

One hundred years ago

***The Dissociation of a Personality.*
By Morton Prince, MD, Professor
of Diseases of the Nervous System,
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Nervous System, Boston City
Hospital New York: Longmans,
Green & Co. 10s. 6d. net.**

This book, which is an amplification and continuation of a paper read before the International Congress of Psychology, Paris, 1900, is a study of perhaps the most remarkable case of multiple personality, or, to be more accurate, of dissociated personality, that has been recorded. The patient presented three distinct personalities, in addition to minor hypnotic states, and it was not till she had been carefully watched for almost four years that her real self was discovered – and found to be none of the three. One of these individuals was very remarkable; the other two were alternating personalities of the more ordinary type, but this was not only an alternating personality – in which form she displayed robust health and a vigorous character – but also an extensively developed subconsciousness. As such she appeared to have existed since childhood; she remained sane when the patient was delirious during an attack of pneumonia, so that later, as an alternating personality, she was able to give an account

of the delirious thoughts and even hypnotise them. As an alternating personality she had full knowledge of the other states, but they had none of her, nor had the real self when finally reintegrated. The book before us is the first volume of a larger work – *Problems in Abnormal Psychology* – and is to be followed by another, in which the psychological questions involved will be discussed. It will be better to defer a complete review of this first volume till the work has been concluded. In the meantime, however, attention may be drawn to a few points. First, we must congratulate Dr. Prince on the insight he displayed, on the care and labour he devoted to following up the case, and on the success he so deservedly achieved. Secondly, his view of neurasthenia deserves careful attention; he holds it to be a perverted reaction to the environment, due to dissociation of the consciousness. Another point is the very incomplete success of hypnotism when it consisted merely of suggestions to a disintegrated personality; its true work seems to lie in the direction of reintegrating the original self. Indeed, it is to be observed that whereas the patient had exhibited only one abnormal personality for several years before hypnotic treatment began, a second followed very rapidly over a year later. Though there is not sufficient proof, one cannot help suspecting that this further

dissociation was due to the hypnosis. If this be so, it confirms the view that hypnotism is a dangerous weapon to use, its direct effect being to increase the evil. On the other hand, by skilful suggestions, the good thus done may far outweigh the immediate ill-effects. Dr. Prince seems to have benefited his patient greatly; had he been less clear-sighted and unwearied, he would probably have done her harm.

The book is well written and extremely interesting. Indeed the only fear is that the story of the three personalities, with their different characters, their trials and difficulties, the practical jokes played by one upon the others, and the efforts of that one to outwit Dr. Prince, so that the original personality might not be reintegrated and she herself “squeezed” out of existence in the process, may obtain a vogue among unscientific readers and fall into the hands of the patient’s friends. It should be read by all who are interested in normal psychology as well as by those who devote themselves to pathological states of mind.

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REFERENCE

Journal of Mental Science, January 1907, 173–174.

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doi: 10.1192/bjp.190.1.82