HOWARD

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AT THE

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OF THE

Virginia State Medical Society,

September 13th, 14th and 15th, 1892,

BY

WILLIAM LEE HOWARD, M. D.,

OF BALTIMORE, MD.

BALTIMORE:
THE AMERICAN JOB OFFICE.

1893.

The man who, outside of pure mathematics, pronounces the word IMPOSSIBLE, lacks prudence.

ARAGO,
In his éloge of Bally.

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INTRODUCTION.

Doctor—You see her eyes are open.

Gentlemen—Aye, but their sense is shut.

MACBETH.

The only apology the author has for putting this paper before the profession is the interest shown in the subject. Since writing an account of some of my investigations in psychology and hypnotism, articles that have been produced sporadically in various journals, I have been in receipt of hundreds of letters from doctors, scientists and lawyers, asking me for more details upon the subject. Hence I concluded to publish my latest paper upon hypnotism, adding a list of works upon the subject, which I hope will be found satisfactory, as I have been so frequently asked about the literature, especially modern literature, relating to hypnotism. It was my intention to give a more satisfactory physiological explanation, as well as to enter deeper into the subject, but as I found that my investigations

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would cover over a period of several more years study, I have made this tentative effort, hoping that the interest aroused would redound to the future knowledge and benefit of both reader and author.

Great gaps in conclusive facts will be noticed, because the writer does not feel justified in going beyond his own deductions derived from experience. If the reception of these few pages is such as to attract the attention of our progressive profession, the author will feel justified in placing a more pretentious paper before the public.

In the following pages I have given Prof. Gower's, F. R. C. S., explanation of the phenomena of hypnotism. It is but just to give another explanation here. Prof. Rudolf Haidenhain, of the University of Breslau, attempts to explain most of the phenomena by the physiological doctrine of inhibitory nerve action. While I admit that most of the phenomena can be explained physiologically, there remains a mass of facts which cannot be explained with our present uncertain knowledge of physiology. In view of this admission I will give a few of Haidenhain's

theories as transcribed by Prof. Crystal, Edinburgh University. Haidenhain groups the symptoms of the hypnotic state under four heads :

(1) Those referable to conditions of the sensorium or portions of the brain, which receives nervous impulses, resulting in a movement of a reflex and imitative character; (2) insensibility to pain, and various forms of pervertical sensations ; (3) increased irritability of the portions of the nervous centres devoted to reflex actions ; and (4) states of the nervous centres controlling the movements of the eye, the accommodations of the eye to objects at various distances, and the movements of respiration, etc.

A person in a state of hypnotism may be regarded as in a condition in which the part of the nervous apparatus associated with conscious perception is thrown out of gear, without preventing the kind of movements which would result were it really in action.

A good example of inhibition is shown and is supplied by the innervation of the heart. Its rhythmic contractions are maintained by the nervous ganglia in its substance. Further it is

supplied by the vagus nerve and by the sympathetic. Section of the vagus is followed by quickening of the heart's action, and stimulation of the lower end causes slowing, and, if the stimulation be strong enough, stoppage of the heart, not however, in a tetanic state (which would be the case if the fibres of the vagus acted directly on the muscular structures of the heart, as a motor nerve), but in diastole. Opposite results follow sections and stimulations of the sympathetic fibres. It has been clearly made out that the terminal fibres of both nerves do not act on muscular fibres but on ganglion cells, those of the vagus inhibiting, or restraining, whilst those of the sympathetic "accelerate" the action of the cells. Inhibition is now known to play an important part in all nervous actions, and it would seem that any powerful impression in a sensory nerve may inhibit or restrain motion. This is strikingly seen in some of the lower animals. It has been ascertained that whilst the spinal cord is the chief reflex centre, the reflex activity can be inhibited by impulses transmitted to it from portions of the cerebral hemispheres which are in a state of high activity. It would appear then

that if we suppose one set of sensory or recipient cells in the brain to be brought into a state of exalted irritability by the preliminary operations of hypnotism, the result might be the inhibition of the parts devoted to voluntary movements. In like manner, the activity of the sensory nerve cells may become inhibited. Thus stimulation of a certain cutaneous area, say the arm, by a mustard plaster, has been found to lower the sensibility of the corresponding portions of skin on the opposite arm. The theory then offered is that "the cause of the phenomena of hypnotism lies in the inhibition of the activity of the ganglion cells of the cerebral cortex,—the inhibition being brought about by gentle and prolonged stimulation of the sensory nerves of the face, or of the auditory or optic nerve."

As there is a legal side to the phenomena I have added a few facts for the reader to consider. As professional men we should look this subject fairly in the face, and at once stop all public demonstrations of hypnotism, as we would those of surgical operations or gynecological demonstrations.