a pass by charges hardly proved, that in the presence of his judges he had thrown himself on his sword.* Æschylus had caused Ajax to kill himself off the stage; but Sophocles probably felt that a more dramatic ending could be borne by his audience, and would have a better effect on them.

To such a vain, fickle and restless democracy did Sophocles present the highest lessons of wisdom clothed in immortal verse. They might seem to be lost for the time, for his life, which had reached from the first great victory of Salamis almost to the final ruin of Athens, witnessed the development of that moral and social corruption, of which Aristophanes is the witness and the product. But some of his words bore good fruit, and are bearing it till this day; for we can recognise in the gentle reverence and tender piety of Plato the immediate influence of the great dramatist.

The Religious Sentiment in Epileptics. By JAMES C. HOWDEN, M.D., Medical Superintendent, Montrose Royal Lunatic Asylum.

(Read at a Quarterly Meeting of the Medico-Psychological Association, held at the Royal College of Physicians, Edinburgh, Nov. 21st, 1872.)

In the following observations I propose to describe a feature in the mental condition of Epileptics, which, to the best of my knowledge, has not attracted that attention to which its frequency entitles it. I refer to the exaltation of the religious sentiment. Irritability, suspicion, impulsive violence, egotism, strong homicidal propensities are among the most commonly observed characteristics in the insane epileptic; but in strange contradiction with these we very frequently find combined a strong devotional feeling, manifesting itself, it may be, in simple piety or in decided religious delusions. I do not pretend that the forms of religious insanity to be afterwards noticed are peculiar to epilepsy, but they are very frequently found in connection with it, and, I believe, I have only to describe a few illustrative cases to bring to your recollection numerous others which have occurred in your own experience. The causes which combine to develope a devotional frame of mind in Epileptics are probably numer-

* Plutarch (Nic. 6), quoted by Schöll (*Sophokles' Leben und Wirken*), who makes this suggestion, and quotes many similar cases.

https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.18.84.482 Published online by Cambridge University Press

ous. In congenital cases or those arising from diseases of childhood education no doubt exercises a powerful influence. The epileptic child is necessarily less able to join in the amusements and occupations of healthy children, and a large share of his time and attention may be devoted at home to religious instruction. The mysterious nature of the disease, the consciousness of infirmity and helplessness developes a craving for sympathy in the epileptic which we rarely see in other lunatics. In the wards and airing-courts of our asylums, epileptics may be distinguished from their fellow-patients by the fact that they are generally found associating in little groups of twos or threes. They sympathize with each other, lean on each other for help in the time of trouble, and however much they exhibit violence and viciousness to others, they rarely attack each other. Along with this desire for sympathy, the epileptic is mercifully endowed with strong hope. He is always getting over his trouble, he thinks the turns are less severe, and will tell you perhaps the day before a fatal seizure that he thinks he will have no more fits. We all know how much hope has helped the physician in his efforts to combat this disease with a whole battery of drugs, each of which in its turn seems for a time to promise success, only too surely to fail in the end. This craving for sympathy finds a deep response in the highest development of hope—religion; and the sufferings of this life are assuaged by the assurance of sympathy and aid from heaven, and of a blessed future where suffering and sorrow are no more.

Again, when religious emotion developes itself in delusions, another element of character comes into play. Vanity and egotism give shape and form to his dreams and fancies. When cut off by sleep or epileptic trance from communication with the outer world through the senses, the ever-waking mind operates on the stores which memory has hoarded, and works up those wonderful visions in which the most exaggerated egotism finds gratification in interviews with the Almighty, direct communications with the Saviour, or revelations as to the salvation of the human race.

I have selected a few cases from many, illustrative of the connection between epilepsy and religious emotion, beginning with what but for the bizarre co-existence of the most vicious qualities might be considered normal piety, and passing gradually to those exhibiting the most extravagant visions and religious delusions.

https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.18.84.482 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Case of J. J.—A strong, powerfully-built young man, æt. 27, takes epileptic fits at irregular intervals. Before the fits he is taciturn and ill-natured, and is at all times irritable and dangerous. He is a good workman, and in his saner intervals is fond of, and good at all athletic games.

During these intervals, though quarrelsome and vicious, he shows a strongly devotional frame of mind. He may be observed frequently reading his Bible, and evinces in his conversation what cannot but be considered for the time sincere repentance, as well as firm religious convictions. This man tells his story and explains his state of mind well in the following letter addressed to a clergyman: —

"Montrose Asylum,
21st February, 1871.

"Reverend Sir,—Excuse me for troubling you with this few lines. You mentioned last night that the Sacrament of our Lord's Supper was drawing nigh again, and as I have got the opportunity, I would be very glad to be a communicant in the Established Church of Scotland, as you know that the last time I took badly; but thank God for it, I feel better than what I was at that time, and with the help of Him who giveth us all help in time of need I will try and be a communicant with you at this time, and will try my best endeavour for to lead a better life than what I have led in times past; for to tell you the truth I attended church very irregular until this last two years back, not without the means of getting to the church, but was led astray as is common amongst young men on a Sunday living in a town in which I have been doing for nearly two years and a half in Leith, which is not one of the best places for a young man without friends to live in; and before that I was hired at several places on Deeside, near Aboyne; and before that I could hardly tell you myself, but first that I got my education in Sheriff Watson's school, in Aberdeen, where I got my food and learning all day, and went home all night, because my parent was not fit to pay for my schooling, as my father was never married to my mother, who stopped in Arbroath, where I was born, but he is dead now, and for my mother, I could hardly tell you where she is, but just that she was at L—— mill six months ago seeking work, as she used to work there; but the mill was stopped at the time, and I heard that she went to Abroath* and I never seen her, for she does not know anything of me being here, nor the trouble that I am afflicted with, as it is four years since I have seen her, and it is little more than three since it came on me, which has been God's will to lay on, and will be either His will to keep on me or take off.

"I am,
"Your obedient servant,
"J. J."

* She is now in an Asylum.

https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.18.84.482 Published online by Cambridge University Press

So evidently sincere was he that I had no hesitation in recommending the clergyman to allow him to take the sacrament, which he did in the village church. Yet a few weeks afterwards he nearly killed a fellow patient—a poor demented creature—because he called him a Fenian, and his conduct continues to this day a singular jumble of piety and vice. He is, indeed, I believe, one of the most sincerely pious, as well as one of the most dangerous homicidal, lunatics in Scotland.

The next case is one which, though scarcely characterized by actual delusions, must be considered as exceeding the bounds of normal religious feeling.

Case of J. I.—An epileptic from childhood, weak-minded, and vain, was a handloom weaver, but owing to disease of the wrist joint has been unable to work for many years. He received a strictly religious education, and his father is a pious man. Except while walking or taking his meals, he reads the Bible almost constantly, and can repeat most of the Old Testament by rote. He is fond of praying aloud, and can deliver an extemporary discourse in a fair conventional style. He tries to convert the attendants and his fellow patients, chiefly by threatening them with God's judgments if they will not do what he (J. I.) tells them. He is fond of the terrors of the law, and tries to impress on his hearers that he is a messenger sent by God to warn his fellow men to believe and flee from the wrath to come, * and wishes release from the Asylum that he may fulfil his mission in the conversion of sinners. He maintains that he is a holy and righteous man, and that he never commits sin, but in this, as in other matters, his word is not to be depended on. The following letter is characteristic of his frame of mind:—

"March 20th, 1871.

"Dear Friends,—I write you this letter to let you know that I am well; to God be all the praise from whom all my comforts flow, and I hope this will find you all the same. I hope and believe you will send my father and the inspector into this house for me on Friday or Saturday, the 24th or 25th of March month, and I hope, as you are my friend, you will send me one letter on Wednesday telling me when they will be here. So what my work has been every day is to have been reading at the Bible, which I like to make as the man of my counsel and as the rule of my life. I have no more to say,

"But remains,

"Yours affectionately,

"J. I."

* He was placed in an Asylum on account of his over-officious missionary efforts in his native village.

https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.18.84.482 Published online by Cambridge University Press

The following extract from the case book refers to another illustrative example :—

Case of C. C.—Ætat 50 ; an epileptic. Is subject to *petit mal*, as well as fully developed convulsions. He had been much addicted to the use of stimulants, and says that the fits were brought on by drinking. He is a stout, corpulent man, and will not apply himself to any kind of work. He is of ordinary education and intelligence. He usually conducts himself quietly and decorously, but occasionally is very loquacious, and grumbles a good deal about his confinement and bad treatment. He frequently recites scraps of sermons and pieces of religious poetry, and is a most religious voluntary and dissenter, but he does not seem to have much Godliness about him. He is subject to attacks of excitement, when he is very troublesome and noisy. At these times he conducts divine service, reading, preaching, praying, and singing with great vehemence.

When actual religious delusions are present in epileptics, these are generally founded on visions occurring during a state of trance, but sometimes, as in the following case, the delusion continues after the memory of the vision on which it was founded has faded. The case is curious, not only from the nature of the delusions, but from the fact that the subject of them was a boy only 13 years old.

J. A.—A good-looking, intelligent boy, who, through an epileptic fit from infancy, has none of the physiognomic characteristics of the disease. His father died young, and his mother, who was also an epileptic, went to Canada with another man, taking her son with her. Some years afterwards the boy was sent home to Scotland, where he resided with his grandfather, who taught him to read the Bible, and learn its historical facts. During the lucid intervals he is active and intelligent, and works sometimes in the garden, sometimes in the tailor's shop.

After the fits he became excited, subject to delusions, and given to wander, and exhibits strong amorous propensities. On admission to the Asylum he spoke with an earnestness, and, granting his premises, an intelligence beyond his years. He told me he was Adam, the first man, born again into the world. When questioned as to his previous life in the Garden of Eden, he replied that he had been so long dead that he could not be expected to recall particulars, but added that it was perfectly true that he had eaten the forbidden fruit, and when asked why he had done so, he replied, "It's all very well to blame me, but you would just have done the same thing if you had been in my place." He pointed to a picture of a woman on the wall, which he said was the portrait of Eve. He says he has been in Heaven, and describes what he saw there.* He has been in the Asylum now for two years. He

* His description of Heaven is evidently drawn from the scenery of Canada.

https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.18.84.482 Published online by Cambridge University Press

takes fits every two or three weeks, and on recovering from them he is dull and stupid; then he becomes possessed of some extravagant delusions, always of a religious nature. Sometimes he returns to his old delusion that he is Adam, sometimes he is God, at other times Christ, and not unfrequently the Devil. When questioned as to the ground of his belief, he generally says that it has been revealed to him, and that he feels it is true, pointing with his finger to his epigastrium.

Case of S. D.—A female epileptic; during the lucid intervals is cheerful, good-tempered, and industrious. She is always religiously disposed, carries her Bible and Shorter Catechism constantly with her,* prides herself on the number of chapters she will read in a day. The first symptoms of the approach of her malady is a change in temper. She becomes irritable and quarrelsome, noisy and violent, swears vehemently, and threatens suicide. At this stage she often tears the skin off her face in pure rage, and would, I have no doubt, cut her throat if she had an opportunity, or allow anyone to do it for her. During the following night she has a series of epileptic fits, and for some days is subject to *petit mal*. She is then excited, but good-humoured; she will tell you that she has seen her Heavenly Father, and that to-morrow she is to receive the Crown of Glory; she sees glorious visions in the sun, converses with Christ, and receives messages direct from Heaven. The interval between the fits is about a month, and so constant is the rotation of symptoms that you can tell to a day when she wants her throat cut, or when she is to receive the Crown of Glory.

Case of J. A.—Æt 32. Epileptic from birth; said to have been insane for 18 months, has threatened the life of his relations, and is always dangerous when excited. Before the fits he complains of blood rushing to his head. The fits are not regular in their occurrence, but generally come on about once a month, and are preceded by an aura in the region of the stomach. He gets very excited, and labours under some religious delusion, such as that he is in Heaven, or that he is struggling with the Devil, whom, in the end, he generally vanquishes. One night I was sent for to see him in a fearful state of hysterical excitement. His yells might have been heard a mile off. He was rolling on the floor, tearing his clothes, and struggled violently with anyone who approached him. On asking what he meant by acting in that way, the answer I got in a roar was that God was in his belly, that he would dwell there for ever, and that he would make him the means of converting sinners, &c. A free administration of cold water dashed over the head and chest had speedily the effect of restoring him to his senses.

In illustration of the more exaggerated form of religious delusion, I will quote two cases of unusual interest, in which visions of a kind exactly resembling such as are supposed to have been witnessed by many religious enthusiasts manifested

* A very general practise with epileptics.

https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.18.84.482 Published online by Cambridge University Press

themselves. The first was a patient in the asylum, the other was a man who neither before nor since showed symptoms of insanity, and the vision he had took the place of a fit (*epilepsie larvée*). Both were equally convinced of the reality of what they had seen, believing that the soul had been for the time removed from the body, and had been transported to the land of spirits.

The first case is the more interesting, because the visions are described by the patient himself.

Case of D. C.—Æt. 66, a shoemaker from Caithness. The medical certificate in the schedule for his admission states that—"He labours under several delusions, but the one he seems most active about is his commission to kill the devil." On being questioned as to the killing of the devil, he said that a certain night he had a vision, when he thought he was in a place with the Great Beast, and that a prize was offered to anyone who would kill it. He was accompanied to the enterprise by his brother and another lad. To these he gave the swords of Jonathan and Saul, and he armed himself with the two stones with which David slew the giant Goliath. He then said, "In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, I'll cut off your head," which he did, and then cut the beast through the middle, after which all the bells rang with triumph. He was then asked if he could go through the fiery furnace of Shadrach, Meshech, and Abednego, and he went through it.

This vision occurred before he came to the Asylum, and he firmly believed in its reality. He had delusions of suspicion, but on other subjects spoke rationally and intelligently. He had no fits for a year after admission. He worked at his trade, and was most zealous in reading the Scriptures, and exhorting his fellow-patients and the attendants on spiritual matters. The next vision he had was after or during a fit, and is well described in a letter to his wife:—" . . . . . I went out to the shop to work the day after the doctor told me, and on my coming into the house where the shoes are left and our slippers put on, one of the men, a keeper, said, 'What are you doing here?' I replied that I was not doing any harm. He then knocked me down,* and kicked me with his foot so severely that I fainted. I thought during the time that I was getting kicked, a man asked me if I would like to go through hell for God's cause. I then said I would, if the Son of God was in company. I then found my memory return. I saw nothing more then but quarrelling and fighting, &c. I then thought a person said, 'Would you undertake to go through the flames that Shadrach, Meshech, and Abednego went through?' I then thought that I was caught up by the hair of my head, and brought through the air to a beautiful country,

* He fell in an epileptic fit.

https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.18.84.482 Published online by Cambridge University Press

which was surrounded by beautiful green grass parks, and those parks were full of young lambs, and lo! and behold I saw them, I also saw a woman in their company,—on the opposite side of her there were people throwing things in the scale. On the opposite side an old woman came with a stick into her hand, and she took a skin (wool) into her hand from underneath her arm, and threw it into the scale before mentioned, and then she went up (the scale). I then asked the person supposed to be in my company, where was God. His reply was in Heaven. I then said this was Heaven. He then said that this was only a kitchen to Heaven, and none can enter into Heaven but those that are pure and perfect. He, the visionary man, said that this was the place that saints were made perfect in. He then told me the number that had entered since our Saviour went there. I said that surely some of our great ministers was ready to go there, and he said that there were only five between Inverness and Montrose, and those five I saw. I know one of them to be the Rev. J—— K——, Free Church minister of the parish of D——. On my coming out of the trance, I asked the man what was the reason he did not kill me right off hand. I have killed five already, and I do not wish to kill the sixth. After the time that I went to work at the shoes, I went out to take a walk along with my fellow-workman. I saw a pole and a board upon it with writing on it (thus). "There is no road this way but to the Asylum," and then I thought that was a place that they killed the beast at. I had a Gaelic Bible in my pocket at the time I saw the pole. I took the Bible out of my pocket and sat down on the wayside where we were taking a walk, and opened it in the fourth chapter of St. Lucas, and read therefrom the account of where our Saviour came to be baptised with John, &c., and when I was done reading the above portion of Scripture I was at once restored to myself.

No more from your loving husband, D. C.

Case of A. C.—Æt. 47; a strong, healthy man. He is an excellent and intelligent workman. He is of a sanguine and excitable temperament, given to boasting when talking of himself or his doings, especially if he has been taking drink. His first wife, by whom he had eight children, one of whom was an idiot, with congenital double cataract, died about three years ago. During her lifetime he was not temperate in his habits. He was not an habitual drunkard, but was liable to exceed when he began to drink. He was extravagant in his habits, given to be quarrelsome and riotous when under the influence of drink, but withal made strong religious professions, and, like many of his countrymen, though he was drunk on Saturday night he would be next day sitting demurely in his pew in church. On the occasion of his wife's death, he seemed affected, but within a month he was paying attentions to several domestic servants, one of whom he afterwards married. Two months after his wife's death I was called to see him during the night. I found him just recovering from

https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.18.84.482 Published online by Cambridge University Press

a severe epileptic fit; he had bitten his tongue severely, and bruised his face and head. Next morning he had two slighter fits, but on the following day he was able to go to work. I ascertained that for two days before his illness he had been drinking heavily. After this he continued to have epileptic seizures about once a month; he was treated with Bromide of Potassium, which seemed to have the effect of diminishing the severity of the fits. He married a second time nine months after his first wife's death. He now declared that he had altogether given up drinking, and though I am disposed to doubt the strict accuracy of this statement, I had no actual knowledge of his being the worse for drink since his first illness. His second marriage took place on the 3rd of May. He had a fit on the 24th of April previous; he had no fit again till 8th August, then he had one on 26th September. Early on the morning of the 19th October I was sent for. His wife stated that he had started out of his sleep in a very excited state, declared that he was dying, and that he would soon be in Heaven. I found him bathed in a profuse perspiration, pulse feeble, pupils somewhat irregular. He knew me quite well, but spoke somewhat incoherently. At one time he would say that he was in Heaven; again he would complain of great weakness, and say that he was dying; always, however, his conversation was of a religious character. Next day he was sure he was dead, and that his soul was in Heaven, and in perfect happiness. He continued in this belief for two days, but on the third day he believed soul and body were again united in this world. In a few days he was able to be at his work again, and spoke quite rationally on every subject but that of his vision. He maintained that God had sent it to him as a means of conversion, that he was now a new man, and had never known before what true peace was. He still believed that his soul had been transported to Heaven. It was a glorious country, abounding with the most beautiful trees, shrubs, and flowers, the trees were loaded with the most luscious fruit, and the fields waved with the most luxuriant crops.* Everything grew spontaneously, the ground needed neither digging nor tilling, nor the crops sowing, and the trees needed no pruning. He assured me he was a converted man, and that he was convinced he would have no more fits. I advised him to put more trust in his own efforts to obey God's natural laws than in any supernatural intervention from above, but he repeated his belief in the miraculous effect of his illness.

A month after (17th November), he had a distinct epileptic fit. Up to the present time he continues to have fits about once a month. Immediately before the fits come on he feels a bad smell as if of a foul breath; this smell he was not sensible of on the occasion of his vision. He has had no return of the visions or any other symptoms of insanity.

A consideration of these and such like cases naturally

* He was a gardener.

https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.18.84.482 Published online by Cambridge University Press

suggests the enquiry as to how far epilepsy has had to do with the origin of certain religious creeds, and how far the visions of many so-called religious impostors may have had an epileptic origin.

In pursuing this enquiry, a difficulty meets us at the outset —the difficulty of ascertaining the truth. Biographers, as a rule, are too much occupied with the psychical and religious aspects of the question to notice peculiarities in the physical constitution of their subjects. Allegations of madness are, however, very frequent, and though it is not stated, one cannot help suspecting, from the nature of the insanity, that in many instances it was of an epileptic origin.*

There is, however, evidence that many religious fanatics were epileptics or cataleptics. Hecker, describing the dancing mania of the fourteenth century, says, "While dancing, they neither saw nor heard, being insensible to external impressions through the senses, but were haunted by visions, their fancies conjuring up spirits, whose names they shrieked out." . . . . . "Others during the paroxysm saw the heavens open, and the Saviour enthroned with the Virgin Mary, according as the religious notions of the age were strangely and variously reflected in their imaginations. Where the disease was completely developed the attack commenced with epileptic convulsions. Those affected fell to the ground senseless, panting and labouring for breath. They foamed at the mouth, and suddenly springing up, began their dance amid strange contortions." †

Ann Lee, the mother of the Shakers, is described as "a wild creature from birth, a prey to hysteria and convulsions, violent in her conduct, ambitious of notice, and devoured by the lust of power." While in the prison at Manchester a light shone upon her, and the Lord Jesus stood before her in the cell, and became one with her in form and spirit.‡ Another writer says: "A combination of bodily disease—perhaps catalepsy—and religious excitement appears to have produced in her the most distressing consequences. During the spasms and convulsions into which she occasionally was thrown, her person was dreadfully distorted, and she would

* Many insane fanatics are referred to in a curious old book entitled "ΠΑΝΣΕΒΕΙΑ; or, A View of all Religions in the World, with the several Church Governments, from the creation to these times. Also a discovery of all known Heresies, in all ages and places, and choice observations and reflections on the whole," by Alexander Ross. 1672.

† "Epidemics of the Middle Ages," Trans. Babington, p. 81.

‡ "Hepworth Dixon's New America," vol ii., p. 115.

https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.18.84.482 Published online by Cambridge University Press

clench her hands until the blood oozed through the pores of her skin. She continued so long in these fits that her flesh and strength wasted away, and she required to be fed, and was nursed like an infant." *

Was the insanity of Emanuel Swedenborg accompanied by or dependent on epilepsy? Dr. Maudsley, in reviewing "White's Life of Swedenborg,"† says: "A notable peculiarity which distinguished him in his early years, and made him unlike other children, was a power of almost suspending his breathing; when deeply absorbed in prayer he hardly seemed to breathe at all. Another remarkable characteristic of the wonderful child! On it he subsequently founded important theories concerning respiration, and his disciples look upon it as connected with the power which he claimed to have of entering the spirit world while still in the flesh. A more common-place explanation, however, may easily suggest itself. Physicians who are accustomed to be consulted about children of nervous disposition predisposed to epilepsy or insanity, will call to mind instances in which the little beings have fallen into trances or ecstacies and spoken in voices seemingly not their own. On the one hand, these seizures pass by intermediate steps into attacks of chorea, and on the other hand they may alternate with true epileptic fits, or pass gradually into them." The visions of Swedenborg were much like those we meet with in epilepsy. On one occasion, he says: "I was astonished, having all my wits about me, and being perfectly conscious. The darkness attained its height, and then passed away. I now saw a man sitting in the corner of the chamber. As I thought myself entirely alone, I was much frightened when he said to me, 'Eat not so much.' My sight again became dim, but when I recovered I found myself alone in the room." Or again: "I was this time not at all alarmed. The man said, 'I am God, the Lord, the Creator and Redeemer of the world. I have chosen thee to unfold to men the scriptural sense of the Holy Scripture. I will dictate to thee what thou shalt write,' &c., &c."

The following would describe an epileptic seizure—"I went to bed . . . . Half an hour after I heard a trembling noise under my head. I thought it was the Tempter going away. Immediately a violent trembling

* W. and R. Chambers' "Miscellany of Useful and Entertaining Tracts," Art. Religious Impostors.

† "Journal of Mental Science" for 1869, p. 175.

https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.18.84.482 Published online by Cambridge University Press

came over me from head to foot with a great noise. This happened several times. I felt something holy over me. I then fell asleep, and about twelve, one, or two o'clock, the trembling and noise were repeated indescribably. I was prostrate on my face, and at that moment I became wide awake, and perceived that I was thrown down, and wondered what was the meaning. I spoke as if awake, but felt that these words were put into my mouth." Then follows an imaginary interview with the Son of God.

Very similar to these were the visions of John Engellerecht, who, after passing many years in a state of most gloomy and agonising desperation, in which he had frequently been tempted to commit suicide, appeared at length to his friends and to himself to die, and to be restored again to life; and fancied he had visited, during the short space from his supposed death to his resuscitation, first hell, and afterwards heaven, and was from that time freed from his despondency, which he had exchanged for the opposite emotions of religious joy.

Now this pretended death seems to have been in reality no other than what Sauvages and other nosological and pathological writers term an *Asphyxia*, or a total privation of external sense and of all the vital motions; and was of an exceedingly short duration; for he himself tells us that the whole process was but of a moment's continuance, that it was much about twelve o'clock at midnight when his bodily hearing failed and left him, and that when the watchman cried twelve o'clock the ecstatic rapture had fully passed from him.

But a short view of the symptoms of this curious disorder, as described by himself, in their gradual advancement and decline, will sufficiently explain its nature.

"It was on Thursday noon, about twelve o'clock, when I distinctly perceived that death was making his approaches upon me from the lower parts upwards; insomuch that my whole body becoming stiff, I had no more feeling left in my hands and feet, neither in any other part of my whole body. Nor was I at last able to speak or see; for my mouth now becoming very stiff, I was no longer able to open it, nor did I feel it any longer. My eyes now broke in my head in such a manner that I distinctly felt it. But for all that, I understood what was said when they were praying by me;—and I heard distinctly that they said one to another, 'Pray feel his legs; how stiff and cold they are become—it will now be soon over with him.' This I heard distinctly, but had no

https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.18.84.482 Published online by Cambridge University Press

perception of their touch. And when the watchman cried eleven o'clock at midnight, I heard that, too, distinctly; and much about twelve o'clock at midnight the bodily hearing failed and left me too. Then was I (as it seemed to me) taken up with my whole body; and it was transported and carried away with far more swiftness than any arrow can fly, when discharged from a cross-bow." He then, after some observations, relates what he saw, and heard, in the other world; and afterwards describing his return to life, and telling us that he was twelve hours in dying, and the same space in recovering, he thus proceeds:—"Remarkable it is, that as I died from beneath upwards, so I revived again the contrary way, from above to beneath, or from top to toe. Being now conveyed back again out of the splendourous glory, it seemed to me as if I had been replaced with my whole body upon the same spot; and then I first began to hear again, corporally, something of what they were praying in the same room with me. Thus was my hearing the first of all the senses I recovered again. After this I began to have a perception of my eyes, so that little by little my whole body became gradually strong and sprightly. And no sooner did I get a feeling of my legs and feet again, but I rose and stood up upon them with a strength and firmness I never had enjoyed before through the whole course of my life. The heavenly joy invigorated me to such a degree that the people were greatly terrified at it, seeing that in so rapid and almost instantaneous a manner I had recovered my strength again to such great advantage."

During this supposed and apparent death he had been carried in imagination, or, as he terms it, in a trance or vision, and set down before hell, where he had perceived a dismal darkness, a thick, nasty fog, smoke, and vapour, and a horrible nasty stench, and had heard dreadful howlings and lamentations; had from thence been conveyed by the Holy Ghost, in a chariot of gold, into the radiant and splendourous light of the Divine glory, where he had seen the choir of holy angels, prophets, and apostles, singing and playing round the throne of God, the angels in the form of flames of fire, and the souls of believers in the shape of luminous sparks, and God's throne under the appearance of a great splendour; had received a charge or message from God by means of an holy angel; had had such assurances of divine favour, and felt such delight from this momentary glimpse of the glory of God, that he was ever after a happy enthusiast, and the joy he retained from

https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.18.84.482 Published online by Cambridge University Press

this splendid spectacle was so very great and unspeakable in his heart as to surpass all kind of description.

After this he had for several years frequent visions and revelations, sometimes in the day time, and with his eyes open, and always without any of those symptoms of disorder which had preceded his first vision; lived sometimes, as he assures us, for eight, twelve, and thirteen days, and even for three weeks together, without eating and drinking; for the space of three-quarters of a year without the least wink of sleep; and once heard with his bodily ears, for one and forty nights together, the holy angels singing and playing on the heavenly music, so that he could not help joining them; and the people who were with him were so much affected with joy as to be unable to sleep likewise, and often continued singing along with him almost the whole night through.*

There is strong evidence that Mahomed was an epileptic, and that, though a man of undoubted power and strong religious feeling, he founded his pretensions as a medium of revelation on visions which appeared to him during epileptic trances. Washington Irving, in his "Life of Mahomet," says—

"Dr. Gustav Weil, in a note to *Mahommed der Prophet*, discusses the question of Mahomet's being subject to attacks of epilepsy; which has generally been represented as a slander of his enemies and of Christian writers. It appears, however, to have been asserted by some of the oldest Moslem biographers, and given on the authority of persons about him. He would be seized, they said, with violent trembling, followed by a kind of swoon, or rather convulsion, during which perspiration would stream from his forehead in the coldest weather; he would lie with his eyes closed, foaming at the mouth and bellowing like a young camel. Ayesha, one of his wives, and Zeid, one of his disciples, are among the persons cited as testifying to that effect. They considered him at such times as under the influence of a revelation. He had such attacks, however, in Mecca, before the Koran was revealed to him. Cadijah feared that he was possessed by evil spirits, and would have called in the aid of a conjurer to exorcise them, but he forbade her. He did not like that any one should see him during these paroxysms. His visions, however, were not always preceded by such attacks. Hareth Ibn Haschem, it is said, once asked him in what manner the

* "Observations on the Nature, Kinds, Causes, and Prevention of Insanity," by Thomas Arnold, M.D., 2nd Ed., pp. 229-233.

https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.18.84.482 Published online by Cambridge University Press

revelations were made. 'Often,' replied he, 'the Angel appears to me in a human form and speaks to me. Sometimes I hear sounds like the tinkling of a bell, but see nothing. (A ringing in the ears is a symptom of epilepsy.) When the invisible Angel has departed, I am possessed of what he has revealed.' Some of the revelations he professed to receive direct from God, others in dreams; for the dreams of Prophets, he used to say, are revelations."

Bayle says (Dict. Hist. art. Mahomet) that he was subject to the mal caduc (epilepsy) and that he tried to make his wife Cadijah believe "that he only fell into convulsions because he could not sustain the glory of the appearance of the Angel" Gabriel, who came to announce many things from God concerning religion.

The following passage is quoted by Moreau (de Tours) from "Gisbert Voctins" :—

"Non video cur hoc negandum sit (epilepsiæ et maniacis deliriis aut enthusiasmis diabolicis Mahommedi ad fuisse energema) si vitam et actiones ejus intueamur."

"I do not see how it can be denied (that the fanaticism of Mahomet arose from the maniacal delirium or diabolic enthusiasm of epilepsy) if we look carefully into his life and actions." * The inhabitants of Mecca considered him to be a madman and possessed, and his wife thought he was a fanatic deceived by the artifices of a demon.

"By his ecstatic visions (says Moreau), had he not become the dupe of his visions, whence sprung the first idea of his divine mission, and then had not these visions become the principal, if not the sole basis of his apostolic works, as well as the source of his audacity, and of his prophetic power over the ignorant and superstitious spirit of his countrymen?" †

It seems incredible that a religion which sways the minds of 200,000,000 of the human race at the present day should have no better foundation than the visions and dreams of an epileptic.

Religious systems, must not, however, be judged of by the ordinary laws of reason; they must be estimated rather by their influence for good or evil on men's lives and on society.

The imagination may, when unfettered, during a state of trance, work upon what was during consciousness a constant theme of reflection, and elaborate therefrom ideas and

* "Life of Mahomet," by Washington Irving, page 30.

† Psychologie Morbide, par Le Dr. J. Moreau (de Tours), p. 552.

https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.18.84.482 Published online by Cambridge University Press

theories pregnant with many moral truths, and though vanity has no doubt influenced the actions of most of the so-called religious impostors, it has taken the direction of attempts to benefit their fellow men, and to satisfy that craving which seems instinctive in the human mind to lean for aid and sympathy on something stronger and better than itself, to connect the present life with an eternal state of existence, and to attain a high standard of moral perfection.

Imperfect though the doctrines of such men as Swedenborg and Mahomet may be, they attempted, and to a certain extent have succeeded, in satisfying those yearnings in many human beings, whom they have made, if not better, at least more satisfied with life than if left to the unbridled guidance of their own passions and impulses.

A millennium of reason may be in store for the human race, but the day is yet far distant; and we cannot afford at present to sneer at the credulity of our fellow men, when in the latter half of the nineteenth century we hear of a learned Bishop consecrating a cave where Bernadotte Soubarons, a girl of 14, saw the Virgin Mary, and read of thousands of pilgrims flocking to this sacred grotto in the year 1872 to worship with the most earnest convictions.

Need we wonder that the ignorant Arabs, 1300 years ago, living—as far as a knowledge of nature's laws was concerned—in a state of heathen darkness, should have been attracted to the moslem faith, which, while it held out bright hopes for a future life, consorted well with their inclinations in the present.

The mere act of believing is to most men a source of happiness, and the happiness appears sometimes to be in the inverse ratio to the credibility of the thing believed in, as Moreau (de Tours), says— "Ils croient, mais pour croire, en tout état de cause, ils faut d'abord qu'ils ne comprennent pas."

https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.18.84.482 Published online by Cambridge University Press