

INCIPIENT PSEUDOPIA.

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One of the miseries of my life has been a supersensitive retina. The sunshine on snow or a bare road is often torture. Any cone of artificial light is unendurable. To sit in an electric-lighted room, even with eyelids closed and perhaps with a shade over the eyes, is to forfeit the efficiency of the next day. If I have congestion about the head from grip, fever or cold, then it is an affair of bed, black bandages and darkened rooms. Out of this experience have come some observations which are of interest to myself and may be to others.

The doctrine of the specific action of the senses is well understood. The nerves of the retina are made to respond to light and they answer even mechanical pressure in terms of light. I have been interested in watching, in my hours of darkness, the illumination which I get from the inflammation of the retina. The glory of light seems then turned on at full head. In the interest of clear psychological distinction I wish to say that this light is not subjective—a thing of imagination—it is objective; as it comes from the pressure, against the optic nerve-filaments, resultant from congestion.

Further on we shall see where psychic action comes in, as plainly distinguishable from this illumination, or any of its phenomena, as is such psychic action in any perception which is derived from light that comes from the external world. The field of vision in my case is confined to the optical apparatus itself.

I am satisfied that I see the march of the blood through the arteries of the retina itself. I feel my pulse by seeing it in the retina. It is with some timorousness that I make such a statement, but I make it. The statement rests on the perception of the same phenomena recurrent for many years. I have seen,

under a microscope, the corpuscles of blood dart along the tissue in a frog's foot; and the motion there is similar to that which I detect in my eye; only the march is in open order in the frog's foot, whereas in my retina the order is close. I have tried to verify my conclusion in various ways. The steady onflow I cannot stop nor turn aside by volition. I can talk with friends or open my eyes, but when I settle back and the eyes are shut, there is the same procession of bright particles moving in the same way. This phenomenon comes in when the tension from inflammation is high enough and departs as that tension ceases. In this experience I am sure that psychically I am a passive percipient, I see what I have to.

But the show does not end with the sensation of light and the perception of the procession of the blood. I get an unlimited variety of pictures projected before this interior vision. They are the products of imagination I know, but I have no will power over them. They begin at the edge of this inward horizon, pass over the field and then depart. They come and go at their own sweet will. I can never anticipate what is coming. I can call up, alter or modify nothing. I am as helpless about what the exhibition shall be as one sitting in the midst of an auditory is over the movements of a panorama on which he is looking. I have tried again and again, when a face would begin to appear, to have it take the form of some one familiar or loved, and have never yet succeeded. I am compelled to watch the show that is brought up before me. While imagination furnishes some of the elements of the spectacle, I am sure inflammation furnishes others. For instance, something begins to move along before me and it develops into a full-blown iron-foundry. Everything in it takes on the glow that flashes out in a real foundry when the furnace doors are opened; only the color is uniformly distributed over everything. The tools, the walls, the iron rods, the cinders are of molten-iron color. A heap of cinders is simply a heap of gems, an iron rod is burnished gold. I charge the flame-tint up to motion which I interpret in terms of light. But the foundry and all its appurtenances move along and disappear. I cannot stop it. I cannot call it back. The glow may continue but it

is formless. I have many sights savoring less of inflammation than that of the foundry. I am entertained with landscapes of all sorts; and here again I am helpless. If a landscape begins to move out before me I must take it as it is set. I have tried over and again to turn a starting picture into a vision of my old home, or of some familiar scenery, but it always develops in its own wilful way. There is a beautiful ravine twenty miles from Chicago with a magnificent elm at its head. I have supposed myself starting up that ravine many a time but I have never yet seen that elm in these compulsory imaginative excursions. Within three months I have been sure that I was at the lower end of that ravine and have had high hopes of reaching the elm, but the vision refused to go in that direction and turned me out, apparently on the edge of a wood in central Illinois that I had not called for, and I

“Was left lamenting.”

Perhaps I had better give some of the conclusions I have formed. My helplessness in respect to imagination assimilates the phenomena of my visions to those of dreams. But then are we not in our waking moods more than a little helpless in regard to imagination? Do we not then and there have to take pretty much what volunteers in the field? It is a startling, disquieting thought that we have little control over imagination even in our normal conditions. It is the most elusive, evasive, the least tamed of our faculties, the one most inexplicable.

Throughout all these visions I find sensation and psychic action tethered together as in normal sight. The picture is carried forward because it is physically connected with the steady onflow of the circulation of the blood. In these visions I am on the open road to the pseudopia of all delirium. Between what I see and what a victim of *delirium tremens* sees is only a matter of degree. Carry the pressure by congestion on the filaments of the optic nerve far enough, and let some of the brain centers used in coördinating thought and act be involved in the inflammation, and it is easy from my point of experience to see that the vision of imagination might catch and hold the attention to the exclusion of the vision derived from the external world. I might then start to run up my fictitious vale at Brush

Hill or begin to set things to rights or wrongs in my mentally invented foundry. Out of my long experience I have no memory of unesthetic visions. Medically speaking they have been "benign." Landscapes predominate in my panoramas. Though I cannot call up the countenance of a friend the faces I do see are not ugly. Rarely does a human being figure before me. Though my foundry appears to be in working order to the last touch there is never a soul besides myself in it.

I am not fond of pain, but I have had my compensations in experiences of the above-described sort and in observation and reflection upon them. I have had my exhibitions when I have not used opiates, or rather they have had me. It would make no difference in the ultimate physical and psychic analysis however if opiates were used. They explain nothing. The question still is, what are the laws of such visions or why their lawlessness?

NOTE. — Since the above was written I have had another experience with pseudopia. I lay in bed a few days from a cold and congestion about the head. One evening the visions came on and I described them aloud to my wife for half an hour. This experience was mainly of a geological sort. Rock views passed before me such as one would get in riding over the mountains in Wyoming on the Union Pacific Railroad. The rocks were at close range so that I could see all the bands of stratification in the sedimentary rocks. Sometimes the rocks were divided perpendicularly as well as horizontally so as to suggest a wall laid up artificially. But I saw no tools and no workmen. In fact I did not see a single human being in the whole half hour show. The primitive rocks appeared in all their amorphous condition. I could not get vista or prospect among or over them though I tried with all my might. But view after view of rocks in endless succession came on and went off. The only modification of bare rock (no tree or shrub or grass was in sight) was once when the view slid off to a river — drift bank in which were tumbled large boulders as is usual. One boulder was broken across the face and plainly showed the mixed gray, pepper and salt mottling of granite. This did not long continue and then the vision went back to the lithological

vision which was on before. Nothing was repeated. The variety was only equalled by the actuality as you climb the Rocky Mountains and go over the crest in Wyoming. All of a sudden the rock exhibition failed and there came out a beautiful landscape in which nothing of vegetation was wanting to completeness in effect. From embowering trees I looked down a long vista over a grain field filled with bunches of grain as farmers put them up before stacking. The field was apparently of acres in extent and the further edge faded out down a declivity with an intimation of a broad valley lower down beyond. This closed the show and I have seen nothing since and do not expect to till I have another season of congestion about the eyes.

I do not care about drawing conclusions ; but I do not see why I might not have the visions of frenzied oracles, bacchants, hermits, devotees — any of the sights of sinners or saints, if my mind was bent in their particular directions.