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A Case of Obsession

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THE particulars of the case of “obsession,” alluded to in the April number of this magazine, are given in the following letter from a respectable English medical man who is in attendance upon the victim: —

I take the liberty of addressing you in the cause of humanity, with the intention of exciting your sympathies and obtaining all the aid in your power to afford, in a case of “control.” You will understand that the gentleman is being *made a medium* against his wish, through having attended a few *séances* for the purpose of witnessing “materialization.”

Ever since he has been more or less subject to a series of persecutions by the “controlling” spirit and, in spite of every effort of his to throw off the influence, he has been made to suffer most shamefully and painfully in very many ways and under most trying and aggravating circumstances, especially by his thoughts being forced into forbidden channels without external causes being present — the bodily functions overruled, even being caused to bite his tongue and cheeks severely whilst eating, etc., and subjected to every species of petty annoyances which will serve as a means for the “control” (unknown) to sustain and establish the connection. The details are in their most painful features not such as I can write to you; but if there be any means known to you whereby the influence can be diverted, and it is thought necessary to be more particular in my description of this case, I will send you all the information I possess.

So little is known in India of the latest and most startling phase of Western mediumistic phenomena — “materialization” — that a few words of explanation are needed to make this case understood. Briefly, then, for several years, in the presence of certain mediums in America and Europe, there have been seen, often under good test conditions, apparitions of the dead, which in every respect seem like living human [396] beings. They walk about, write messages to present and absent friends, speak audibly in the languages familiar to them in life, even though the medium may be unacquainted with them, and are dressed in the garb they wore when alive. Many cases of fraudulent personation of the dead have been detected, pretended mediums have sometimes gone on for years deceiving the credulous, and real ones, whose psychical



powers have been apparently proved beyond doubt, have been caught playing tricks in some evil hour when they have yielded to either the love of money or notoriety. Still, making every allowance for all these, there is a residuum of veritable cases of the materialization, or the making visible, tangible, and audible of portrait-figures of dead people. These wonderful phenomena have been variously regarded by investigators. Most Spiritualists have looked upon them as the most precious proofs of the soul-survival; while Theosophists, acquainted with the views of the ancient Theurgists, and the still more ancient Aryan philosophers, have viewed them as at best misleading deceptions of the senses, fraught with danger to the physical and moral natures of both medium and spectator — if the latter chances to be susceptible to certain psychical influences. These students of Occultism have noticed that the mediums for materializations have too often been ruined in health by the drain upon their systems, and wrecked in morals. They have over and over again warned the Spiritualistic public that mediumship was a most dangerous gift, one only to be tolerated under great precautions. And for this they have received much abuse and few thanks. Still one's duty must be done at every cost, and the case now before us affords a valuable text for one more bit of friendly counsel.

We need not stop to discuss the question whether the so-called materialized forms above described are or are not those of the deceased they look like. That may be held in reserve until the bottom facts of Oriental psychical science are better understood. Nor need we argue as to whether there has ever been an authentic materialization. The London experiences of Mr. William Crookes, F.R.S., and the American ones of Colonel Olcott, both so widely known [397] and of so convincing a character, give us a sufficient basis of fact to argue upon. We assume the reality of materializations, and shall take the instance cited by the English physician as a subject for diagnosis.

The patient then is described as having been “controlled” since attending “circles” where there were materializations, and as having become the bond-slave of some evil powers which force him to say and do painful and even disgusting things, despite his resistance. Why is this? How can a man be compelled to so act against his will? What is Obsession? Three brief questions these are, but most difficult to explain to an uninitiated public. The laws of Obsession can only be well understood by him who has sounded the depths of Indian philosophy. The only clue to the secret, which the West possesses, is contained in that most beneficent science, Magnetism or Mesmerism. That does teach the existence of a vital fluid within and about the human being; the fact of different human polarities; and the possibility of one person projecting this fluid or force at will, to and upon another person differently polarized. Baron Reichenbach's theory of Odyle or Odic force shows us the existence of this same fluid in the mineral and vegetable as well as the animal kingdoms. To complete the chain of evidence, Buchanan's discovery of the psychometrical faculty in man enables us to prove, by the help of this faculty, that a subtle influence is exerted by people upon the houses and even the localities they live in, the paper they write upon, the clothing they wear, the portion of the Universal Ether (the Aryan *Akāśa*) they exist in — and that this is a permanent influence, perceptible even at the most distant epochs from the time when the individual lived and exerted this influence. In one word, we may say that the discoveries of Western science corroborate most fully the hints



thrown out by Greek sages and the more defined theories of certain Indian philosophers.

Indians and Buddhists believe alike that thought and deed are both material, that they survive, that the evil desires and the good ones of a man environ him in a world of his own making, that these desires and thoughts take on shapes [398] that become real to him after death, and that *Moksha*, in the one case, and *Nirvana*, in the other, cannot be attained until the disembodied soul has passed quite through this shadow-world of the haunting thoughts, and become divested of the last spot of its earthly taint. The progress of Western discovery in this direction has been and must ever be very gradual. From the phenomena of gross to those of more sublimated matter, and thence on towards the mysteries of spirit is the hard road made necessary by the precepts of Aristotle. Western Science first ascertained that our outgoing breath is charged with carbonic acid and, in excess, becomes fatal to human life; then, that certain dangerous diseases are passed from person to person in the sporules thrown off into the air from the sick body; then, that man projects upon everybody and everything he encounters a magnetic *aura*, peculiar to himself; and finally, the physical disturbance set up in the Ether in the process of thought-evolution is now postulated. Another step in advance will be to realize the magical creative power of the human mind, and the fact that moral taint is just as transmissible as physical. The “influence” of bad companions will then be understood to imply a degrading personal magnetism, more subtle than the impressions conveyed to the eye or the ear by the sights and sounds of a vicious company. The latter may be repelled by resolutely avoiding to see or hear what is bad; but the former enwraps the sensitive and penetrates his very being if he but stop where the moral poison is floating in the air. Gregory’s *Animal Magnetism*, Reichenbach’s *Researches*, and Denton’s *The Soul of Things* will make much of this plain to the Western inquirer, though neither of those authors traces the connection of his favourite branch of science with the parent-stock — Indian Psychology.

Keeping the present case in view, we see a man highly susceptible to magnetic impressions, ignorant of the nature of the “materializations” and, therefore, unable to protect himself against bad influences, brought in contact with promiscuous circles where the impressionable medium has long been the unwitting nucleus of evil magnetisms, his [399] system saturated with the emanations of the surviving thoughts and desires of those who are living and those who are dead. The reader is referred to an interesting paper by Judge Gadgil of Baroda (see our December number) on “Hindu Ideas about Communion with the Dead,” for a plain exposition of this question of earth-tied souls, or *Pisachas*. “It is considered,” says that writer, “that in this state the soul being deprived of the means of enjoyment [of sensual pleasures] through its own physical body, is perpetually tormented by hunger, appetite and other bodily desires, and can have only vicarious enjoyment by entering into the living physical bodies of others, or by absorbing the subtlest essences of libations and oblations offered for their own sake.” What is there to surprise us in the fact that a negatively polarized man, a man of a susceptible temperament, being suddenly brought into a current of foul emanations from some vicious person, perhaps still living or perhaps dead, absorbs the insidious poison as rapidly as quicklime does moisture, until he is saturated with it? Thus, a susceptible body will absorb the virus of



smallpox, or cholera, or typhus, and we need only recall this to draw the analogy which Occult Science affirms to be warranted.

Near the Earth's surface there hangs over us — to use a convenient simile — a steamy moral fog, composed of the undispersed exhalations of human vice and passion. This fog penetrates the sensitive to the very soul's core; his psychic self absorbs it as the sponge does water or as fresh milk effluvia. It benumbs his moral sense, spurs his baser instincts into activity, overpowers his good resolutions. As the fumes of a wine-vault make the brain reel, or as the choke-damp stifles one's breath in a mine, so this heavy cloud of immoral influences carries away the sensitive beyond the limits of self-control, and he becomes "obsessed," like our English patient.

What remedy is there to suggest? Does not our very diagnosis indicate that? The sensitive must have his sensitiveness destroyed; the negative polarity must be changed to a positive; he must become active instead of passive. He can be helped by a magnetiser who understands the nature [400] of obsession, and who is morally pure and physically healthy; it must be a powerful magnetiser, a man of commanding will-force. But the fight for freedom will, after all, have to be fought by the patient himself. His will-power must be aroused. He must expel the poison from his system. Inch by inch he must win back the lost ground. He must realize that it is a question of life or death, salvation or ruin, and strive for victory, like one who makes a last and heroic effort to save his life. His diet must be of the simplest, he must neither eat animal food, nor touch any stimulant, nor put himself in any company where there is the smallest chance for unclean thoughts to be provoked. He should be alone as little as possible, but his companions should be carefully chosen. He should take exercise and be much in the open air; use wood-fire, instead of coals. Every indication that the bad influence was still working within him should be taken as a challenge to control his thoughts and compel them to dwell upon pure, elevating, spiritual things, at every hazard and with a determination to suffer anything rather than give way. If this man can have such a spirit infused into him, and his physician can secure the benevolent help of a strong, healthy magnetiser, of pure character, he may be saved. A case almost exactly like this one, except that the patient was a lady, came under our notice in America; the same advice as the above was given and followed, and the obsessing "devil" was driven out and has been kept out ever since.

