

"Psychological Phenomena of the Subliminal Mind."

Paper Read by Dr. G. A. Coggeshall Before the Contemporary Club of Henderson, Monday Night, April 30th, 1906.

The "subliminal" is a word composed of the Latin words "sub" meaning under, and "limen" meaning "threshold." It means, therefore, strictly, "under the threshold." As used by the psychologist, however, it has the specific meaning of "that which is just beneath the surface of consciousness" or the subconscious mind.

Within a comparatively recent period the fact has become established and undeniably true that there is a subconscious mind and a subliminal mind—and it is to the psychological phenomena of the subconscious or subliminal mind that I will ask your attention this evening.

Through all ages, certain mysterious phenomena have caused wonder and perplexity to men of such attainments as Plato, Aristotle, and the great philosophers, and the warnings, premonitions and disclosures received in dreams—the power of certain individuals to see and describe things that were happening at a distance or in the past—the accurate prognostications of seers and prophets—the "miraculous" healings of the sick—the reported manifestations of "mediums" and "spirits" by a system of rappings, table tipping and other manifestations—the wonders of planchette, invisible slates, writing crystal globes, etc.

For a long time the world of science looked askance or with cold disdain upon all these phenomena, discrediting their reality, and regarding them as inventions and hallucinations. But as the manifestations increased in volume and the testimony of men of rank and undoubted veracity, the scientific world gradually after the development of the cult of spiritualism, the scientific world felt obliged to study closely such phenomena, and to seek to explain them as much as was really true and how much was false.

Accordingly, a number of men in the highest walks of science were moved to organize in 1882 the Society for Psychical Research. The first President of the Society was the late Professor Henry Sidgwick, the very eminent logician of Cambridge University. Among the Vice-presidents were Mr. Arthur Balfour, now Prime Minister of England, Mr. Richard H. Burton, editor of the London Spectator, Henry Meville Wedgwood, the brother-in-law of Charles Darwin. Among other distinguished members were the late F. W. H. Myers, one of the ablest and most industrious investigators, Sir William Crookes, the inventor of the Crookes tube, used in X-ray work, Dr. Richard Hodgson, the present secretary of the Society, American Branch, Prof. William James, of Harvard University, the late Prof. S. P. Langley, of the Smithsonian Institute, Washington, D. C., the late Prof. G. B. Marston of Yale, the Bishop of Ripon, and Prof. Max Dessoir of the University of Berlin.

The object of the Society is explained in the following language: "It has been widely felt that the present is an opportune time for making an organized and systematic attempt to investigate that large group of debatable phenomena designated by such terms as mesmeric, psychical, or spiritualist. It is the object of the Society to investigate, from the records of testimony of many competent witnesses, past and present, including observations recently made by scientific men of eminence in various countries, there appears to be a considerable body of remarkable phenomena, which are prima facie inexplicable on any recognized hypothesis, and which, if uncontestedly established, would be of the highest value."

The special subjects of investigation are stated as follows: "1st. An examination of the nature and extent of any influence which may be exerted by one mind upon another, apart from any generally recognized mode of perception. "2d. The study of hypnotism and the forms of so-called mesmeric trances, with its alleged susceptibility to clairvoyance and other allied phenomena. "3d. A careful investigation of any reports resting on strong testimony regarding apparitions at the moment of death or otherwise, or regarding the disturbances in houses reported to be haunted. "4th. An inquiry into the various psychical phenomena commonly called 'Spiritualism,' with an attempt to discover their cause and general laws. "5th. The collection and collation of existing materials bearing on the history of these subjects."

As the result of the investigations of this Society, which have embraced an immense mass of testimony, there became clearly defined the existence and reality of the human mind, the conscious and the subconscious elements. Hudson gives the following classification in his book: "The conscious mind makes cognizance of the 'objective world.' Its media of observation are the five physical senses. It is the seat of man's physical necessities. It is his guide in his struggle with his material environment. Its highest function is that of reasoning. The subconscious, or subliminal mind takes cognizance of its environment by means independent of the physical senses. It perceives by intuition. It is the seat of the emotions, and the store-house of memory. It performs its highest functions when the objective senses are in abeyance. It is that intelligence which is especially manifested in the hypnotic subject, when in a state of somnambulism."

In this state many of the most wonderful facts of the subconscious mind are performed. It sees without the use of the natural organs of vision, and in this sense in many other degrees of the hypnotic state it can be made apparently to leave the body and travel distant lands, and bring back intelligence of things of the most exact and truthful character. It also has the power to read the thoughts of others, even to the minutest detail; to open the contents of sealed envelopes and of closed books. In short, it is the subliminal mind that possesses what is popularly designated as clairvoyant power, and the ability to apprehend the thoughts of others without the aid of the ordinary, objective means of communication.

"In point of fact," continues Hudson, "that which for convenience, I have chosen to designate as the subconscious mind, appears to be a separate and distinct entity, and the real distinctive difference between the two minds, seems to consist in the fact that the conscious mind is merely the function of the physical brain, while the subconscious mind is a distinct entity, possessing independent powers and functions, having a mental organization of its own, and being capable of sustaining its existence independently of the body. In other words, it is the soul."

I will now give some examples recorded of the phenomena of the subconscious mind, or subliminal self. One of the striking properties of the subconscious mind is its perfect memory. Coleridge, in his Biographical Literatures, gives the following interesting case: "A young woman of four or five and twenty, who could neither read nor write, was seized with a nervous fever, during which according to the asser-

ptions of those around her, she became possessed, as it appeared of a very learned devil. She continued incessantly talking Latin, Greek, and Hebrew in very pompous tones, and with most distinct enunciation. Voltaire, humorously advised the devil to decline and acquaintance with medical men; and it would have been more to his reputation, if he had taken the advice in the present instance. The case had attracted the attention of a young physician, and by his statement, many eminent physiologists

visited the town and examined the case on the spot. She continued her ravings were taken from her own mouth, and were found to consist of sentences coherent and intelligible each for itself, but with little or no connection with each other. Of the Hebrew, a small portion only could be traced to the Bible; the remainder seemed to be in the Rabbinical dialect. All risk or complicity was out of the question. Not only had the young woman been ever a harmless, simple creature, but she was evidently laboring under a most serious form of insanity. Fully the young girl's past life, the young physician found that when she was nine years old she had been charitably taken in charge by an old woman, and had remained with him some years till the old man's death. On inquiry into the past life, it appeared that it had been the old man's wish that she should be brought to a passage of his house into which the kitchen door opened, and to read to him with a loud voice, out of his favorite books. Among these books were found a collection of Rabbinical writings together with several of the Greek and Latin fathers, and the physician, on seeing these taken down at the young woman's bedside, that no doubt could remain in any rational mind concerning the true origin of the impression on her nervous system.

"The impression on the girl's conscious mind must have been superficial and doubtful, and she was not, in any manner, mentally after the development of the cult of spiritualism, the scientific world felt obliged to study closely such phenomena, and to seek to explain them as much as was really true and how much was false.

Another instance is given, when not one but two persons had been percipients or receivers of dream intelligence. "A gentleman had a servant, Susan by name, who was taken to the hospital. It was some time before she recovered, and on a rainy night, says the gentleman, the following mystery occurred which has been ever since a puzzle to myself. Being asleep, I was aroused by the sound of her feet on the stairs, and I started through the darkness of the bedroom, but could not see anything but a light overcoat which I saw falling from the stairs. I turned and saw a woman in a light overcoat, and I felt a cold chill all down my side where she seemed to touch me. I turned and saw her again, and she seemed to be looking at me, and I felt a cold chill all down my side where she seemed to touch me. I turned and saw her again, and she seemed to be looking at me, and I felt a cold chill all down my side where she seemed to touch me.

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