# Jealous madness : Leontes, Othello, and Posthumus Leonatus / by J. Foster Palmer.

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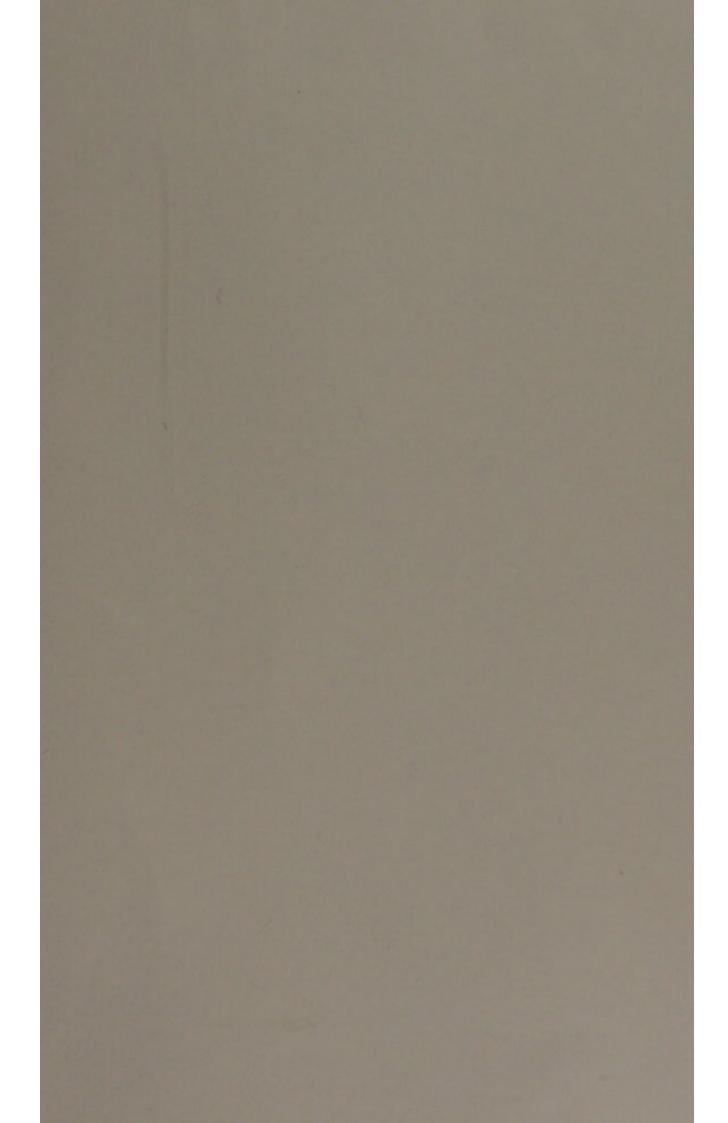
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## THE MEDICAL MAGAZINE. 1914 XX 11.661

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## JEALOUS MADNESS.

LEONTES, OTHELLO, AND POSTHUMUS LEONATUS. By J. FOSTER PALMER.

"JEALOUSY," says Addison, " is no northern passion, but rages most in those nations that live nearest the influence of the sun." "Between the tropics," he continues, "lie the hottest regions of jealousy." He considers that our own country is remarkably free from this passion, and that those few persons who are afflicted with it " are not the proper growth of our country, but are many degrees nearer the sun in their constitutions than in their climate.\* In strange coincidence with this statement the three typical examples in Shakespeare's plays of the violent forms of this passion take place on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea, which is, at least, many degrees nearer to the Tropic of Cancer than is the temperate climate of Britain.

Othello, moreover, was a native of Morocco, Leontes of Sicily, while Posthumus Leonatus, although born in Britain, would seem to have been of Italian descent. His friendship with the Italian Philario, the fact that his father and Philario were fellow-soldiers, and his father's Latin name, all suggest that Sicilius, although he fought on the side of Cassivelaunus against Julius Cæsar, was of Roman extraction.

These three mental studies are, no doubt, taken from nature, exaggerated perhaps, so far as they represent the actual experience of the writer, but differing in no essential particulars from cases we occasionally see in the present day, both within and without the walls of lunatic asylums.

It is always difficult to determine whether the victims of this "ecstasy of reasoning unreason," as it has been appropriately called, have really crossed the border-line of insanity or not. It is largely a matter of degree; to some extent, perhaps, also of definitions. Some have maintained that sexual love itself, especially when of that sudden and violent type so common in works of fiction, is a form of monomania. If so, it is usually, like the "distemper" in dogs and scarlatina in children, of a temporary character, and tends to establish future immunity. It is probably neither so prevalent nor so severe as certain authors would have us believe. Novel writers belong, almost necessarily, to an emotional and neurotic or neuropathic type, and

\*Spectator, Vol. III., No. 170.

would naturally tend to exaggerate, from their own experience, all mental processes of emotional origin. The question, however, does not come before us. The mutual love of married people, which is a slow and steady growth of stable character, bears no relation to the sudden and violent passions we read of in books. All the examples we are now considering refer to jealousy in married men, and men who have a deeply-rooted affection for their wives. Nor does it concern us to enquire into the nature and condition of jealousy founded on fact. In all these cases it is absolutely unfounded, the suspected persons being among the highest types of female character to be found in any of the plays. Imogen and Hermione, in fact, as they are two of the latest, are also two of the noblest of Shakespeare's women, while Desdemona, if not quite equal in nobility, grandeur, and refinement to the heroines of the romances, is a truly sweet, gentle, and loving creature. It is surely hypercritical in the extreme to take exception to her moral beauty as some have done, because she fixed her affections on one of a slightly darker complexion than her own countrymen.\*

In all three cases, then, we have the "ecstasy of reasoning unreason," the purely subjective obsession which so often indicates the unsound mind. In all, too, although the victims of the disorder were of a more or less neuropathic temperament, the immediate cause was mental, if not actually suggestive, and varied in degree from the intense mental force and sophistical persuasion of Iago, to the mere casual auto-suggestion of the neurotic Leontes. In the other two cases there was potent suggestion, and, perhaps, some telepathic influence as well. In the case of Leontes there was no external suggestion or influence whatever. Of a highly suspicious and neuropathic nature, the mental balance succumbed at once to the indulgence of self-torturing thoughts based on no semblance of probability. Certainly a mental defect. A normal mind would not thus have collapsed. A psychic inferiority, due, it would seem, to a lack of balance, the result, probably, of incomplete evolution. The brain had not reached its final stage of development. There was a retardation in the process of some of the functional centres as compared with that of others. Certain prejudices, feelings, and emotions preponderated, and were liable, when agitated, to dominate all the other psychic functions. The idea of suspicion having been once started, from however trivial and unreasonable causes, controlled the whole man, and excluded the reception of all other impressions.

<sup>\*</sup> The custom of representing Othello on the stage with a face as black as a negro, without reference to the Berber type, to which he really belonged, has, no doubt, done much to encourage this feeling. Inter-marriage with Moors has not been uncommon in Southern Europe. The races of Northern Africa are as far removed from the negro type as are the Europeans.

The obsession had taken a complete hold of him, and, so long as it lasted, he was practically a monomaniac. There is no reason to suppose that he was not, on all subjects not connected with his obsession, perfectly sane, just, and reasonable. On all subjects directly connected with it he was insane, unjust, and irresponsible. In the present day it would be no sign of insanity to disbelieve an oracle. It was otherwise then. In his inner consciousness he believed. It was not reason, but an ill-directed obsession, which caused his scepticism. His recovery, the result of an intense mental shock, restored his belief, a belief in accordance with his period, training and environment.

> LEONTES.—" There is no truth at all in the oracle : The sessions shall proceed : this is mere falsehood."

> > ("Winter's Tale," Act III., Sc. 2., 141, 142.)

Yet immediately after, on hearing of the death of his son, his scepticism vanishes : it was not founded on reason. It was mere self-torture.

> LEONTES. - "Apollo's angry ; and the heavens themselves Do strike at my injustice."—(Ibid, 147, 148).

The neuropathic susceptibility of Leontes must have been of an intense, indeed, of an explosive character. It could only be by a happy chance that he had passed so many years, even with a Hermione, without an actual explosion, for, when it came, the exciting causes were of the very slightest. Nor is there any evidence in the play that the outbreak was due to any special moral culpability in Leontes himself, as it was in the case of Posthumus. Unless, indeed, it be maintained that all such cases are of a reflex nature, and that violent and unfounded suspicions are merely a reflection of the character of those who entertain them. "All things look yellow to a jaundiced eye," no doubt, but there are other causes which must, in some cases, be responsible for the result. Briefly, then, it seems to have been through no fault of his own that Leontes fell a victim to this horrible obsession. We can trace no moral delinquency in himself, nor any evil disposition in others, which conduced to bring it about. He was not even naturally cruel or tyrannical. As he truly remarks:

"Were I a tyrant,

Where were her life? She durst not call me so, If she did know me one."

-("Winter's Tale," Act II, Sc. 3, 121-124).

Nor was it in any way the result, as in the case of Othello and Posthumus, of outside suggestion. It was purely subjective and autosuggestive. A sub-tropical climate, a highly sensitive race, a neuropathic nature, congenital, probably hereditary. In addition to this there was a complete absence of constraint from others with regard to all his words and actions; an unwholesome environment, which served to increase his susceptibility to abnormal mental impressions through lack of the necessity of self-control. These causes, culminating at a certain period of his life, brought about a condition which made him a prey to a self-imposed obsession which his weakened mental and moral powers were unable to contend against.\*

The initial mental defect by which all this was brought about was not, as might at first sight be suggested, the result of mental degeneration. It was rather a condition, as already suggested, of partially retarded evolution. In his own life, and, presumably, in that of his family, evolution was proceeding along normal, progressive lines. The complete mental balance, however, was not yet arrived at. The only factor in the result which seems to be all retrogressive is this lack of self-control, the result, partly, of the habitual exercise of arbitrary and irresponsible power, with little or no check from those about him. Not that he had been by any means an unjust ruler, but the mere lack of opposition would tend to the atrophy, for want of exercise, of the functional centres chiefly concerned in this faculty. Atrophy, however, as the event shows, had not actually taken place. With the aid of a strong mental effort the function was enabled to resume its activity. The sudden and unexpected death of his son, following immediately upon his wilful and unreasoning rejection of the oracle. struck with power upon the slumbering conscience, and roused it to exert its influence to the full. Conscience, thus roused, served to readjust the aberrant mental functions, and the faculty of self-control came in time to be again active and dominant. To speak in terms of evolution, the psychical conditions of certain functional centres evolved into a higher phase, not in the race, but in the individual. In theological parlance, Leontes worked out his own salvation, that is to say, instead of waiting for the chances of psychical evolution by the action of natural selection. he, by a definite mental effort, cultivated in his own person the growth of one or more of his less-developed faculties. Moral evil is probably in most cases the result of an undeveloped mental equipment, and what is popularly called "conversion" is just the commencement of a genuine and continued effort to raise some of these less-developed faculties to a higher stage. In early life, a deficiency of growth in the functions of charity, love, tolerance, had made S. Paul a violent persecutor. After his "conversion," his whole life, as his epistles show, was employed in their

<sup>\*</sup> This self-torturing impulse seems, in its inception, to be not unlike that so welldescribed in Poe's great poem, "The Raven." Here the student, for no other reason apparently than to increase his own depression and melancholy, frames a series of questions, knowing well that the inevitable, unvarying reply ("never more") will only intensify his present morbid feelings.

cultivation, or, conversely, the defect might be looked upon as a want of control over the exuberant growth of intolerance and impatience of any divergence from his own standard of thought and action. The subsequent cultivation of the faculty of self-control reduced these evil tendencies to a minimum.

The actual nature of this psychical phenomenon called "conversion" has not yet been fully worked out, although it has been dogmatised upon by theologians of all shades of opinion. In most cases, if genuine, it seems to resolve itself into a determined and permanent attempt to cultivate the power of self-control, initiated, usually, by some powerful mental impression. The mental change is rarely, if ever, sudden, although the suddenness of its outward manifestation may make it appear so. In Leontes there had long been a lurking doubt as to his position, and the speeches of the courtiers, of Pauline, even of Hermione herself, had made an impression on his mind which, at present, he was too proud to admit. The moving force is, no doubt, usually some mystic, religious, emotional shock or stimulus. It appears to be almost in the nature of an obsession, but is distinguished from it by its tendency to restore, instead of to disturb, the mental balance, and in being justified by sound reason. I here refer. of course, only to genuine and permanent "conversion." An obsession which exorcises a demon, or, in other words, mitigates and controls the tendency to inordinate lust, drunkenness or incontrollable hatred, is not one leading to insanity, but the reverse. An emotional impression which produces no such permanent results is not only useless, but is retrogressive, mentally, morally and physically. In Leontes we see a case of genuine conversion in pagan surroundings, and devoid of the brighter lights and higher code of ethics which pertain to Christian teaching.

Obsessed, no doubt, he was; insane, too, no doubt, temporarily. The victim of an unreasoning, purely subjective obsession is, so long as it lasts, of unsound mind, a monomaniac. But the sequel shows the presence of potential sanity. It shows the potent influence of purely mental action, mental causes, in short, mental treatment, in influencing the course and progress of mental disturbances. There are many cases of incipient insanity which may be cured by mental treatment alone. We are often urged to consider the influence of the mind over the body. The influence of the mind over itself is no less potent and effective. As frequently occurs, Leontes, by submitting his mental processes to the control of a reasonable auto-suggestion, put a stop to the ascendancy of the evil demon of suspicion, and brought back the flow of thought into its normal channels,

(To be continued.)

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#### JEALOUS MADNESS.

# Leontes, Othello, and Posthumus Leonatus. By J. FOSTER PALMER.

## (Continued from page 665, vol. XXII.)

In Othello we are dealing with a mind of another nature, and trained under entirely different surroundings. There is no question here of demoralisation from the luxury and sleepy softness of courts. The whole training was, and had ever been, the stern, hard, and vigilant discipline of the camp and the battle-field. Yet there is in Othello, as in Leontes, a certain lack, or retardation, of mental evolution, though of a dissimilar character. That of Leontes appeared chiefly in a want of balance between some of the mental faculties. In Othello the mental faculties, so far as they went, were fairly balanced, but not highly developed. The whole cast of mind was altogether simpler, more rudimentary. There was no special neuropathic tendency to suspicion, as in the case of Leontes. The mental growth had been slow, but even. The emotion of love, even, had been quiescent, and, when it came, was largely the result of suggestion.

OTHELLO. - ""'Twas pitiful, 'twas wondrous pitiful :

She wish'd she had not heard it, yet she wish'd That heaven had made her such a man : she thank'd me, And bade me, if I had a friend that loved her, I should but teach him how to tell my story, And that would woo her. Upon this hint I spake."

-(" Othello," Act I, Sc. 3, lines 161-166.)

He could hardly do less. The suggestion was pretty obvious. His simple mind was evidently highly receptive to suggestion, but not much disposed to take the initiative without it.\* This is a striking trait in his character, and gives a clue to much of his future history. Both love and suspicion, if not actually non-existent, were latent until roused into action by an external stimulus. Without suggestion, love would never have been awakened in him. Without suggestion,

\* The experiments of Liebault, at Nancy, prove that the simple, stagnant, undeveloped mind of the French peasant is extremely amenable to hypnotism : more so, probably, than that of the more highly civilised and educated citizen. In the peasant, as in Othello, there would be a passive lack of resistance which would be extremely favourable to its reception. The question, of course, at once arises whether the susceptibility to hypnotic influence, as well as to the minor and simpler forms of suggestion, is not an indication of incomplete intellectual evolution. At the same time, a complete indifference to all suggestion is surely abnormal to the extent of morbidity. Indeed, it is chiefly a matter of degree. Extreme susceptibility and extreme indifference may both be morbid states, true sanity being found in the Aristotelian mean.

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jealousy would have been equally quiescent. His mental horizon was limited, his interest absorbed in matters connected with discipline and the successful carrying out of military operations. His training had brought him to a high degree of mental efficiency in dealing with open enemies, but had left him absolutely unprotected from those of the baser sort, who assume the  $r\delta le$  of friendship. It had left him entirely at their mercy. His character is truly sketched, though in his usual coarse and brutal style, by Iago:—

IAGO.—" The Moor is of a free and open nature That thinks men honest that but seem to be so, And will as tenderly be led by the nose

As asses are."- (" Othello," Act I, Sc. 3, lines 405-408.)

Iago recognised in him the untrained, undeveloped intellect quite incapable of successfully defending itself against the insinuations and machinations of more subtle intelligences.

That in the end the mind had become unsound there can be no doubt. We can trace the gradual process of its disturbance. It is clearly a case of deliberately induced insanity by means of false evidence and subtle argument, aided by a certain degree of subhypnotic suggestion. The martial equipment of the simple-minded Moor is obviously no match for that of the strong-willed, clever, and unscrupulous Italian.

At the commencement of the third act Othello's love and confidence in his wife remain complete and undisturbed.

OTHELLO. - " I will deny thee nothing."-(Act III, Sc. 3, lines 76, 83.)

Yet in the same scene, after the interview with Iago, in which the latter plies him with a succession of strongly suggestive statements interspersed with a few fragments of generalised and not very convincing argument, his confidence is already becoming undermined, and the nerve-centres have begun to take on a morbid action which is destined, sooner or later, to overthrow the mental balance :—

"Haply, for 1 am black,"

And have not those soft parts of conversation

OTHELLO. -

That chamberers have, or for I am declined

Into the vale of years-yet that's not much-

She's gone. I am abused ; and my relief

Must be to loathe her."-("Othello," Act III, Sc. 3, lines 263-268.)

\* Othello's calling himself "black" is on a par with the exaggerated view he is taking of the difference between himself and Desdemona in other respects. Since the interview with Iago all the possible causes of divergence are magnified tenfold. Molehills are turned to mountains, and

" Trifles light as air

Are to the jealous confirmations strong

As proofs of Holy Writ."--(Act III, Sc. 3, lines 322-324.)

In the present day we still commonly use the word "black" when we wish to emphasise even a moderate darkness of complexion, while all those of darker skins than Europeans are commonly lumped together by the uninitiated under the comprehensive but unscientific designation of "niggers,"

Iago at once sees the effect he has produced.

IAGO.-

"Not poppy, nor mandragora, Nor all the drowsy syrups in the world Shall ever medicine thee to that sweet sleep Which thou owedst yesterday."—(Act III., Sc. 3, lines 330-333.)

His description, too, of the subtle and almost unrecognised working of certain forms of suggestion is admirably true to nature.

> IAGO.—" The Moor already changes with my poison : Dangerous conceits are, in their natures, poisons, Which at the first are scarce found to distaste, But with a little act upon the blood, Burn like the mines of sulphur."—(Ib., 325-329.)

The recognition here of the potency of mental action, of the unlimited possibilities of purely psychic influences, and the striking parallel drawn between the mental forces and the physical action of poisonous drugs, show that exact psychological knowledge is no monopoly of a later period. The words might have been written in the twentieth century, and no addition, based on more recent research, would have served to elucidate them further. And now, seeing by the expression of the Moor's countenance that the change he expected had actually taken place, he seizes the opportunity and plies him further with the most potent and apparently convincing arguments; while Othello, in his blind confidence, taken in by a plausible manner, accepts the mere ipse dixit of Iago, entirely overlooking the almost obvious fact that the statements upon which these arguments were based were devoid of foundation; that the evidence was altogether hypothetical and absolutely false. Before the end of the interview the "poison" has done its work, and the Moor's feeble (and now disturbed) intellect is convinced. His will has fallen a prey to Iago's sophistry.

We cannot say that the result was largely due to telepathic suggestion. Some men have very considerable hypnotic influence, while at the same time they lack the power of argument. Others can prove beyond the possibility of contradiction that "black is white" and yet be quite devoid of real hypnotic power. When the two are combined, the possessor of them becomes a power in the world. Iago possesseth the former in a high degree. He had, in the first place, a deep insight into men's minds, and, secondly, he had the faculty of selecting, marshalling and perverting facts (or supposed facts) to the best advantage; of making the worse appear the better reason. He was, in fact, a capable special pleader, and, in addition, absolutely unscrupulous as to the employment of means and the ends to be gained by them. Besides this, he possessed in a high degree the gift

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of humour. This served further still to divert suspicion of his deep and dark designs. He is, indeed, the humorist of the play. There is a very prevalent tendency to look upon a humorist as one "not to be taken seriously" either for good or evil. Humour is sometimes fatal to reputation. It served Iago's turn well, and helped to obscure his real intentions. Even Othello could hardly conceive a rather vulgar joker to be at the same time a deep designing plotter.

Whether, beyond these qualifications, Iago possessed any real hypnotic influence it is difficult to say. If he did it was employed simply to supplement his powers of argument and persuasion, not to act independently of it. Indeed, some recent observations rather tend to show that one runs into the other, that hypnotic influence is, in fact, only the result of a high degree of cultivation of the argumentative faculty, combined with supernormal or unusual powers of observation and mental insight. This view has thus been defined by a recent writer :--- "Suggestion," he says, "is merely the process of getting an idea accepted by the mind of the subject, by slipping it, as it were, past the guard of his attention or criticism."\* This statement coincides perfectly with the method employed by Iago. The idea was slipped into the mind of Othello past the guard of his attention, not of his criticism, for the critical faculty was conspicuous by its absence. This agrees, too, with the converse side of the question. Othello is intensely receptive of suggestion, but the suggestion must be expressed in a way that he can understand. The more brutal, the more commonplace, the more realistic the statements of Iago, the more potent is their effect on him. He is receptive in the way of the French peasant of Nancy, passively taking in the idea suggested. not acutely sensitive, like the thought-reader, grasping the unexpressed idea. Indeed, if he had been receptive in this telepathic sense he would have seen beyond the mere words of Iago, and dived into his inner thoughts, which were hostile.

Another possible factor in the collapse of Othello's sanity before the well-directed shafts of Iago was his almost childish credulity. The next scene shows us his real or assumed belief in the magic power of a handkerchief.

OTHELLO.— "While she kept it, 'Twould make her amiable and subdue my father Entirely to her love, but if she lost it Or made a gift of it, my father's eye Should hold her loathed and his spirits should hunt After new fancies."--(Act III, Sc. 4, lines 58-63.)

#### Telepathy, too, he had heard of, and seemed to stand in awe of it.

"She was a charmer, and could *almost* read The thoughts of people."—(Ibid., lines 57, 58.)

These and the other superstitious fancies which he relates as to its supposed magical origin show the childlike simplicity of his nature, and the absolute impossibility of his being able to contend against the trained intellect of his astute betrayer. Meanwhile the psychic "poison" continues to work. In the next act we find Iago following up his advantage with the grossest suggestions (which he now knows will not be resented or opposed), conveyed in the coarsest language. The result, indeed, is more complete than even he had anticipated. Before the interview is at an end Othello becomes incoherent, the mental excitement has caused so much disturbance in the circulation through the nerve centres that a nerve explosion takes place in an epileptiform seizure. From this time he can hardly be considered sane. During the interview with Lodovico the incoherent manner continues:—

> "You are welcome, Sir, to Cyprus—goats and monkeys." —(Act IV, Sc. 1, line 274.)

Lodovico himself looks upon his inconsequent speech as indicating insanity, and rightly so :---

LODOVICO.—" Is this the noble Moor whom our full senate Call all in all sufficient? Is this the nature Whom passion could not shake? whose solid virtue The shot of accident, nor dart of chance, Could neither graze nor pierce?" IAGO.— "He is much changed." LODOVICO.—" Are his wits safe? is he not light of brain?" —(Act IV, Sc. 1, lines 275-280.)

The signs of insanity, as indicated in the play, are not greatly conspicuous. They consist, chiefly, in a succession of occasional lapses into incoherent and inconsequent interjections. The impression conveyed to others, however, seems intended to convey the idea that these lapses were more marked and frequent than appears in the actual words introduced. The great bulk of Othello's conversation is sane and consequent, if we make allowance for the fact that he was really convinced by Iago's argument and persuasion, and also remember that he was not entirely free, in spite of his European training, from certain relics of barbarism, partly hereditary and partly due to early environment. He himself recognises, in his final speech, the existence of this initial lack of mental development when he describes his own character, and compares himself to one in a lower stage of civilisation. He speaks of himself as:—

"One that loved not wisely but too well; Of one not easily jealous, but being wrought, Perplex'd in the extreme: of one whose hand, Like the base Indian, threw a pearl away Richer than all his tribe; of one whose subdued eyes, Albeit unused to the melting mood, Drop tears as fast as the Arabian trees Their medicinal gum."-(Act V, Sc. 2, lines 344-351.)

An obsession there was, indeed, but it was one which, in view of his incomplete mental equipment, and the potent and subtle forces which had been brought to bear upon him, was not altogether unreasonable.

Whether, at the beginning of the fourth act, Othello had an epileptic fit or not, the words leave us in doubt. The stage direction says he "falls in a trance," but immediately after this Iago, in Cassio's presence, says :---

"My lord is fall'n into an epilepsy : This is his second fit : he had one yesterday." —(Act IV, Sc. 1, lines 51, 52.)

Iago's word, of course, stands for nothing, and this statement may be on a par with the rest, especially with regard to the previous fit, which is affirmed solely for Cassio's benefit. The inference, however, from Iago's remarks is that he was not foaming at the mouth, which would be one of the signs of epilepsy, for he says, in Cassio's presence:

> "The lethargy must have its quiet course. If not, he foams at mouth and by-and-by Breaks out to savage madness."—(Ibid., lines 54-56.)

Which implies that he is not doing so now. If he had been foaming at the mouth Cassio would have seen it, and the statement would be purposeless. Nor does he afterwards, for he recovers a little later, without, apparently, even a temporary loss of memory, which would probably have been a sequel to true epilepsy. If the attack was really epileptic, it was due, no doubt, to venous obstruction or congestion, the result of purely mental causes, the potent nature of which it shows. If, on the other hand, it was only a syncopal attack, the sequence would be still simpler and more direct, and, indeed, a matter of common experience. Fainting is quite a frequent result of a strong mental impression. The brain disturbance being thus due entirely to mental causes would probably be, as in nearly all such cases, curable by mental means. And such proved to be the case. It would be pedantic to speak of "psycho-analysis" and "psychotherapy" in connection with this case, yet the actual means by which Othello regained (in whole or in part) his reason included, in reality, both these methods of treatment. The mental causes of the brain

disturbance were "analysed" and "re-stated" by Othello himself, and "suggestion," followed by evidence, was made to him that these causes were imaginary and based on falsehood.\* Stated in nontechnical terms it means that the whole of Othello's symptoms, including the temporary state of unconsciousness (whether it were genuine epilepsy or merely an attack of syncope), were due to some circulatory disturbance, that this disturbance was brought about by shock, and that this shock resulted from the credence given by him to Iago's statements. These statements having been now entirely disproved, the original causes had ceased to exist, and the conditions were favourable to a complete restoration to mental health. There had intervened, however, between the acceptance and the final rejection of Iago's evidence a new and terrible factor in the murder of Desdemona. It is conceivable that this factor, now further intensified by a knowledge of the truth, may have supplied the place of the original cause of the brain trouble, and thus prevented that perfect recovery to which the other surrounding conditions were favourable. In short, madness due to mental causes may, in most cases, as already pointed out, be cured by mental treatment. But this treatment may come, as in the present case, too late, and the subjective obsession, amenable to mental means, may have been already superseded by a real, objective obsession, which no means, mental or otherwise, can have the slightest influence on. Whether this objective obsession indicates insanity or not depends on the relative proportion it bears to the cause from which it springs. In Othello's case it was the acute consciousness of the foul and cowardly murder of the being he loved best in all the world. Was there any disproportion here? In other words, was Othello, during the latter part of the last scene, sane or insane ? Was his suicide the result of temporary insanity or of a true sense of auto-retributive justice ? It rather depends on the point of view. In a pathological sense, the cause of the mental disturbance being removed, the normal brain functions might now be speedily resumed. The morbid and unfounded obsession, however, had never been mitigated or checked, but worked

<sup>\*</sup> The psychical state which underlies obsessions and other similar mental disturbances has been thus defined by students of psycho-analysis: "Every psycho-neurotic symptom is to be regarded as the symbolic expression of a submerged mental complex of the nature of a wish. . . . The stream of feeling that characterises the wish is dammed up, it can find no direct outlet, and so flows in some abnormal direction." (Montreal Medical Journal, August, 1909.) This is well exemplified in the case of Othello. The intense, ardent "wish" is plain to all. The "stream of feeling that characterises it is dammed up" by his complete, though unwilling, belief in Desdemona's faithlessness, and "flows in this abnormal direction" so well described in the play that, viz., which leads to a homicidal obsession.

itself out to the bitter end, with dire result. For now another and worse obsession followed, this time a true one. Not only no poppy nor mandragora, but no mental treatment, no enlightenment, no argument, no sophistry, could now remove from his psychic consciousness the burden of that terrible murder of which he knew himself to be guilty. This obsession, at least, was no sign of madness. It was only too well founded. It was one which would render his future career, his future life, impossible. He now saw the act in all its bearings, in all its dreadful consequences. Was his suicide, after all, a sign of madness ? Was it not rather a sign of restored reason, able now, with comprehensive view, to grasp the situation in all its bearings, and urge him on to take the only possible step which could readjust the balance, and solve the difficulties of the position for himself and others ?

(To be concluded.)

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#### JEALOUS MADNESS.

# LEONTES, OTHELLO, AND POSTHUMUS LEONATUS.

By J. FOSTER PALMER.

# (Continued from page 48.)

THE jealousy of Posthumus seems, at first sight, hardly to reach to madness. But it reached to homicide. It may, of course, be said that murder is no sign of insanity, or crime would be non-existent. But was Posthumus an ordinary criminal, and nothing more ? The dramatist seems to be at great pains to point out, by the description of his character in the early part of the play, that he was, at least, something very remote from that. We need not accept this description at its actual face value. He is far from being the model of perfection that is there indicated. He does not enlist our sympathy. His troubles, those, at least, which followed his banishment, he brought upon himself. One can only feel indignation and contempt for a man who so drags his wife's character in the mud as to boast and make bets on it in the company of a set of chartered libertines. And not only this, but deliberately exposes her, and under false pretences, to the insults and insidious advances of one of the worst of the set, while she was far away from the reach of his protection. This is heartless, thoughtless, but not akin to any murderous intent. His good qualities, such as they are, seem to depend chiefly on the influence of his wife. Away from Imogen he immediately deteriorates. Yet, however reckless, however careless, however inconsiderate, however lacking in refinement and common decency, however ready to succumb to the influence of evil company, he is no natural born criminal; there is nothing of the homicide about him. As soon, however, as his rather feebly-balanced intellect becomes obsessed, through his own folly and credulity, with the false idea of his wife's dishonour, his character changes into that of a cowardly, treacherous murderer. The fall is like that of Lucifer. It is appalling. It might almost seem to justify the theory of demoniacal possession, so great is the contrast. It is, indeed, so great as to bring it into the category of madness. A distinct and striking change in comparison with previous character is one of the surest signs of insanity.

In comparison with Posthumus, Othello stands forth almost as a hero. Othello acted under great provocation and as the victim of intense subtlety and mental influence; and, at least, even when obsessed, he did his own dirty work. Posthumus, too mean, too cowardly, too treacherous, to do it himself, "caused," in intent, at least, as he afterwards confesses, "a lesser villain than himself" to carry out his evil deed; a deed, too, attempted in the most cruel and treacherous manner possible. Working on his victim's love to himself to entice her to Milford Haven in order to murder her. Seething the kid in its mother's milk in the worst possible sense. Othello, at least, did not deceive Desdemona; he told her plainly what he was going to do, and did it. "Cymbeline" is a romance and "Othello" is a tragedy. The former has to end in happiness, the latter in horror. Had both ended alike, in tragedy, the character of Othello would have seemed white beside the blackness of Posthumus, his madness less. Had both ended well, Othello would have appeared as a persecuted hero, but Posthumus would still seem, as he does, a mean, cowardly, contemptible hound. He excites sympathy only because Imogen loves him, and because, under her influence, and that alone, he has been, and may be again, a man with some sense of honour and virtue. We must consider Posthumus, then, as of feeble, ill-balanced intellect, with little will-power, lacking in personal decision, intensely receptive to suggestion from without, and utterly unable to contend against the influence of his immediate surroundings. Good with the good, evil with the evil. A mind thus constituted would be likely to lose its balance completely when confronted with any new and startling situation. Easily swaved to one side or the other by trivial matters, emotional, neurotic, and highly susceptible to surrounding influences, it would be liable to break down from comparatively slight causes. When the false news of evil came, he lacked both the intellect to test it and the mental vigour to stand up against it.

This double feebleness is very conspicuous when he incontinently succumbs to the flimsy arguments of Iachimo, supported by a few palpably false oaths, by which he seems to be greatly impressed, though they would themselves excite suspicion in any man of wellbalanced mind, as they did in that of Philario :—

PHILARIO. — "Sir, be patient : This is not strong enough to be believed Of one persuaded well of ——" —("Cymbeline," Act II, Sc. 4, lines 130-132.)

In spite of this protest Posthumus swallows the unlikely story, and goes out, practically raving.

So, at least, Philario interprets it. The impression on those who have witnessed the sudden change is that of temporary insanity as the probable issue of it :—

> PHILARIO.— "Quite besides The government of patience !— Let's follow him, and pervert the present wrath He hath against himself."—(Act II, Sc. 4, lines 149-152.)

He appears to consider him suicidal.

Nor is the soliloquy which follows remarkable for the sanity of its reasoning. It is something more than mere pessimism. It is a changed personality, a morbid outlook, a "diseased wit," as Hamlet would call it.

The attack, however, whatever its actual character, was not suicidal, as Philario had suggested, but homicidal, and it led him on to such depths of infamy, treachery, and cold-blooded cruelty as to be absolutely inconceivable in one of his antecedents, unless we accept the view entertained by Philario as to his sanity.

During the next two acts Posthumus does not appear, a fact which causes the reader little regret. But we are brought into contact with the effects of his cowardly crime, both on Imogen and on Pisanio. Even Pisanio, the faithful servant, of more even balance than his master, sees through the whole matter at a glance, well aware, it would seem, too, of his master's mental deficiencies and lack of judgment in his opinions of men and women :—

> PISANIO.—"O master! what a strange infection Is fall'n into thy ear! What false Italian, As poisonous-tongued as handed, hath prevail'd On thy too ready hearing? - (Act III, Sc. 2, lines 4-6.) "How look I, That I should seem to lack humanity So much as this fact comes to?"\*—(Ibid., lines 15-17.)

Then comes the cruel, treacherous letter, professing love, and urging her for *his sake* to go to Milford Haven—to be murdered ! Could Othello have been guilty of such diabolical cruelty and hypocrisy ? Never.

At this point one could almost wish that Imogen had married Cloten instead. He was at least a man; he knew how to hold his own before the Roman Ambassador, and, though intensely conceited, he possessed a saving sense of humour as well as an accurate knowledge of the position. His remarks to the Ambassador, although

<sup>•</sup> Posthumus' judgment, it is evident, is as incapable of appreciating honour and probity in the good as it is of detecting dishonour and falsehood in the evil. Pisanio, on the other hand, grasped the entire situation at once.

not so high-flown and euphemistic as those of his mother, showed a full grasp of the position.

CLOTEN.—" There be many Cæsars Ere such another Julius." Britain is A world by itself ; and we will nothing pay For wearing our own noses."—(Act III, Sc. 1, lines 11-14.)

"If Caesar can hide the sun from us with a blauket, or put the moon in his pocket, we will pay him tribute for light; else, sir, no more tribute." —(Ibid., lines 43-46.)

If Imogen could make a man of Posthumus (for it was her love and her forgiveness only that made him what he was), might she not, under favourable surroundings, have made a man of Cloten? This feeling, however, is only temporary, for Posthumus, though feeble in intellectual balance and will-power, appears to good advantage until he is removed from her influence, and, later on, when this is restored to him after the terrible experience he has undergone, shows that he has in him the making of a true man after all.

Yet, surely, of unpromising materials. Up to this point we see little to hope for in him. We hear nothing further of his psychological condition till the beginning of the last Act. He has, in will and in belief, murdered his wife. Naturally, he is now full of remorse. There had been, at present, no real repentance. He never wavered in his evil intent until the evil deed was done, or he thought it done. The obsession, if such it was, had, as in Othello's case, worked itself out, in his own mind, to the bitter end. It was only the unexpected rectitude and justness of his faithful servant Pisanio that prevented its consummation in actual fact. As, too, in the case of Othello, the false obsession had been replaced by a true one, for in will, though not in deed, he was a murderer. His psychological state. however, is not quite the same. Even now, with all this weight of crime upon him, he never becomes actually suicidal. He seeks death in battle, and at others' hands, but never attempts to lay violent hands on himself. This fact is, perhaps, an indication of a degree of mental and moral potentiality we should otherwise hardly have been prepared to expect. It shows a certain measure of moral courage and restraint as well as of returning mental balance. He begins again to see things in their true proportions. He is willing to meet death, if fate so wills it, but he is also willing to submit to any other penalty that justice may inflict upon him. The scene in the prison (Sc. 4) shows the first signs of commencing actual mental readjustment and a true sense of moral right. Addressing the Higher Powers (presumably the Roman Gods), and comparing them with "temporal fathers," he says :---

"Gods are more full of mercy. Must I repent? I cannot do it better than in gyves, Desired more than constrain'd : to satisfy, If of my freedom 'tis the main part, take No stricter render of me than my all. I know you are more clement than vile men, Who of their broken debtors take a third, A sixth, a tenth, letting them thrive again On their abatement : that's not my desire : For Imogen's dear life take mine ; and though 'Tis not so dear, yet 'tis a life ; you coin'd it : 'Tween man and man they weigh not every stamp ; Though light, take pieces for the figure's sake : You rather mine, being yours ; and so, great powers, If you will take this audit, take this life, And cancel these cold bonds. O Imogen ! I'll speak to thee in silence."-(Act V, Sc. 4, lines 13-29.)

And then he sleeps—and dreams.

The spectral appearances which follow in this scene cannot be spoken of in terms of hallucination, or as pointing to any definite abnormal psychological state. Posthumus is asleep, and the appearances are just what he sees in his dream. There is also a supernatural element in them, indicated by the presence of a written inscription, readable to others as well as to himself, and not to be accounted for by any thought projection of his own. At the same time the very clearness of the vision points to a highly-wrought brain and extreme nervous tension, if not to actual present mental disturbance. Indeed, so vivid has been the impression that he is himself more than doubtful of his sanity.

> "'Tis still a dream, or else such stuff as madmen Tongue and brain not; either both or nothing; Or senseless speaking, or a speaking such As sense cannot untie."—(Act V, Sc. 4, lines 146-149.)

His full restoration to mental and moral sanity comes later. Yet, when the real truth is revealed to him, when the purity and nobleness of Imogen, and the baseness and baselessness of his unjustifiable suspicions are brought home to him, even though he calls aloud for cord and poison, there is still no attempt, no real suggestion of suicide. He calls for justice on himself, but not by his own hand.

POSTHUMUS.— "O, give me cord, or knife, or poison, Some upright justicer ! Thou, King, send out For torturers ingenious ; it is I That all the abhorred things o' the earth amend By being worse than they."—(Act V, Sc. 5, lines 213-217.)

As in the case of Othello, the truth being told, the obsession disappears, the mental faculties recover themselves, and things are seen in their true proportions. Like Othello, too, he sees that there is

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no readjustment, but in his own death, with whatever preceding adjuncts justice may decree. Only, with greater courage, and more highly evolved mentality, he makes no attempt to escape the full penalties of the law, the justice of which he fully acknowledges. Here, however, the parallel ends. Not in a psychological, but in a material sense. Othello had no faithful friend to check him in his mad career, but Posthumus, more fortunate, was saved from actual guilt by one with a higher sense of right and a more accurate judgment, that type of noble and faithful dependants, Pisanio. The crime being thus one in thought only and not in deed; the original cause of the obsession being removed, and there being no more potent real cause to take its place, as in the case of Othello, the mind is left free to recover its soundness, and does so.

Being a romance, the play has to end happily. This is the only way it could do so. His mental soundness being thus restored, and his character disciplined by the terrible experience he has undergone, we find the latent sparks of true manhood, long hidden, coming at last to the front. Posthumus has drunk the bitter cup to the dregs. Already in despair, he now hears the convincing proofs of his wife's innocence. His homicidal mania seems to return, and he makes a violent assault on the supposed page. When assured, however, that Imogen still lives, and stands before him, he calms down, and the better part of his nature at last asserts itself. His final words to his subtle and treacherous, but now repentant, enemy, show that, in spite of his many shortcomings, in spite of his feeble resisting power, both mental and moral, his want of balance, and his sudden collapse, he had had in him all along, the making of a man, the germs of intellect and character, and that under the guiding influence of Imogen, following upon the sharp but salutary discipline of mental torture, evolution was already taking place in both :---

POSTHUMUS.—" The power that I have on you is to spare you; The malice towards you to forgive you; live, And deal with others better."—(Act V, Sc. 5, lines 418-420.)

The words show, not only a perfect restoration to mental soundness, but also, potentially, at least, a genuine nobility of character.\* The mind, now restored, has greater power and a more

<sup>\*</sup> The ethics here indicated are, of course, those of Christianity, or, at any rate, those of the higher Judaism (vide Proverbs xxv, 21); but it must be borne in mind that although the scene of the play is laid in Britain in the early part of the first century, there is no attempt to fit in the characters with the surroundings of this particular period, nor with the traditional semi-civilised condition of our early ancestors. The ethics throughout may be considered, generally speaking, as those of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

even balance than before its temporary aberration. The intellect, as well as the character, may sometimes grow stronger by tests which have compelled it to more energetic action.

The mutual interaction of mind upon mind, whether it be the action of one mind upon another, or that of different sections of the same, is by no means fully understood, and perhaps never will be. In some respects the mind in its morbid condition presents more facilities for accurate observation than are to be found in the vast field of more or less healthy mental action. That morbid states of the brain, indeed, actual insanity, may be brought about by the persistent and active influence of another, as well as by the autogenous cultivation and exaggeration or accentuation of certain series of mental action, there can be no doubt.

An incipient lunatic in an early stage may, by a determined and persistent exercise of the attentive control, and the concentration of the mind on certain objects, exclude from its consideration those it has a special tendency to dwell upon, which may ultimately evolve into an obsession. According to Bergson's theory of life, the chief function of the brain<sup>\*</sup> is to limit the great mass of diverse facts of which the mind is cognizant, to exclude extraneous matter, and cause it to concentrate its attention on the particular subject before it. When this function is in working order the mind may be said to be in a sound condition.

On the other hand there are certain states of the body in which the brain fails to carry out this function. When this is the case the mutual inter-action of mind and body is disturbed; the mind verges, at least, on the unsound, and insanity may be said to be incipient, if not actually present.

This condition of brain insufficiency may be brought about by a variety of causes. It may be self-induced. This is a form of autosuggestion. Assuming the truth of Bergson's hypothesis, we may consider the brain as selecting one (or more) of the numerous facts which are within the mind's field of knowledge, one which has special relation to the emotions, and has a disturbing effect on the mental equilibrium. The passions of anger, hatred, remorse, envy, jealousy, sorrow, or regret, may be so continually and insistently presented to the mind that the brain at last becomes unable to limit their intensity, and an obsession results, ending in madness. This process of selftorture is well described in Poe's "Raven," already referred to. The

<sup>• &</sup>quot;Body," he calls it, in contradistinction to "mind;" but from a psychological point of view we must look upon the "brain" as the actual point of contact between mind and body, and as the particular part of the body where the function originates.

insane jealousy of Leontes is another instance of a similar sequence. In both these cases the mental disturbance was entirely the result of auto-suggestion. This may be considered as the action of the mind upon itself, or as the inter-action of certain sections of the physical organ of mind upon one another. Expressed according to Bergson's view, it would signify the inability of the physical organ to limit the extent and intensity of the mental action : a loss, he would call it, of "solidarity." In either case, the result is due to a want of balance from some form of physical weakness, by reason of which the brain is unable to control the mental action. This, after all, seems to be merely another way of describing that "loss of the attentive control" which, as we have already pointed out, is so important a factor in many forms of mental disturbance, and, whatever may be the primary cause, whether mental or physical, is so closely connected with stagnation or diminution of the blood-current in certain parts of the brain.

This stagnation may be due to a variety of purely physical causes, but it may be due also to purely mental causes, and, as we are dealing with the subject from the psychological point of view, it is sufficient to say that it may also be the result of a culpable neglect of the cultivation of the intellectual powers. The stagnation resulting from this neglect may culminate in a loss of attentive control, and, ultimately, in atrophy of the brain from lack of healthy exercise. This, up to a certain point, seems to have been the case with Leontes. The controlling power of the brain had become weakened by want of use, and when a suspicious and distressing idea presented itself, had lost, for a time at least, the power to limit the intensity of the effect of the stimulus, and self-torture followed, culminating in the madness of jealousy. This was a pure case of insanity (though a temporary one) brought about by auto-suggestion. That of Posthumus, though chiefly due to the same cause, had, in addition, the further element of suggestion from without.

The same series of mental phenomena may be induced by the action of one mind upon another through the channel of the organs of sense. The ultimate result may be practically the same, but it arises, so far as it can be traced, from a different source. In the long run, we have the same inability of the brain to limit and control the intensity of the processes set up in it by the mental stimulus, but the disturbance originates in a series of powerful impressions conveyed from another mind, and producing in the recipient mind, or its organ, such concentration on a single idea or set of ideas that the brain becomes incapable of controlling or limiting the intensity of the mental action. This was the case with Othello. His psychical collapse was not the

result of self-indulgence, producing a brain defect from want of use, but of morbid intensity in a wrong direction. The bodily organ, feeble from incomplete evolution, had not sufficient power of control over the mind's action to exclude the suggestions persistently forced upon it by the subtle Iago, and the mutual balance (or, as Bergson would call it, "the solidarity") between the mind and the body was destroyed.

In the case of Posthumus we see an instance of both these causes, acting alternately, and reacting one upon another. I submit, however, that the series began with auto-suggestion. It was "not the full faith, but the lurking doubt," unjustifiable as it was, that induced Posthumus to test his wife's fidelity by the basest of methods. It needed but the false, feeble, and unconvincing suggestion from without, supplied by Iachimo, to excite the latent tendency to selftorture. This tendency, no longer latent, became, being indulged in, so intense that the brain, its circulation disturbed, was unable to control the violence of the mental action. The "solidarity" of mind and body was destroyed, and the madness of jealousy reigned in its stead.

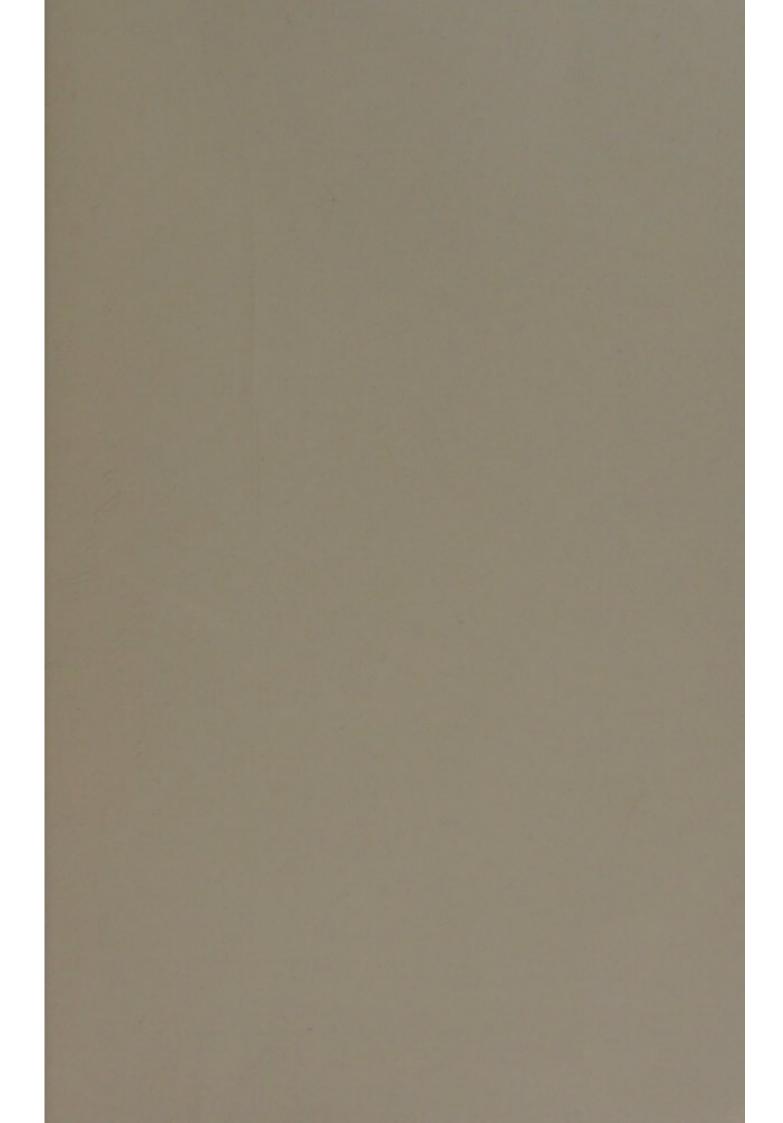
## DR. EDWIN GOODALL ON MENTAL TREATMENT AND RESEARCH.

DR. GOODALL, the Medical Superintendent of the Cardiff Mental Hospital, lately gave an exposition of his views on the mental and lunacy problems, from which we quote the following paragraphs:—

"For years those interested in the treatment of mental disorders have been pointing out the need for altering the present lunacy laws with the object of making proper provision for the early treatment of incipient and undeveloped cases of mental disease, and also for dealing with acute and recent insanity on more scientific lines.

"The radical defect in our British system consists in the fact that cases of mental trouble receive no expert treatment till they are certified as 'insane," the exceptions to the rule being found amongst the very wealthy and of a negligible number. A person who is certified to be insane has been bodily ill, in the vast majority of cases, for a period of from one to four months before the insanity supervened, and this supervened in consequence of the illness, and it is in the overlooking of this point that the defect in our system lies. It is true one hears from time to time of insanity following severe mental shock, but the expert would not accept any such causation without first excluding physical antecedent factors. Now, what would be thought of a system which only enabled persons suffering from tuberculosis to receive sanatorium treatment after they had been ill three months? Or one might say the like of cancer and many other diseases. And how would the doctors who deal with those cases like to have patients after such a lapse of time from the commencement of the malady, when the latter has already a grip on the system?

"It is an extraordinary fact that nowhere in this country, except on the condition of deprivation of his liberty, can a poor person obtain indoor treatment at a public mental hospital. It is not permitted by the law. This is a very grave injustice. The injustice is, however, only one of degree between the poor and the well-to-do, for the latter can only obtain treatment on those terms in licensed houses and registered hospitals for the insane; but the provision is often rendered practically useless by the right accorded to the boarder to terminate residence with 24 hours' notice.





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