

WHAT IS THOUGHT-TRANSFERENCE?



THOUGHT-TRANSFERENCE, or as it is more commonly, but less correctly called, thought-reading, is a subject which has recently provoked a considerable amount of discussion and controversy. From being ranked at one time amongst the multitudinous tricks of legerdemain and modern charlatanism, it is now taking its stand as a scientific fact, incontrovertible as to its actual existence, but yet involved in a large amount of mystery as to its real cause and workings.

First brought into general public repute a few years ago, the various phenomena connected with it have since then excited the attention of many scientific societies: more especially of the Society for Psychical Research, which is devoting a considerable amount of labour towards investigating the result of individual experiments on the subject.

Thought-transference is really the power by which a thought or act of will emanating from one person's brain may be produced, or exerts an influence upon the brain of another, otherwise than through the recognised sensory channels.

It has for some time been imagined that since all the more striking experiments of thought-reading were performed with the subject and operator in direct contact, either personal or through the medium of copper-wire or some other communication, therefore the result was gained through an unconscious muscular agitation on the part of the operator, who in his intense desire that the exact locality of a certain missing object might become known to his subject, actually revealed it, although perhaps unconsciously, by the action of his muscles. And certainly this theory on the face of it sounds not only very plausible, but by far the most correct and reliable one. Take one of the most simple experiments in this line, known as the "willing game," which has been practised in many drawing-rooms for several years past. The subject was blindfolded and ordered to stand in the centre of the room with his limbs in as plastic a condition as possible, and his waist or neck was then encircled by the hands of two or three operators, who willed that he should fall in a certain direction. In this case the result might certainly have been unconsciously, but none the less actually, caused by the force of the muscular energy on the part of the operators, who, by indirect pressure, compelled the subject to fall towards the direction required. In the same manner, some object being secreted, its locality was discovered by the subject when in direct contact with one or more operators who were conscious of its whereabouts.

In fact many have gone so far as to state that the wonderful experiments of the pin-finding feat, and

reading the number of a Bank of England note, were actually owing to the fact that the direction of space in which the object lies is unintentionally indicated by the operator's muscular pressure. After a prolonged scientific inquiry on the claims of one of the best-known exponents of the art as a "thought-reader," the committee decided that he had only delicate muscular sensibility, and no power as a true thought-reader. Yet to this decision Professor Barrett, a great authority on the subject, in a lecture on "Thought-Reading, True and False," delivered before the members of the Literary Society attached to the Richmond Club, Dublin, adds the altogether unsatisfactory remark, "that although a large number of these experiments might fairly be set down as muscle-reading, yet there remained a certain number of phenomena which could not be attributed to muscle-reading," thus virtually stultifying the committee's decision.

That this is not the true solution of the difficulty, any one who has entered upon the threshold of the subject can easily demonstrate, for while undoubtedly many of the phenomena connected with the study could to a certain extent be explained away by this hypothesis, yet there remains behind an unbounded mass of evidence which cannot be gauged by the limitation of muscular power.

A course of simple experiments, attempted with a qualified subject, will soon convince the most sceptical that to look to unconscious muscular agitation as the sole secret of this transmission of energy is a totally erroneous idea, and does not at all meet the exigencies of the case.

I adduce the results of one evening's experiments carried out with my brother, who is of rather an excitable temperament.

The subject was blindfolded, and after the application of my hand to his forehead, reeled to and fro, drew one or two deep inspirations, and then went off into a kind of mesmeric sleep. Throughout the whole series of experiments there was an entire absence of muscular effort, and no nervous excitement as is the case with many percipients.

Articles hidden in the most unaccountable and unlikely places were discovered and returned as required.

From a number of coins and books the chosen one was immediately pointed out.

Several tunes being hummed over, the tune in question was at once selected.

A pipe and pouch of tobacco were hidden in different places; the pipe was filled from the pouch, lighted, and placed in the mouth of one of the company. During this experiment another pipe was substituted, which, after some hesitation, was filled, but immediately discovering the mistake, my subject hastily emptied the pipe and threw it on one side.

A name written on a piece of paper was correctly read out.

Arithmetical and geometrical figures were repro-

duced on a blackboard. The last-named experiment was carried out by another percipient in his normal condition.

There was one circumstance connected with these experiments which exercised a great influence on the minds of the company present. After any article had been touched and returned to its original position, my brother, although blindfolded, and some distance from the object, was immediately conscious if any one even touched the article, and would instantly rush back and seize it, using great force if it were not at once returned to him.

Now, I am perfectly aware that several of these results might perhaps be owing, or at all events might have the appearance of being due, to this unconscious muscular pressure, but I defy any one to produce many of the results by simple muscular power. It is evidently apparent that there is some more complex and involved reason for these phenomena, and that the mere assumption that they are solely due to muscular pressure is erroneous and misleading. The mere fact that after a protracted series of experiments there is generally an acute feeling of exhaustion, is by no means conclusive evidence that it is muscular exhaustion, as the same feeling would undoubtedly arise from exhaustion of the brain, even if the muscles were at rest.

I go a step farther and bring forward some more surprising experiments, which I do not consider at all exceptional, as similar results are being obtained in many quarters.

I place my hand upon the forehead of my subject, and by the exercise of will-power to the greatest possible extent, and by the entire concentration of energy, I throw him into an hypnotic condition, or kind of mesmeric trance—a condition very similar to that in which a person is when actually dreaming, although the ordinary senses are not suspended as in sleep. This state appears identical with that induced by the Hindoo Yogins who by several modes of concentration, such as fixing the sight upon the space between the eyebrows or the tip of the nose, render themselves by several intermediate stages insensible to heat and cold, and become impervious to blows and even to the effects of fire. Indeed, while in this condition they may be confined for many days without food or drink and yet remain alive.

When in this condition of trance the voices of all in the room (although conversation is being carried on as usual) become entirely inaudible: the eyes close: and the subject or percipient is then *en rapport*—as it is termed—with me. My voice can be heard if uttered only in a whisper, my slightest commands are obeyed. I can make my subject eat the warmest condiment without being affected by it. In fact, he is entirely under my control. I rivet my attention on a watch which I have placed upon the table, and as it were by the power of my will impress the object before my eyes upon his own brain, until the object itself seems to be transferred to him, and he not only describes the article itself, but tells me at once the correct time the watch indicates.

Now there is something far more recondite and involved in this than any such theory as many bring forward of simple muscular agitation, for no amount of muscular power could reproduce a mental picture upon the brain of another.

It is plain that we must look to some other explanation. But what? The general opinion that is now gaining ground among scientific men, is that thought-transference is virtually and essentially the influence of mind upon mind. In what way the impression is conveyed is of course a mystery, but, as one writer on the subject remarks:—

“The phenomena of magnetism show that there need be no perceptible carrier for the transmission of force: or we may instance gravitation, which binds together the universe. Hence it does not appear at all preposterous to assert that the action of a powerful brain may exert an effect upon a less powerful but equally sensitive one, although the means by which it accomplishes this may not be perceptible to the ordinary senses.”

A very plausible theory is that a subtle virtue or magnetic flow emanates from our bodies in undulating waves, as is the case with light, heat, and sound, and these waves being set in motion by the movement of the molecules of the brain, which occurs in thought, awaken similar vibrations in the brain of another, provided that he be in sympathy with the generator of the wave-motion, as is the case with a piano or other stringed instrument, wherein all notes of the same vibration will sound in response to another instrument, but all of a different rate of vibration remain silent.

The fact that this mode of communication of thought does not take place in all subjects in the identical manner is no argument against its adoption, for it is a well-known truth, but still for all that one which cannot be explained, that all persons do not possess the power of mesmerising, or of being mesmerised by, others; neither are all persons somnambulists.

The production of mental pictures while in this hypnotic condition is a very remarkable fact. I have stated one out of several that have come under my immediate notice, instances with diagrams have been published in the Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research, and I now adduce one which appeared in a weekly journal a few months since, and is authenticated by a gentleman of the highest literary standing and character.

“A young lady friend of mine had been to a pantomime; an evening or two later she and another lady upon whom I had been making several experiments were with me, and it occurred to me to try if the second of my subjects could be made to see the pantomime through the memory of the other. I put them both into trance, and then occurred what no one who witnessed it is likely to forget. My subject fairly shouted with laughter, followed and described the action, and often repeated the words, of the pantomime which she had not seen herself. Suddenly she exclaimed, ‘The lights are gone out.’ I had that instant by my own will, and without saying a word, broken the connection between my subjects.”

This is but one of many similar experiments that have been successfully carried out after the operator had thrown his subject into a state of trance, and which it is in the power of nearly every one possessed of a strong will and concentrativeness of purpose to demonstrate for himself.

Nor is this mental transfer confined to the reproduction of impulses and mind-pictures, but in the same manner pains and tastes can be transferred from the operator to the percipient. This is generally done in a state of trance, but I carried out a most successful series of experiments a few months ago with my subject in a normal waking condition, and without contact.

I pinched my right leg: subject at once rubbed the identical spot on his own leg. I nipped my left arm: the exact place was at once indicated by the subject on his own arm.

I then gave my left leg two consecutive pinches, and afterwards bit my lower lip, both of which results were immediately and accurately described by my subject. In fact the experiments were altogether most successful, and I did not experience a single failure.

But there is still one more remarkable feature in some of these instances upon which I will only touch, as it passes almost out of the region of thought-trans-

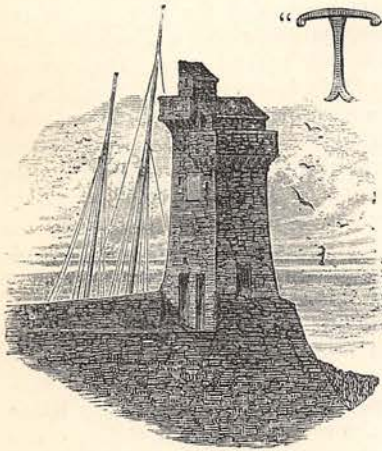
ference to the more complex subject of mesmerism, of which thought-transference is but a branch, and that is that the influence of mind over mind, when persons are in intense sympathy, seems completely to annihilate all space and time. The subject of telepathy, as it is called, has created a vast amount of discussion lately, and an exceedingly interesting and remarkable article appeared in a well-known Review on the subject, by Messrs. Gurney and Myers, entitled "Transferred Impressions and Telepathy;" but as these are of very exceptional occurrence, and only manifest themselves in persons of extremely sensitive temperament, such instances do not strictly demand a place in a paper on the subject of thought-transference.

In conclusion let me observe that although this power has only recently attracted public attention, there is very little reason to doubt that we can look to it to explain away a great amount of the witchcraft, demonology, and superstition of the Middle Ages. Indeed, even at the present day such experiments cannot be carried out without a strange feeling of awe and astonishment at the subtle connection of mind and matter, and we are bound to exclaim in the words of Hamlet:

"There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,
Than are dreamt of in our philosophy."

GEORGE D. DAY.

IN THE ENGLISH SWITZERLAND.



TOWER ON THE BEACH, LYNMOUTH.

"TWENTY miles from everywhere," nestling on the western sea in a lovely little bay, lies the village of Lynmouth, to the country round which has often been given the name of the English Switzerland. Seldom, indeed, can a

district be found which unites in itself such an infinite variety of scenery. The thickly wooded valleys, through which flow the mountain streams, seeming, as they roll over the huge stones, to make one long waterfall, open downs, the rock-bound coast, heather-clad moorland—all are found here in their most lovely forms.

There are several ways of reaching Lynmouth and its sister village, Lynton, which is some 400 feet higher—any one of which forms a pleasant change to

the usual routine of travel. You may take train to Minehead, to which a branch line runs from Taunton through very fine scenery, and from there reach your destination by coach, passing through Porlock and the very heart of the wild Exmoor district. If this be your first experience of Devonshire hills and Devonshire horses, you will probably be somewhat surprised at the little account the latter make of the former, a stumble being an almost unknown thing.

The journey may also be made by coach from Ilfracombe and Barnstaple, but the Minehead route is certainly to be preferred.

Then, again, if you are not afraid of a sea-passage, you may leave the train at Portishead and take the steamer which plies daily to and from Ilfracombe during the season, calling off Lynmouth. The voyage is a very pleasant one on a fine day, and as the channel gradually widens out, the coast-line becomes more and more rugged, till, as you round the Foreland, a huge promontory about 1,100 feet high forming the eastern boundary of the bay, you see the little boats waiting to land you, for there is no pier or landing-place; and should the tide be low, you will probably have a somewhat rough scramble over the rocks.

The village of Lynmouth is very primitive. At the top of the harbour, which is marked by irregular posts driven into the beach, stands a quaint old tower, much beloved of artists, and which was built some