

FRANZ ANTON MESMER

His Life and Teaching

By
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"In scientific truth there is no finality, and there should therefore be no dogmatism. When this is forgotten, then science will become stagnant, and its high-priests will endeavour to strangle new learning at its birth."—R. A. GREGORY.

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FRANZ ANTON MESMER

CHAPTER I

EARLY THEORY AND PRACTICE

SUCH is the apathy prevailing, even at the present day, concerning the science of which mesmerism treats that comparatively few people are interested in the life of the man who gave his name to this study—Franz Anton Mesmer.

Mesmer was born on May 23rd, 1734, at Iznang, in the parish of Weiler, on the Lake of Constance, where he was christened Franciscus Antonius. Little is known of his childhood and youth beyond the fact that he received a good education, studied medicine, and took his degree at the University of Vienna in 1766. For the subject of his inaugural dissertation he chose the influence of the planets on the human body (*De Planetarum Influxu*). The theory to which he devoted his life was already germinating in his mind. In this essay he

maintained that "the sun, moon and fixed stars mutually affect each other in their orbits ; that they cause and direct on earth a flux and reflux, not only in the sea, but in the atmosphere, and affect in similar manner all organised bodies through the medium of a subtle and mobile fluid, which pervades the universe, and associates all things together in mutual intercourse and harmony." This theory, it should be remarked, bears a striking resemblance to the theory of the ether of space held by certain of the scientists of to-day.

While studying at the University of Vienna Mesmer made the acquaintance of Professor Hehl, a Jesuit and professor of astronomy at the University. Professor Hehl was interested in the theory advanced by Mesmer in his essay. He had himself been experimenting with magnets, and he believed that certain forms of disease could be cured by their use.

Professor Hehl sent Mesmer some magnets to try on a patient of his. Mesmer applied them to the feet and heart, and a cure resulted, followed by relapses which were quickly cured by the same means. Hehl published an account of this cure and claimed it as his own. Mesmer resented this and a quarrel was the result, Hehl becoming Mesmer's irreconcilable enemy.

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Shortly afterwards Mesmer happened to be present when a patient was being bled. It was on this occasion that he first entertained the belief that there is magnetism of some kind residing in the human body. He noticed that the flow of blood differed in amount according as he approached or receded. From this time he began to discard the use of steel magnets in his practice and relied mainly on the human hand.

Previous to this Mesmer had attained some notoriety owing to his treatment of Baron Hareczky for spasms of the throat. The Baron had consulted the leading physicians of Vienna, but without benefit. One of the doctors, Van Haen, suggested to the Baron to try Mesmer's treatment, although, he admitted, he had no faith in it himself. Mesmer was therefore invited to the Baron's castle of Rohow, in Austria.

Mesmer, relying at that time mainly on the use of magnets, took his magnetic apparatus with him. The news of his coming spread widely in the neighbourhood, and Mesmer found a large number of patients waiting for him.

From these he selected such as he considered were nervously afflicted cases; the others he recommended to the doctors or wrote prescrip-

tions for them himself. Among well-attested cures performed by Mesmer at Rohow was that of a young Jew suffering from phthisis. Mesmer treated him, with the result that the sufferer, after a strong convulsion, was seized with vomiting. His condition under treatment steadily improved. A year later he was quite well. In his own words, spoken in a chance meeting with a friend, "I have taken nothing, and yet now I am always fresh, lively, and healthy as a fish."

But the Baron, on whose behalf Mesmer had come to Rohow, did not appear to make progress, despite the use of electricity and magnets. Baron Hareczky experienced no sensations of any kind under treatment and was in despondent mood. On the sixth evening, while treating him, Mesmer exclaimed, "Patience. You will soon feel something assuredly." Next day the Baron continued as usual. In the evening Mesmer warned the Countess that she had better fortify herself to bear the occurrences of the morrow. She had, however, no belief in Mesmer and placed no reliance on his words.

The following day, about eight o'clock in the morning, there was confusion in the castle. The Baron was in violent delirium. He besought everyone to shoot him and put him

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out of his misery. He swore frightfully at Mesmer. The Countess ran up and down wringing her hands. "Ah," she cried, "that cursed Mesmer will send my husband to the grave." A note was despatched to the family physician, Dr. Ungerhoffer, begging him to come at once to the castle. Amid all the hubbub the only person who appeared quite unperturbed was Mesmer. He sat by the bedside holding the Baron's hand. The doctor, he said, had better be asked to bring two doses of cremor tartari with him. Nothing else would be required, as the Baron would certainly be up and about before his arrival. Mesmer then let go the Baron's hand and held him by the foot. The paroxysms thereupon gradually abated. Then Mesmer took him by the hand again, whereupon the paroxysms returned. Having continued his alternate magnetisms for a little while, Mesmer desisted. When Dr. Ungerhoffer arrived, about noon, he found the Baron in his usual health, playing the violin.

Dr. Ungerhoffer attributed the fever to chance coincidence; Mesmer maintained that, had there been no magnetism, there would have been no fever.

Two or three days later Mesmer desired to magnetise the Baron again. After much re-

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sistance the Baron consented. But as soon as the symptoms began to show themselves he sprang out of bed. "Rather than endure such torment," he said, "I will keep my spasm for ever."

In face of this resistance Mesmer could do nothing more. Had he continued, he maintained that the cure would have been complete. Finding the Baron obdurate, he decided to leave the castle.

Just as he was taking his departure the Countess found him holding a peasant lad by both ears. "What is the matter with you?" she asked. "Six weeks ago," the boy replied, "I lost my hearing in a great wind, and this gentleman is giving it back to me again."

Mesmer then walked down to his carriage and took his leave.

CHAPTER II

MADemoisELLE PARADIS

AFTER a tour in Switzerland in 1776, Mesmer returned to Vienna. His fame was already considerable, and his unorthodox methods had aroused the active hostility of the Medical Faculty. Mesmer's patients were drawn chiefly from desperate cases which the doctors had failed to cure. Many remarkable successes were reported. These the orthodox practitioners denied. They were by no means satisfied that "a charlatan," as they called Mesmer, should bring their own methods into disrepute. Baron von Stoerck, President of the Faculty of Vienna, and First Physician to the Emperor, advised Mesmer not to make his discovery public, lest he should incur the enmity of the profession. This advice came somewhat late, since Mesmer was already well hated by his professional brethren. They laughed at his theory and denied his practice, adopting the tactics which they have used, in similar circumstances, since

the days of Æsculapius. They refused to examine his patients before treatment began, and afterwards denied that there had been any serious illness. Mesmer, however, had the courage of his opinions, and refused to be silenced or ignored. He considered the pursuit of truth to be of more value than professional reputation.

His final encounter with the medical men of Vienna was brought about by his treatment of a gifted young pianist, Mademoiselle Paradis.

Mademoiselle Paradis, a protégée of the Empress Maria Theresa, from whom she received a pension, had lost her eyesight from paralysis of the optic nerve. Having undergone treatment from the leading physicians of Vienna without benefit, she was placed under the care of Mesmer.

After a brief treatment from Mesmer Mademoiselle Paradis was able to distinguish the outlines of articles brought near her. At first her returning sense of vision was very sensitive. If a lighted candle was held near her eyes, even though bound by a thick cloth, the effect upon her sight was as a flash of lightning. The appearance of the human form, seen for the first time, distressed her greatly. The nose on the human countenance moved her to laughter.

Speaking of noses, "They seem," she said, "to threaten me, as though they would bore my eyes out."

At first she found it of the utmost difficulty to remember the names of colours. The relative distances of objects puzzled her so that she was afraid to move about freely as formerly.

Her improving sight also occasioned her difficulty in playing the piano. Whereas, when she was blind, she could execute the most difficult movements, she now found it no easy task to play even the simplest piece. Her eyes persisted in following her fingers as they moved over the keys, with the result that she was continually missing the notes.

The case of Mademoiselle Paradis became something like a *cause célèbre* in the medical circles of Vienna. Despite the obvious facts, the doctors who had treated her without success denied that any improvement of sight had taken place. Mademoiselle Paradis, they declared, merely "imagined that she could see."

At first Herr Paradis, her father, was delighted. He caused particulars of the case to be published in the newspapers. Herr von Stoerck himself came and witnessed the cure and admitted its genuineness.

Opposition, however, came from Professor

Hehl, Herr Ingenhaus, a friend of his, and Herr Barth, professor of anatomy and specialist in diseases of the eye. To Mesmer, in private, Herr Barth admitted that Mademoiselle Paradis could see ; but afterwards, in public, he declared that she was " still quite blind."

These three united to get Mademoiselle Paradis out of Mesmer's hands before he should have time to complete the cure.

With this object they successfully appealed to the avarice of Herr Paradis. They persuaded him that, so soon as his daughter regained her sight completely, the pension she received from the Empress would cease.

The *argumentum ad hominem* proved entirely successful. Mademoiselle Paradis was taken home by her parents. For the time it appeared as though Mesmer's enemies had triumphed.

CHAPTER III

MESMER IN PARIS

DISGUSTED with his treatment at Vienna, Mesmer shook the dust of the city off his feet and went to Paris. His rapidly growing reputation had preceded him. Expectation was a-tiptoe. On all sides he was cordially received. The medical profession alone stood aloof, sceptical, unfriendly, suspicious. They saw in him only a rival using other methods than theirs. They also prepared for him a warm welcome—but of a different nature.

At first, finding his methods strange, people were inclined to laugh. But he had absolute confidence in himself, and a courage and perseverance which triumphed over all obstacles. Very soon the number of patients who sought his aid became so great that he found it impossible to attend to them all personally. He therefore had recourse to the baquet.

This curious device consisted of an oval vessel, about four feet in diameter and one foot

deep. It was placed in the centre of the salon. In it were laid a number of wine-bottles, filled with magnetised water, well corked up, and disposed in radii, with their necks outwards. Water was then poured into the vessel until it covered the bottles, and filings of iron were thrown in occasionally "to heighten the magnetic effect." The vessel was then closed with an iron cover and pierced through with many holes. From each hole issued a long, movable rod of iron which the patients applied to such parts of their bodies as were afflicted.

In addition to the baquet assistant magnetisers, trained by Mesmer, were employed. They made passes and laid their hands upon the patients, with the object of increasing the magnetism. Rigorous silence was maintained during treatment, and, to produce a suitable atmosphere of repose, music and singing were employed.

A description of the scene was written by an eye-witness, the historian Bailly.

"The sick persons," wrote Bailly, "arranged in great numbers, and in several rows, round the baquet, receive the magnetism by all these means: by the iron rods which convey it to them from the baquet, by the cords round their bodies, by the connection of the thumb, which

conveys to them the magnetism of their neighbours, and by the sounds of a pianoforte, or of an agreeable voice, diffusing the magnetism in the air. The patients are also directly magnetised by means of the finger and wand of the magnetiser moved slowly before their faces, above or behind their heads, and on the diseased parts, always observing the direction of the poles. The magnetiser acts by fixing his eyes on them. But, above all, they are magnetised by the application of his hands and the pressure of his fingers on the hypochondrium and on the regions of the abdomen. . . .

“ Meanwhile the patients, in their different conditions, present a very varied picture. Some are calm, tranquil, and experience no effect. Others cough, spit, feel slight pains, local or general heat, and have sweatings. Others, again, are agitated and tormented with convulsions. These convulsions are remarkable in regard to the number affected with them, to their duration and force. They are preceded and followed by a state of languor or reverie, a kind of depression, and sometimes drowsiness. . . .

“ Nothing is more astonishing than the spectacle of these convulsions. One who has not seen them can form no idea of them. The

observer is as much astonished at the profound repose of one portion of the patients as at the agitation of the rest—at the various accidents that are repeated, and at the sympathies that are exhibited. All are under the power of the magnetiser. It matters not in what state of drowsiness they may be, the sound of his voice, a look, a motion of the hand—brings them out of it.”

“It is impossible,” wrote Baron Dupotet, “to conceive the sensation which Mesmer’s experiments created in Paris. No theological controversy in the earlier ages of the Church was ever conducted with greater bitterness.”

His adversaries hurled all the hard names at him they could find or invent, and the Abbé Fiard asserted that he had, beyond a doubt, sold himself to the Devil.

CHAPTER IV

MESMER'S FIGHT WITH THE DOCTORS

DURING his residence in Paris Mesmer was involved in continual disputes with the doctors. This was neither his intention nor his desire. But the attitude of the Medical Faculty of Paris towards him was such that he was compelled in his own defence to waste valuable time in unprofitable debate.

It was impossible for the medical profession of Paris to ignore Mesmer as, no doubt, it would like to have done. His reputation had preceded him, and it was of that awkward kind which springs from results obtained instead of being founded upon honours and degrees which may be secured through favouritism or purchased by hard cash. Therefore, at first, the Faculty thought it wise at least to appear interested and friendly.

The President of the Academy of Sciences, M. Leroi, proposed that Mesmer should demonstrate the usefulness of his discovery by treating

a selected number of cases, chosen by a Committee of the Royal Society of Medicine, composed of Drs. Daubenton, Desperriers, Mauduyt, Andry, Tessier, and Vicq d'Azyr.

This offer Mesmer declined. To have accepted it would, he said, have been useless. His experiences at Rohow and in Vienna had taught him that those who do not desire to be convinced will not be convinced by the most incontestable and sensational cures. His object, he said, was to induce the Faculty to try his system for themselves and not to set himself in opposition to them. He wrote to M. Leroi : " My principal object is to demonstrate the existence of a physical agent hitherto unobserved, and not to array against my discovery medical men whose personal interests would necessarily induce them to injure my cause, and even my person. It is as a natural philosopher myself, and not as a physician, that I call on you, men of science, requesting you to observe natural phenomena and to pronounce on my system."

Wishing, however, to work in conjunction with the Faculty, he made a counter-proposition. He asked that twenty patients should be selected by the Committee of the Royal Society of Medicine, comprising cases of all

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kinds, equally severe; half of these to be treated by the Faculty according to the old and approved methods, and the other half by himself. The division was to be made by lot. Neither the Academy of Sciences nor the Royal Society of Medicine would listen to this proposition.

In May 1778, weary of what he called the "puerile objections" of the doctors, Mesmer selected several bad cases and took them to his establishment at Creteil, six miles from Paris, first applying to the Royal Society of Medicine to examine and certify them. The Society sent two doctors for that purpose. But, on their arrival, they apparently mistrusted their skill in diagnosis, for they declined to make a report. The maladies chosen (epilepsy, paralysis, blindness, deafness) might, they said, be feigned.

Mesmer then applied to M. Vicq d'Azyr, Secretary of the Royal Society of Medicine, asking leave to present his patients before the whole Society for certification. "For," as he pertinently remarked, "men who thus doubt their own ability to ascertain the truth of a disease, would doubt still more when requested to pronounce on restoration to health." At the same time he enclosed certificates of independent members of the Faculty as to the

genuineness of the diseases of his patients. His application was refused and the certificates returned unopened.

Hearing nothing further, Mesmer wrote again to M. Vicq d'Azyr, saying that he would proceed with the treatment, and hoping that, when the time came, the Society would not refuse to hold an inquiry. In August Mesmer wrote to M. Leroi. His patients, he said, were almost ready for inspection. The President of the Academy of Sciences took no notice. Nothing daunted, he again applied to M. Vicq d'Azyr, requesting the Royal Society of Medicine to examine his patients. The only reply was a curt refusal. Nothing remained for Mesmer to do but to publish the sworn statements of his patients and of his witnesses. The most interesting of these sworn statements is that of Charles du Hussay, Major of Infantry and Knight of the Royal and Military Order of St. Louis.

Major du Hussay had suffered from typhus in the Indies. He was a physical wreck when he consulted Mesmer, broken in mind and body. His statement is as follows :—

“ After four years of useless experiments and the constant attendance of eminent physicians, among whom I can name several members of

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the Royal Society of Medicine of Paris, who personally know me and my case, I consented, as a last resort, to accept the proposition of Dr. Mesmer to try the proceedings of a method hitherto unknown. When I arrived at his establishment my head was constantly shaking, my neck was bent forward, my eyes were protruding from their sockets and greatly inflamed, my tongue was paralysed, and it was with the utmost difficulty that I could speak; a perpetual and involuntary laugh distorted my mouth, my cheeks and nose were of a red purple, my respiration was very much embarrassed, and I suffered a constant pain between the shoulders; all my body trembled and I staggered when walking. In a word, my gait was that of an old drunkard, rather than that of a man of forty. I know nothing of the means resorted to by Dr. Mesmer; but that which I can say with the greatest truth is that, without using any kind of drugs, or other remedy than 'Animal Magnetism,' as he calls it, he made me feel the most extraordinary sensations from head to foot. I experienced a crisis characterised by a cold so intense that it seemed to me that ice was coming out of my limbs; this was followed by a great heat, and a perspiration of a very fetid nature, and

so abundant at times as to cause my mattress to be wet through. The crisis lasted over a month; since that time I have rapidly recovered, and now, after about four months, I stand erect and easy. My head is firm and upright, my tongue moves perfectly, and I speak as well as anyone. My nose and cheeks are natural, my colour announces my age and good health, my respiration is free, my chest has expanded, I feel no pain whatever, my limbs are steady and vigorous, I walk very quickly, without care and with ease. My digestion and appetite are excellent. In a word, I am perfectly free from all infirmities.

“I certify that this statement is in every particular conformable to truth. Given under my hand and seal, at Paris, the 28th of August, 1778.

“(Signed) CH. DU HUSSAY, ETC.”

CHAPTER V

MESMER AND THE ROYAL SOCIETY OF MEDICINE

AMONG the leading doctors of Paris, Mesmer had one firm friend in Dr. Deslon, a court physician of unprejudiced mind and wide reputation. Dr. Deslon firmly believed in Mesmer, and took a keen interest in his experiments. He was by no means satisfied with the attitude of the Royal Society of Medicine towards him, and persuaded him to make one more effort to gain their attention.

Mesmer therefore selected six new cases and asked the Royal Society of Medicine to examine them. Only three of its members, Drs. Bertram, Maloet, and Sollier, responded to his appeal. They did not deny the cures, but refused to certify them as conclusive. "Nature," they said, "often cures without the help of man." Mesmer thereupon begged these three to select some patients themselves. This they refused to do. They could not be present, they said, during the months of treatment, and

therefore they could not be sure that the usual medicines were not given. Their faith in "the usual medicines" appears rather pathetic considered in conjunction with their belief that Nature often does the work popularly supposed to be done by the doctors.

Dr. Deslon, however, was not discouraged by these refusals. Shortly after this he brought Mesmer's famous "Twenty-seven Propositions" before a meeting of the Royal Society of Medicine.

In these brief axioms Mesmer's main doctrines are summarised. They are as follows :—

1. *There exists a reciprocal influence between the heavenly bodies, the earth, and animated bodies.*

2. *A fluid universally diffused, and so continuous as not to admit of any vacuum, and the subtlety of which does not allow of any comparison, and which by its nature is capable of receiving, propagating, and communicating all impulses, is the vehicle of that influence.*

3. *This reciprocal action is governed by mechanical laws, at present unknown.*

4. *From this action there result alternative effects, which may be considered as a flux and reflux.*

5. *That flux and reflux is more or less general,*

more or less particular, more or less composite, according to the nature of the causes that determine it.

6. *It is by this operation, the most universal of those that Nature presents to us, that active relations are established between the heavenly bodies, the earth, and its constituent parts.*

7. *The properties of matter and of organised bodies depend upon this operation.*

8. *The animal body experiences the alternative effects of this agent ; and it is by insinuating itself into the substance of the nerves that it directly affects them.*

9. *Properties similar to those of the magnet are found in the human body ; different and opposite poles can be distinguished, which can be excited, changed, destroyed, or reinforced ; even the phenomena of attraction and repulsion are observed in it.*

10. *The property of the animal body, which makes it susceptible to the influence of the heavenly bodies, and to the reciprocal action of those that surround it, has led me, from its analogy with the magnet, to call it Animal Magnetism.*

11. *The action and virtue of Animal Magnetism, thus characterised, can be communicated to other bodies, both animate and inanimate. Both are more or less susceptible.*

12. *This action and this power can be reinforced and propagated by the same bodies.*

13. *The flow of a matter whose subtlety penetrates all bodies without losing perceptibly its activity can be observed experimentally.*

14. *Its action takes place at a great distance, without the aid of any intermediary body.*

15. *It is augmented and reflected by mirrors like light.*

16. *It is communicated, propagated, and augmented by sound.*

17. *This magnetic virtue can be accumulated, concentrated, and transported.*

18. *I have said that animated bodies are not equally susceptible. There are some, though this is very rare, that have an opposite property, so that their mere presence destroys all the effects of this magnetism in other bodies.*

19. *The opposite property also penetrates other bodies ; it can be communicated, propagated, accumulated, concentrated, and transported ; reflected in mirrors, and propagated by sound ; which shows that it is not a mere privation, but a positive opposing influence.*

20. *The magnet, whether natural or artificial, is, like other bodies, susceptible of Animal Magnetism, and even of the opposing virtue, without in either case its action on the iron, or needle,*

undergoing any alteration ; which proves that the principle of Animal Magnetism differs essentially from magnetism of the mineral kind.

21. *This system will furnish new ideas about the nature of fire and light, and throw light upon the theory of attraction, of flux and reflux, of the magnet and of electricity.*

22. *It will show that the magnet and artificial electricity have an effect on maladies similar to that of several other natural agents ; and if some useful effects have come from their employment, those effects are due to Animal Magnetism.*

23. *It will be recognised from the facts, according to rules which I will establish, that this principle will cure immediately all diseases of the nerves, and mediately all other diseases.*

24. *With its assistance the physician is enlightened as to the use of medicaments ; can improve their action ; and can bring on and direct beneficent crises, so as to make himself their master.*

25. *In communicating my method, I will demonstrate, by a new theory of diseases, the universal utility of the principle I oppose to them.*

26. *With this knowledge, the physician will judge with certainty as to the origin, the nature, and the progress of diseases, even the most complicated ; he will check their advance, and will*

succeed in curing them without ever exposing the patient to dangerous effects or unfortunate consequences, whatever be his age, temperament, or sex. Even women in pregnancy and childbirth will enjoy the same advantage.

27. Finally the doctrine will put the physician in a position to judge accurately the degree of health of each person, and to preserve him from diseases to which he might be exposed. The healing art will thus attain to the utmost perfection.

These strange doctrines proved too much for the Royal Society of Medicine. Its members were in no mood to sit at the feet of Mesmer. On September 18th, 1780, they rejected them in full and pronounced a decree depriving any qualified doctor ("doctor-regent") of his diploma who advocated or practised Animal Magnetism.

CHAPTER VI

MESMER AND MARIE ANTOINETTE

DR. DESLON's reputation was embarrassing to the Royal Society of Medicine. Thirty-three more or less insignificant members of the Faculty suffered deprivation under the decree issued against Animal Magnetism. But they were not in a strong enough position to enforce it against Dr. Deslon, who laughingly defied their thunderbolts. Deslon was therefore separately reprimanded, suspended for a year from voting at the meetings of the Society, and threatened with loss of his diploma in a year's time if he did not meanwhile abjure Animal Magnetism. The meeting necessary to confirm the decree before it became valid, however, was never held, and Deslon openly defied the Society.

Not content with their refusal to give countenance to Mesmer or his work some members of the Faculty resorted to the basest means in order to entrap him. A Dr. Portal, a well-

known practitioner in Paris, went to him, feigned the symptoms of a disease, gave him a fictitious history of it, and, after being operated on magnetically, pronounced himself cured. He then published an account of how he took in Mesmer, declaring that his allowing himself to be duped showed his ignorance and the folly of Animal Magnetism.

During Mesmer's residence in Paris Marie Antoinette had become interested in him and his work. Mesmer, despairing of gaining any recognition from the Faculty, wrote to her with the view of securing her influence in obtaining for him the protection of the Government. He wished to have a château given him, with a yearly income, in order that he might continue his experiments at leisure, untroubled by the persecution of his enemies. If he met with no more encouragement, he would be compelled, he said, to carry his discovery to some other country more willing to appreciate him. "In the eyes of your Majesty," he wrote, "four or five hundred francs, applied to a good purpose, are of no account. The welfare and happiness of your people are everything. My discovery ought to be received and rewarded with a munificence worthy of the monarch to whom I shall attach myself."

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M. de Maurepas, on behalf of the King, thereupon opened negotiations with Mesmer to induce him to remain in France and teach his system publicly. At a conference between M. de Maurepas and Mesmer it was agreed that a certain large house and grounds should be given to him for the accommodation of himself and his patients, and a pension of 20,000 francs for himself, on condition that he treated cases, and taught the doctors. He was not to leave France until he had established his system or had obtained permission of the King.

Some weeks later Mesmer had another visit from de Maurepas, proposing certain alterations in the agreement: a sum of 10,000 francs was substituted for the proposed property, with which wholly inadequate sum Mesmer was to provide an establishment for his patients. His own pension was to remain the same, but the ratification of the agreement was to be left to the decision of his pupils, some of whom were to be appointed by the Government. They were at the same time to pronounce upon the value, or otherwise, of his system.

Mesmer very naturally rejected these conditions. "My intentions," he wrote, "when I came to France were not to make my fortune but to secure for my discovery the unqualified

approval of the most scientific men of this age. And I will accept no reward so long as I have not obtained this approval; for fame, and the glory of having discovered the most important truth for the benefit of humanity, are dearer to me than riches." Moreover, "it is contradictory and impossible," he said, "that I should be judged by my pupils. What if Drs. Laffone, Maloet, and Sollier were to be sent to me as pupils?" Obviously his pupils could give no authoritative pronouncement on his discovery, and, since this was what he desired above all else, he decided that all further negotiation was useless and prepared to leave France.

CHAPTER VII

THE ROYAL COMMISSIONS

It has been argued that Mesmer's letter to the Queen, asking for the assistance of the Government, was proof of avarice and self-seeking on his part. Such a view is surely as absurd as it is unjust. Had his desire been merely to make a large fortune, all he had to do was to continue his work in Paris. But this did not satisfy him. He wanted the leading scientists of his day to make an honest investigation into the natural forces at work in his cures. And he wished to obtain a recognised position in France which would leave him free to continue his investigations instead of wasting time in disputing with the doctors.

His insistence upon the need of a large establishment where he could treat his patients arose out of the serious disadvantages which attached to the baquet. He knew very well that many of those who flocked to the public baquet came, not because they were ill, but merely for the

sake of excitement. The ignorant regarded him as a magician and his work as miraculous.

Moreover, scandals had broken out in connection with the baquet. Moral effects were attributed to its action. It was said that the moral influence of the baquet depended upon which side of the apparatus the patient connected himself with. To obviate these abuses Mesmer was anxious to treat each patient separately ; but owing to the large number of his patients, this was not easy.

In 1784 the King appointed a Commission, consisting of members of the Academy of Sciences and of the Royal Society of Medicine, to examine the claims of Animal Magnetism.

The sittings of the Commission took place at the house of Dr. Deslon, and most of the experiments before the Commissioners were conducted by him. Against this Mesmer protested. Dr. Deslon, while fully convinced of the phenomena of Animal Magnetism, did not agree with Mesmer's theories. Mesmer absolutely denied that imagination, or, as we should term it, Suggestion, had anything whatever to do with his cures. Deslon, on the other hand, attributed considerable effect to it.

As a result of the Commission, three reports were published in August 1784: the Report

of the Faculty of Medicine of the Academy of Sciences, the Report of the Royal Society of Medicine, and an independent report by De Jussieu—one of the Commissioners.

The first two reports were regarded at the time as a refutation of Mesmer's claims. They were, as a matter of fact, nothing of the kind. They constituted merely a refutation of Mesmer's theory of Animal Magnetism.

The modern theory of Suggestion, it should be remembered, was unknown at that time. Had the Commissioners been familiar with it, they would undoubtedly have worded their report differently. To have got rid of Animal Magnetism in favour of Suggestion would have been merely to exchange the frying-pan for the fire. But, in using the word "imagination," they fancied they had, once for all, given the quietus to Mesmer's discovery. The conclusion of the report states :—

"That which we have learned, or at least that which has been proved to us in a clear and satisfactory manner, by the examination of the process of Magnetism, is that man can act upon man at any time, and almost at will by striking his imagination; that the simplest gestures and signs can have the most powerful effects; and that the action of man upon the

imagination may be reduced to an art, and conducted with method, upon subjects who have faith."

De Jussieu's Report was more favourable to Mesmer. In his opinion there was evidence of the existence of a universal medium which was responsible for the mysterious phenomena which Mesmer had revealed. This medium appeared to him to be of the nature of heat rather than of magnetism. Other members of the medical profession, while compelled to admit the occurrence of the phenomena, steadfastly refused to trace them to that universal fluid which Mesmer called Animal Magnetism.

Thus Dr. Virey, in an article on the subject in the *Dictionnaire des Sciences Médicales*, denied the existence of Animal Magnetism and attributed the observed phenomena to some vital principle of the soul. "In order to act upon the body," he said, "the soul makes use of a vital principle or nervous fluid, which is capable of impressing motion and sensation on our organs. The sensitive element is not of the same nature as thought; it is secreted in the brain; it descends into the nerves; it exhausts itself and is renewed."

Had the deliberate intention of the Commissioners been to render themselves ridiculous

they could not have succeeded in doing so more successfully than was the case. Having solemnly declared in 1784 that no such thing as Animal Magnetism existed, the following year they invited foreign and provincial doctors to make observations on Animal Magnetism and to forward to them their reports. At that time there were upwards of a hundred doctors in the French provinces who had established magnetic practices, and many others were trying it. Of these many sent in reports, but the Royal Society of Medicine was careful to publish only those that were opposed to Animal Magnetism.

Why, it may be asked, were the findings of the Commissioners so uniformly unfavourable to Mesmer? Why were they so staunchly opposed to the theory of Animal Magnetism?

The answer is not far to seek.

In the first place, they refused to examine Mesmer's cases and his methods at first-hand. Imagining Animal Magnetism to be a simple and constant force, like terrestrial magnetism, they expected to be able to test it themselves by similar means. In this, as was only to be expected, they failed.

Secondly, they believed their professional reputations to be at stake, and these they

valued above every other consideration. In their opinion it was the *Materia Medica versus* Animal Magnetism. They were afraid of what might be the result of such a contest. Consequently Animal Magnetism had, at all costs, to be suppressed.

CHAPTER VIII

MESMER IN RETIREMENT

IN 1781 Mesmer left Paris and retired to Spa. His enemies lost no time in asserting that he had quitted the French capital because he was a beaten man. The evidence, however, points in exactly the opposite direction. Had he wished to escape observation it is hardly likely that he would have chosen such a fashionable resort as Spa. Neither would he ever have returned to Paris ; and this he did after a short sojourn in Spa. He established a free clinic in the Rue Coq-Héron, where from time to time he was in residence, treating the poor gratuitously and busied in propaganda of his system.

The accusation brought against him by his enemies that he was extravagant and avaricious is not borne out by the facts. It is true that he made a considerable fortune, but this he spent with a lavish hand, employing it mainly in the spread of his ideas. His enemies hated

him for his single-minded pursuit of truth ; his friends were attracted to him by his personal qualities of heart and head. In the words of Deleuze : " Those who knew Mesmer testified to his goodness of heart ; he gave the same care to the poor as to the rich ; and being of service was his greatest pleasure."

Many of Mesmer's patients followed him to Spa. Among these was an attorney named Bergasse. Bergasse and Kornmann, a banker, assisted Mesmer in his scheme to establish centres of magnetic healing throughout France. Bergasse issued an appeal for funds in which he stated that he was impelled to take such action " in order to protect a shamefully persecuted man from the fate prepared for him by the blind hatred of his enemies."

The result of this appeal was that Mesmer's project of " Societies of Harmony " came into being. The Societies of Harmony were hospitals in which students of magnetic healing might study. Into these hospitals poor patients were received gratis. Some twenty of these societies were soon established in the most important towns of France. The medical schools were furious ; but they were powerless to prevent the movement. All they could do was to expel any of their members who dared to

express the least shadow of belief in Animal Magnetism.

During the later years of his life Mesmer lived in retirement at Frauenfeld. From thence he moved to Constance. In 1814 he made his home at a farm-house in the village of Reidetswiller. His friends frequently urged him to return to Paris, but he steadily refused. The Revolution had deprived him of a great part of his fortune ; he was an old man, and there was nothing to be gained by beginning the fight all over again. From the farm-house at Reidetswiller he removed to Meersburg, where he continued until his death.

The King of Prussia frequently urged him to settle in Berlin. Mesmer declined, pleading age and infirmity. Frederick thereupon sent Herr Wolfart, one of the Court physicians, to him, and on his return Wolfart was appointed Professor of Mesmerism in the Academy of Berlin. A hospital of 300 beds was also founded, where only mesmerism was employed.

Mesmer's life in his declining years was singularly happy and peaceful. The days of contention were over ; he had a long life of strenuous and useful work to look back upon.

He was rarely seen on foot, but he kept a horse and light carriage and drove out daily.

For his horse he had a great affection. He appears to have possessed the faculty of taming and attracting animals to himself. The story of his canary sheds a charming light on this side of his character.

This canary lived in an open cage in his room. Every morning the bird would fly out, perch upon Mesmer's head while he slept, and waken him with its song—nor would the concert end until Mesmer arose and dressed himself. Always he had the power of putting the canary to sleep with a light stroke of the hand and of awakening it by stroking the feathers in the reverse direction.

Living thus in quiet seclusion, he was able to satisfy his love of music. When supper was over and twilight gathering he would sit and improvise on his loved harmonica. Sometimes he would accompany the music with his voice, which even now, in advanced age, was an agreeable tenor. While in Paris he had become intimately acquainted with Gluck, who made him promise that he would never play otherwise on the harmonica than thus improvising without notes or art. He also employed himself in modelling and drawing, and he still found time for attending the sick people of the neighbourhood.

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On February 20th, 1815, Mesmer, feeling unwell, did not visit the Casino as he was accustomed to do on Sundays. His illness gradually increased, and upon March 5th he begged that his friend, a young priest, Fessler by name, might be sent for. Before he arrived, however, Mesmer passed peacefully away. The body was left untouched until morning, but the canary did not, as usual, fly out of its cage to perch upon his head and awake him. The bird neither sang nor ate any more, and very shortly afterwards was found dead in its cage.

Mesmer had expressed a wish in his will that he should be interred very simply, but the people of Meersburg disregarded his wishes in this respect. Clergy and citizens united in giving him a ceremonious funeral, whilst numbers who were indebted to him for health and life followed the procession. His mortal remains were laid to rest in the churchyard of Meersburg, where subsequently a monument was erected to his memory by his Berlin admirers and disciples.

Throughout his life Mesmer had one single aim : to demonstrate the natural force he had discovered and to use it for the benefit of humanity.

His reward was mainly a plentiful harvest of anger, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness. And the intrinsic greatness of his character is vindicated chiefly in this: that he never allowed himself to become embittered by the treatment he received. His nature continued sweet and amiable to the end.

CHAPTER IX

MESMER'S THEORY

MESMER, as we have seen, maintained the thesis in his inaugural address in 1766 that the sun, moon, and fixed stars mutually affect each other and cause a tide in the atmosphere, similar to that which they cause in the ocean; that they affect in similar manner all organised bodies, through the medium of a subtle fluid which he believed to pervade the universe and to associate all things together in mutual harmony. This fluid, which, in his conception, bears a striking resemblance to the ether of modern theorists, he believed to be in constant circulation, producing rhythmic tides which serve to keep the universe in health. This magnetic flux and reflux, he considered, is also to be found in man in a state of health. But, if checked in any way, obstructions and disease result.

"There is," Mesmer asserted, "only one disease and only one cure." It is, he said,

the throwing of the system out of equilibrium that constitutes disease, and cure can only be obtained by bringing the system back into equilibrium. He was not averse to the use of drugs, but he taught that drugs only do good by arousing the curative power of Nature. In his own practice he used drugs very sparingly.

Mesmer was not satisfied with the views the Medical Faculty of his day took with regard to the causes of disease. The doctors only took cognisance of physical causes. This, in his opinion, was not going deep enough. In his own words :—

“To these physical causes must be added moral causes : pride, envy, avarice, ambition, all the vile passions of the human mind, are so many causes of visible maladies. How can the effects of these continually acting causes be radically cured ? Moreover, Animal Magnetism cannot cure the loss of an income of a hundred thousand francs, nor relieve one of a brutal and jealous husband, nor of a faithless and nagging wife, nor of an unnatural father or mother, nor of ungrateful children, nor of unfortunate propensities, nor of disagreeable vocations.”

Instinct Mesmer considered to be of far greater importance than reason. “Man,” he

wrote in his *Aphorisms*, "who alone uses what he calls his reason, is like a person who uses glasses in order to look at the thing he wishes to see; this gives him the habit of never looking at things with his own eyes, and never seeing things as other people do." He taught that, whereas instinct puts us into rapport with the whole of Nature, reason, as often as not, is a misleading guide, founding its conclusions on fallacies and prejudices which it helps to perpetuate. Instinct he regarded as the "internal sense" which serves to keep us in touch with the whole physical creation.

Something has already been said about the "crisis" which Mesmer regarded as of vital importance in the cure of disease. He believed that by discovering how to bring on and regulate "crises" he had found a method of arousing that curative power which is inherent in man's physical organism. The term "crisis," as used by Mesmer, indicates a change in the magnetic condition of the patient which reacts beneficially on the disease. Magnetism, by breaking down the obstruction, brought on a "crisis" which violently agitated the patient's organs and forces and temporarily increased their action.

There is no doubt that Mesmer had dis-

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covered a very effective method of inducing the crisis, and with highly beneficial results. By what means did he effect this ? Tardy de Montravel, one of his most successful disciples, attributed to Mesmer a power of self-induction whereby he could increase in himself the intensity of the magnetic fluid and transmit it to his patients.

CHAPTER X

MESMER'S METHOD

In treating individual patients Mesmer's method was as follows :—

If the disease was general he passed his hands, with fingers extended, all down the body, beginning with the head, passing over the shoulders, and then down the back and front of the body. This movement, varied in accordance with the special needs of the patient, he would repeat many times, bringing the hand round in a circle. Sometimes he used an iron rod in place of his fingers. For violent headache he would place one thumb on the forehead, the other at the back of the head. In some cases he would place his hands on the solar plexus, stretching his fingers towards the hypochondrium. His endeavour was always directed towards putting the magnetic fluid in equilibrium in every part of the body. And for all bodily pains he advocated the placing of one hand on one side and the other on the opposite side.

Mesmer's influence on the patient is said to have continued several days after treatment ; and in cases where the patient was susceptible he could produce sensations in him at will, without resorting again to touch, and this at a considerable distance.

Magnetism, he said, could be augmented by establishing a direct communication between several persons. This could be done either by the sitters holding hands and forming a chain or by means of the baquet.

Mesmer did not trouble to demagnetise his patients. His main object was to produce the crisis. In this he was usually successful, the crisis lasting a longer or shorter time according to circumstances and gradually wearing itself out.

The baquet was believed to act in a way somewhat similar to an electric battery. The large oaken tub which formed the centre of the baquet was usually filled with magnetised water, but sometimes the water was omitted, in which case the baquet was referred to as "dry." No apparent will power was used, although passes were occasionally made, and no verbal suggestions were given. The patients sat round the tub holding the iron rods which projected from it.

Modern theorists would be inclined to ascribe the curious developments which followed to the power of suggestion. But to any such theory Mesmer himself was utterly and consistently opposed.

These developments, the truth of which is well attested, were curious and appeared somewhat alarming. Patients experienced more or less violent perspiration, palpitations, hysterics, catalepsy, and sometimes a condition resembling epilepsy. When the crisis was at its height the patient was carried by attendants into one of the adjoining "salles des crises"; he was there laid on a couch, and usually he subsided gradually into a deep sleep from which he awoke refreshed and benefited. No harm appears ever to have resulted from the crisis, no matter how violent or of how long duration.

At all times Mesmer possessed the power of instantly arresting the most violent crisis by a word, a look, or a movement of his iron rod.

Music also was used to bring patients into a condition of restfulness and to fix their attention, Mesmer on some occasions playing on a wind instrument in order to exert influence upon them and to diffuse magnetism.

CHAPTER XI

FAILURE OR SUCCESS ?

THE day has long gone by when it was worth while asking the question : Was Mesmer a charlatan ? We know enough now of hypnotic and mesmeric phenomena to be able to consider impartially the curious developments which resulted from his treatment.

If Mesmer is to be regarded as a " quack " then the term must in justice be bestowed on every doctor, no matter what his diplomas, who has ever practised. The epithet was applied to Mesmer because he was dealing with forces that are imperfectly understood. But orthodox medical men, who rely on drugs, are also dealing with forces that are imperfectly understood. Mesmerism, it was said (and the same objection is frequently raised by the ignorant to-day), is dangerous. If there are dangers, then Mesmer was extraordinarily fortunate in his practice, for there is no evidence that he ever caused injury to a single patient through

the use of magnetism. If surgeons and medical practitioners could substantiate a similar claim on behalf of drugs and the knife they might consider themselves fortunate indeed.

Hostile critics sneered at Mesmer because he was simple enough to believe in the *baquet*; because he made use of an iron rod which they wittily referred to as a "wand"; and because he wore a silk garment when treating his patients. No doubt the *baquet* *was* an amazingly simple contrivance, but the phenomena which resulted from its application were simply amazing. The iron rod likewise was amply justified by its use in Mesmer's hands, and, as for the clothes most suitable for him to wear—that, surely, was a problem for himself to decide.

Mesmer was undoubtedly unfortunate in his age. It was a time of tumult and of violent change. The good seed which he sowed was trampled underfoot in the French Revolution. The scientific method of research was hardly understood, and the prejudices of medievalism were only beginning to melt away in the light of more exact knowledge.

In challenging the Royal Society of Medicine of Paris, the most important scientific corporation of his day, Mesmer may have been over-

bold. But it is hard to see how else he could have focussed the attention of Europe, for a brief space, on the strange phenomena of Animal Magnetism.

For the time, medieval orthodoxy, as represented by that Society, triumphed. But the Faculty were utterly unable to get rid of Animal Magnetism. Having explained it away to their own satisfaction, it was distressing to find that, like Frankenstein, it turned up again and yet again, and asked for a further explanation.

To-day the tables are turned, and, such are the revenges of Time, the doctors who do not "believe in" hypnotism and its allied phenomena run the risk of being considered "rusty" and "old-fashioned."

There are even signs that Mesmer's own special theory, which has been for the most part disregarded since his death, is in process of rehabilitation. Professor Boirac, late Rector of the Academy of Dijon, in his recently published book, *La Psychologie Inconnue*,* supports the view, after years of research and experiment, that the human body is a store-

* *Psychic Science (La Psychologie Inconnue)*. An Introduction and Contribution to the Experimental Study of Psychical Phenomena. By Émile Boirac, Rector of Dijon Academy. Translated by Dudley Wright. Demy 8vo. London: W. Rider & Son, Ltd. 10s. 6d. net.

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house of magnetic energy. The hypothesis is not of recent date. It did not entirely originate with Anton Mesmer. But Mesmer, by fearlessly devoting his life to it, did more than any other man to give it "a local habitation and a name."

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