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EDITORIAL.

A SIXTH SENSE.

Dr. Charles Richet, LL.D. Edinburgh, Professor of Physiology at the University of Paris, in an Address of absorbing interest delivered before the International Congress of Physiologists at Edinburgh, said: "It is the universal opinion that we can have no other notion of the reality that surrounds us except through our five senses, and that any fact must remain for ever unknown unless sight, touch or vision has revealed it to us. This is the classic, and at the same time popular idea. It is formal and exclusive, without itself ever having been demonstrated. To admit that a knowledge of occurrences can arrive at our consciousness by any other means than those of the senses is a daring and revolutionary proceeding." This position Dr. Richet proceeds to defend. His Address is published in full in the *Lancet* of September 8th.

After giving incontrovertible instances of the facts that "a knowledge of the real world can arrive in consciousness in other ways than through the ordinary channels of the senses," and that "the occurrences of the external world, even when they do not affect our sense organs, can still influence our consciousness," he says: "By what channels I do not know, but the fact is there. Reality comes to us, and then the knowledge of this reality takes a symbolic form as in a dream." He then puts forward the proposition that we are endowed with a hidden form of sensibility which he calls *cryptæsthesia*.

Concerning this, Dr. Richet said: "I have often been told that courage was needed to sustain my opinions on *cryptæsthesia*. This is a mistake. No courage is needed to defend truth; on the contrary, courage is needed—a bad courage—to deny the value of experimentation, to throw, without examination, into the broad ditch of errors this formidable, weighty collection of undeniable facts."

Allied with this subject is that which a medical practitioner discusses in the *Weekly Dispatch* of substances to which any person

may be specially sensitive, to which the new word "Allergen" has been applied.

Instances are given of a case at a London hospital in which a patient said she could not put on a garment made of silk without coming out in a severe rash. This was found to be absolutely correct. Violent redness of the skin—"nettle rash"—accompanied by some weakness, followed the putting on of a silk blouse, and the patient remained unwell for some time. Silk was this girl's "Allergen."

Another instance given by the doctor is that of a young married woman who had suffered severely from asthma since she was about ten years old. The attacks almost always came on at night, and were very frequent. When she stayed with an aunt in the country the attacks never came on, which was attributed to the fresh country air. Her parents arranged for her to stay with her aunt more or less permanently, and later for her to have riding lessons. After the first, a violent attack of asthma came on, so severe that a consulting physician was summoned from London. He was studying "Allergens," and had no hesitation in saying that the patient was a victim of "horse asthma." He found, as he expected, that whereas in London the patient was sleeping on a horse-hair mattress, in the country she slept on a feather bed.

"Many doctors," it is stated, "usually begin their study of certain cases of illness by trying to find out if the patient is sensitive to any article of food, or to any animal. Frequently success in the search results in a complete cure."

"These people, in spite of their amazing peculiarity, are quite healthy. All that is wrong with them is the possession of a 'sixth sense' in a world where five senses are enough."

"This sense is purely physical and bodily. The question which is now being asked is this: Is there any connection between this bodily sixth sense and the sixth sense of the mind or spirit which enables its possessor to penetrate beyond the darkness surrounding ordinary men?" We advise nurses to keep an open mind on this subject.

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