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ABNORMAL PSYCHOLOGY



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ABNORMAL PSYCHOLOGY

BY

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TO
DR. MORTON PRINCE
IN APPRECIATION OF HIS PIONEER WORK
IN ABNORMAL PSYCHOLOGY

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INTRODUCTION

ABNORMAL psychology, or the study of abnormal mental phenomena, is one of the late developments of scientific medicine. It is not a mere fad, as some of its critics would attempt to make us believe, neither has it sprung up like a mushroom, within a single night. Abnormal psychology is the outcome of the work of small groups of investigators in France, Germany, and America, within the last twenty-five years. Beginning with a study of the phenomena of hypnosis, these researches gradually developed into a series of brilliant psychological discoveries. The most important of these is the principle of dissociation or of splitting of the mind. In a general way we speak of these matters as the theory of the subconscious. This theory has not only thrown an immense amount of light on the nature of human personality, but other peculiar phenomena, such as losses of memory or amnesia, automatic writing, crystal gazing, and such diseases as neurasthenia, hysteria, psychasthenia, have been stripped of the mystery which sur-

rounded them for centuries. These phenomena, even more than the modern investigations on the ultimate nature of matter, form the "fairy-land of science." Apart from any scientific knowledge, the general reader has a certain interest in these problems, either from curiosity or the light they shed upon human personality or perhaps from the mystery which seems to surround them.

Abnormal psychology has also its practical aspects. Its discoveries have made possible the psychic treatment of certain functional nervous disorders. Technically, this is known as psychotherapeutics. The interpretation of these functional states is based on the principle of the dissociation of consciousness. But psychotherapeutics would be in a very chaotic condition and barren of results, were it not for abnormal psychology, for a scientific psychotherapeutics must be based upon a sound psychopathology.

Most of the investigations on abnormal psychology are widely scattered in medical publications and in psychological journals of a highly specialized character, thereby making these researches almost inaccessible to the general reader. There has been no attempt, so far as known, to bring all this material together within the compass of a single book. It is with this object in view that the present volume

was written. In it an attempt will be made, not only to summarize the principal work in this fascinating field, but also some personal observations and experiments will be added.

Most of the problems of abnormal psychology centre around the modern theory of the subconscious. While there is no consensus of opinion as to the exact interpretation of these subconscious phenomena, yet it is admitted by all psychologists that subconscious or dissociated mental states exist. Whether these states depend upon psychological or physiological activities, or whether they are normal or abnormal conditions, seems to be the chief ground of contention. It seems that subconscious manifestations present all grades of complexity, from the absent-mindedness of everyday life to the phenomena of hysteria and multiple personality. Before we can comprehend the more complicated aspects of subconscious mental states we must have a clear understanding of their simpler manifestations. The evidence seems to show that subconscious mental states are not always proofs of disease, but just where the physiological ends and where the pathological begins, is difficult to determine. No hard and fast line can be drawn, there is a decided overlapping, an almost imperceptible shading of one into the other. For in psychology as in pathol-

ogy, the normal explains the diseased, and the diseased throws light on the normal. Absent-mindedness, the forgetting of familiar names, purposeless or thoughtless actions, all these may be designated as normal states of mental dissociation, because they occur in everyday life. On the other hand, such manifestations as hysteria or multiple personality or losses of memory are distinctly pathological conditions.

Therefore, in order that clearness may not be sacrificed, we must pass by slow gradations from the simplest to the most complex forms of subconscious mental states. We must understand the normal before we can hope to grasp the abnormal. Without adopting this method, we would become lost in a maze of psychological theories. After we have learned, so to speak, the grammar of abnormal psychology, by this meaning the psychopathology of everyday life, we are then in a position to understand the work on hysteria, neurasthenia, amnesia, multiple personality, etc. These subjects will be discussed from the standpoint of dissociated mental states, without entering into the field of psychical research. We shall see that these phenomena can be explained by purely psychological and physiological mechanisms based on well-recognized laws of body and mind, and

that there is no need of supernormal interpretations.

This volume is, therefore, divided into two parts, which are indicated by the titles "The Exploration of the Subconscious" and the "Diseases of the Subconscious." In the first section, after a discussion of subconscious phenomena in general, we will pass to the methods of analyzing these phenomena and making them objective facts. The second section will be devoted to a study of certain functional disturbances which, either in whole or in part, are due to perversions of subconscious mental states.

In general what can psychotherapy, in its purely practicable aspects learn from these complex theories? What can psychotherapy do and how does it do it? That the principles are eminently practicable is shown by the results of psychotherapy. The modern concepts of the principles of mental dissociation and mental synthesis, of subconscious and unconscious mental states were the forces which were responsible for the birth of this new psychology in its practicable application to medicine. Popular ideas on suggestion are so loose and vague that a restatement of the scientific principles upon which suggestion is based may have a certain value. It seems to be the general idea that suggestion is a kind of magic wand in the hand

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