

“Nothing But the Truth”

Psychology

LOYD RING COLEMAN AND SAXE COMMINS, in *Psychology, a Simplification* (Boni and Liveright):

The contributions of psychology are not by any means limited to the field of industry. They pervade every form of human activity. All the professions take cognizance of the importance of the psychological problems with which they are confronted. The law, medicine, the arts and humanities, education, public opinion as it is molded by the media of press and pulpit, all these are implicitly formed and nourished by psychological considerations. In some of these activities, this phase is ignored; in others, only the mildest concessions are made and, to their own loss, the contributions of this struggling science are accepted on sufferance.

The law, which presumably deals with facts, and not with suppositions, which recognizes precedent and authority, and not mere hearsay, must, for these reasons, give careful consideration to the facts of the mind. Perception, memory, the evidence of the senses, and the whole complicated mechanism of emotional responses are basic to the accurate rendering of justice. Under the scrutiny of the psychologist, evidence becomes either illusion or reality.

When a point is at issue and testimony will clarify it, the conflicting reports can be sifted by definite psychological methods. For the most part, the witness relies upon sense records. He is convinced that he has seen, heard, or felt what he recounts. It is no violation of the oath to insist that what one has felt is wet, when in fact it was dry. The psychologist may not be able to prove to the satis-

faction of a jury that the witness was mistaken, but he can prove that errors in sense perception are possible, even with the best will in the world to be accurate. The implication is manifest that evidence depending entirely upon perception is unreliable.

The myriad illusions which get themselves aired on the witness stand need analysis. It may be important to the verdict in a case whether a witness swears that he saw, in a dim light, a person in red or one in blue. It is hardly likely that judge and jury would be aware that in a faint light a sensation of blue is distinguishable, whereas the sensation of red is not. In a murder case, the fate of the defendant may depend upon the hearing of a shot by a witness. To avoid circumstantiality, it may be necessary to be precise about the direction from which the shot came. The witness may swear that he heard the shot directly in front of him. From a psychological point of view, such testimony is worthless because it is impossible to judge whether sound originates in front or back.

All observations are colored by associations and suggestions. The man who heard the shot may have turned and seen the defendant in the act of putting his pipe in his pocket. The pipe became a revolver in his aroused imagination. The shot really was fired in front of the witness. But, by the combination of faulty sense perception, association and suggestion, the inference grew into honest conviction that the man behind him had committed the crime.

If the senses are at fault, memory is utterly unreliable. And it is memory upon which all testimony is based.

The story is told that Sir Walter Raleigh, while beguiling the heavy hours of his imprisonment in the Tower of London, tried to write a history of civilization. One day a fight occurred in the courtyard which was witnessed by all the prisoners. At dinner, when they came together in the mess hall, versions of the fight were as numerous as there were prisoners who had seen it. Being an honest man, Sir Walter realized the futility of his historical task. If men could not report what they had personally seen, with what conscience could he record that which his erring senses could not verify? Accordingly, he destroyed his manuscript.

Imaginative ideas slip into the consciousness easily. Once in, they grow to the magnitude of convictions. It is almost impossible to determine what is remembered, perceived, or imagined. In Titchener's laboratory, careful experiments revealed that subjects, under certain conditions, were unable to differentiate between objects actually seen and those imagined. The problem of the accuracy of memory will not be solved by taking it for granted, as it is in courts of law, but by some test yet to be devised by the psychologist.

The law should make every possible effort to detect crime. It condones every physical method so long as there is a justification in precedent for it. Yet it concedes nothing to the possibilities of the psychogalvanometer, or even in the word association test of the psycho-analyst. The guesses of the past are more acceptable to the courts than the verifications of the experimental laboratory.

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Folklore of the Teeth

Anthropology

LEO KANNER, in *Folklore of the Teeth* (Macmillan):

Sometimes the folk-prescriptions against toothache seem to be so strange that it almost may appear that they might have been intended as jokes or as a humorous criticism of superstitious magics. Yet they are meant to be taken very seriously. To secure yourself from toothache you will be told in Sussex to be careful always to put on the right stocking before the left, and to put the right leg into the trousers before the left. But in Shropshire, for instance, ex-

actly the contrary is enjoined. In Swabia you should leave the bed in the morning with the left foot first and also put on the left stocking, the left shoe, the left sleeve before the right; at night you should take off your clothes in the same order and go to bed with the left foot first. In the northeast of Scotland it is thought a good cure for toothache to go between the sun and the sky to a place where the dead and the living cross, and lift a stone from it with the teeth.

The most frequent thing people do

if they have pain in their teeth is that they wrap a handkerchief or a towel round the cheek. This towel is in cartoons and in so many paintings the chief characteristic of one suffering from toothache. In Franconia, the dirtier the towel, the better the effect will be on the teeth.

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Sentiment against public display of royal mummies is growing in Egypt.

More than half of Arizona is over 5,000 feet above sea level.