Insane or Not?

We extract the following interesting letter from the "Meteor," a small journal published at the Alabama Insane Hospital, Tukoloosa, and having the apt motto, *Lucus a non lucendo:*—

EDITOR OF THE METEOR,—I know you would do any service in your power to a fellow-sufferer. I have therefore determined to ask you to make room for a statement of some particulars of my own case. My object is to convince that I am not insane, though recognizing, as actualities of my daily life, circumstances which are so strange as not to have secured recognition, so far as I know, by the authors of our most advanced works on Physiology and Psychology. The only publication I have met with of similar experiences is in Mrs. Mowatt's "Autobiography of an Actress," and some late newspaper accounts of exhibitions of the power of mind-reading. Of the last the editor declared, that though remarkable they were vastly inferior to many others achieved by private performers.

I have been an inmate of several Insane Hospitals, and it was not until I had staid some time in the second one that the phenomena to which I wish to call attention made their appearance. I was sent, the first and second time, to a hospital not because I was thought insane, but at my own request, in consequence of a grievous melancholy which had long oppressed me, and which grew, partly out of impaired physical health, partly out of some circumstances of my past life. It was not until I had been about two years in the second hospital—two and a half in the two—that I became aware of my mind being open to the inspection of others; and for some time thereafter, say for three years, though habitually amazed at the inexplicable anticipation of my words, acts and designs, I did not propose any consistent explanation of the matter. I could conceive of none except miraculous power, and to this I was fain to resort, now and then, when sorely puzzled by it. In the course of the third year, after my attention was called to the mind-reading, I noticed another and equally strange phenomenon—various unusual sensations in different parts of my body. Some of these were pleasurable, some very painful, and after a huge mass of testimony of daily experiences, I was convinced that they were neither effects of the tonic medicine I was taking, nor of substances mixed with my food, nor of vapours thrown into my room—all of which theories I had entertained at different times. About this time I found in the library Mrs. Mowatt's "Autobiography of an Actress," and in that book an explanation of the circumstance of my thoughts being known to those about me. For an explanation of the pleasurable and painful feelings that afflicted me by day and by night, I at length adopted the theory of a force projected in some way by the nervous system of others upon my own. Mesmerism I termed it, but

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there was not in its effects the slightest symptom of the comatose state usually implied by that word. I therefore became quite anxious to leave the establishment, that I might abandon the vicinity of those who possessed such fearful control of my nervous system.

After some years I was suffered to go, but all the way to New York, and thence to Memphis, I found myself still under the influence of mind-readers and nerve-vexers. The extent of my sufferings for a year or more it would be difficult to pourtray. For hours on many consecutive days, I would writhe in the agonies of unnatural chill, fever or headache. Returning to Alabama, I was, after the lapse of ten or twelve days, sent to this Hospital as a dangerous person, I having, when utterly exhausted of patience with the artificial pains, made demonstrations alarming to those about me. I staid here two years and a half, and was never supposed to be insane except upon mind-reading and nerve-fretting. My time was very usefully employed in reviewing my Latin, Greek and Mathematics. I also read much general literature, and wrote hundreds of pages of essays, tales, dramas and verses, much of which, without the change of a word, was published in popular periodicals, and highly commended. Yet during all this time not a day went by without evidence of the proximity of mind-readers and nerve-vexers.

Released in the middle of the third year, I went north to visit my only child, then about fifteen years old, and though I travelled as far east as Baltimore, as far west as Kansas City, and as far south as New Orleans, I nowhere escaped inflictions of the interest taken in my affairs by mind-readers and nerve-vexers. After eleven months I returned to Alabama on business, and was advised by my relatives to return to this Hospital and remain, as a mere boarder, until they should collect some money from notes left with them. But Dr. Bryce refused on my arrival to suffer me to remain except as a patient, and I have been here ever since. For some months I pretended to have given up a belief in the remarkable facts detailed here, but my detention continuing, I learned that I was kept, not for the strange beliefs, but for fear that I might base upon them courses of conduct detrimental to others.

I have turned over the pages of many a medical book for attestations of the reality of my supposed facts, and am to-day surprised that such important matters should not have been mentioned in the latest editions of our most advanced works on Physiology, Psychology, and even practical Medicine. If, as I believe, its most secret conceptions can be wrenched by another from the inmost recesses of the brain; if the direst pains may be inflicted by the mere act of another's will, all ought to know it. The vast import of such truths is obvious. It may be that not all brains are as open to inspection as mine; that not all nervous systems respond as readily to the force of another's will.

My chief object in this letter is to gain some clues toward the acquisition of the arts of mind-reading and nerve-vexing. Dozens of

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persons, some of them quite insane, can read my mind while theirs is sealed to me. My nervous system daily responds to the force of others' will, while I cannot make any one sick at the stomach except with ipecac, &c., nor give them pain in the head unless with a hickory stick or some of its relations.

Brown Sequard's idea, that the nerve force cannot travel beyond the nerve filaments may be correct. Then the phenomena may result either from all mind being, like all matter, in perpetual and instant communication, or from the vibrations of a universal medium communicating the acts of one mind to another. In proof that it was not due to prepossession or dominant ideas—Carpenter's device for getting rid of facts which he cannot explain—I adopted several explanations of the sensations before settling upon what I am now convinced is the true one.

I have written this letter to call the attention of the public, and especially Superintendents of Insane Hospitals, to the subject, and to ask for information of similar experiences. I would also be greatly obliged if some one would send me a book, or the title of one, in which such matters are fairly discussed.* A PATIENT.

Marriages between First Cousins.

Mr. George H. Darwin, M.A., has undertaken a series of laborious and painstaking enquiries into the proportion of first cousin marriages to all marriages in the population, and into the effects of such marriages on the health of the progeny. The method which he pursued in his enquiry, and the results which he obtained, will be found described in an elaborate paper in the "Journal of the Statistical Society" for June, 1875.

To sum up the results of the whole investigation: It seems probable that in England, among the aristocracy and gentry, about 4 per cent. of all marriages are between first cousins; in the country and smaller towns between 2 and 3 per cent; and in London perhaps as few as 1½ per cent. Probably 3 per cent. is a superior limit for the whole population. Turning to lunatic and idiot asylums, probably between 3 and 4 per cent. of the patients are offspring of first cousins. Taking into account the uncertainty of my methods of finding the proportion of such marriages in the general population, the percentage of such offspring in asylums is not greater than that in the general population to such an extent as to enable one to say, positively, that the marriage of first cousins has any effect in the production of insanity or idiocy, although it might still be shown, by more accurate

* Answers to this communication, addressed to the care of Editor of the "Meteor," will be promptly delivered to our bewildered friend.

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