

IS ANYBODY SANE?

That is to say: Is anybody so happily constituted that there is no corner of his mental organization in which he is prepared to admit, consciously or unconsciously, that somehow or somewhere the impossible may happen?

For our part we are inclined to think that perfect sanity, like perfect health, is a condition impossible in the present stage of human development. It is our misfortune as well as our advantage that we are heirs of all the ages. The past remains with us; so that every man carries more or less of the imperfection, the lower life, of all the long series of life forms, reaching back to the beginning.

Without going the length of the litanies and saying there is no health in us, we are nevertheless compelled by every day experience to admit that the best of men fall far short of that state of perfect healthfulness in mind and body which we can readily conceive to be possible, and to which the human race may sometime attain. The best of men inherit physical and mental weaknesses—more correctly, organic imperfections—from ancestors near and remote, which show themselves not only in the outer form but also in the inner constitution, in mental and moral traits as well as in bodily habits and diseases. In like manner man in the aggregate, that is, society, inherits creeds, customs, conditions, and surroundings, which tend powerfully to thwart the normal development of the individual.

For this reason, in the progress of nations, insanities in thought and action have not merely to be overthrown by what is right and true, but slowly outlived and eliminated from the constitution of the race by a long process of natural or artificial suppression. And often the foremost men of a nation have quite forgotten an outgrown error, a once prevalent vicious habit of thought or phase of epidemic insanity, long before it has entirely vanished—literally died out—among the masses. Not unfrequently, too, some seemingly trivial occurrence will start an astounding revival of the long quiescent evil, causing it to burst forth like a mental plague to ravage nations supposed to be beyond its contagion.

The recent wide-spread development of the delusions covered by the general term spiritualism is an instance in point. It is a revival of witchcraft and devilmongering, characterized by many of the obliquities and intellectual vagaries of rampant insanity. Men smitten with the disease cease to be amenable to reason in all matters connected with spiritualistic delusions. The most patent and ridiculous of frauds and follies, reputedly involving spirits and their mediums, are accepted by them with religious enthusiasm. They glory in their shame, proud to be fools in so sublime a cause. In all other fields of thought they may be shrewd, sensible, and logical to a degree; in this, the plainest demonstrations of the unreasonableness of their views, the most palpable proof of the dishonesty of their trusted "mediums," glance off from their minds like raindrops from a duck's back, making absolutely no impression.

The most amazing feature of the case, regarded otherwise than as a phase of insanity, is the prevalence of the delusion among the intelligent and well-to-do. No grade of society is exempt, though it runs more or less in streaks; and no amount of rebuff or exposure seems to lessen the victim's confidence in the absolute wisdom of his foolishness.

The numerous and curiously varied clientage of Flint, the swindling tea kettle medium, affords abundant illustration. A clumsy and illiterate humbug pretends to answer, under spirit guidance, sealed letters (unaddressed, though directed within to the spirits of the dead), returning in each case the desired reply properly signed, with the letter of inquiry unopened, all for two dollars: and straightway men and women, of every rank in life, flood his office with banknotes and queries, in confident expectation that their departed friends and relatives will make them wise before their time.

From the newly appointed minister to England, who wants an improved family tree to give him something more than official rank at the Court of St. James, down to the gushing miss of doubtful virtue, who expects to be a medium and wants to know whether she will "wright impressnoley or makonakley," the whole lot of them seem to be on the same level of intellectual imbecility the moment they enter the spiritualistic sphere: a level so low that the medium's silly rant and senseless doggerel seem to each and all to be the natural talk of dead statesmen and dead fools alike.

No doubt some of them, now that their silliness has been exposed by the medium's letter book, feel somewhat as the swindler did when he said to the reporter in jail: "I feel as if I should love to get out of here and fly!" Even the Honorable Mr. Pierpont must feel a little like flying when he sees his correspondence with "My dear Lady Mary" in print, and has to face the chaffing he so richly deserves. But will his faith in spirit communications, or the faith of any of them, be shaken in the least? We very much doubt it. To sane people the conviction of ninety-nine people out of every hundred mediums as pitiful tricksters and knaves is presumptive evidence that the unexposed hundredth is no better, but not so with the faithful. With them it is not a matter of experience or judgment, but a pure delusion, which no dishonesty on the part of mediums can stagger. The venerable and credulous seeker for aristocratic connections did not slacken his pursuit in the least when the disgusted female Flint told him the secret of the tea kettle. What if the letters were opened and copied? What if the medium were a beggarly fraud? Could not the spirit of "My dear Lady Mary" make use of him all the same?

A few days ago a poor lunatic, in great agony of spirit, poured into our ear a pitiful tale of impossible ancestry: his great-grandmother was—say a kangaroo.

"But," we objected, "all this seems to hinge on the conjecture that your grandfather was a camel."

"To be sure!" he replied, with insane vehemence, "to be sure; but, you know, in my clairvoyant state conjecture to me has all the force of demonstration!"

That is precisely the mental condition of most spiritualists touching matters spiritualistic. Their conjectures about spirit life and spirit action have to them all the force of demonstration. In other fields of thought and action, they may be as sane as our unhappy friend was except where his paternity was involved; but in this field they are blindly irrational, incompetent alike of reasoning or of feeling the force of the reasoning of others.

But—more's the pity!—spiritualists are not the only people who lead a double life, sane on one side, insane on the other, taking conjectures for what they are worth in most fields of thought, but exalting conjecture above all things else in some special field. The world is full of people who, with more or less enthusiasm, expect the impossible to happen somewhere. A fraudulent motor violates the plainest principles of science: therefore they believe in it. A dogma runs counter to all experience: therefore it must be divinely true. "I cannot comprehend; therefore I believe," is their ideal of spiritual exaltation; and too often they are ready to assign to a protracted and disagreeable future all such as cannot share their particular insanity.

The disease, more or less virulent, is indeed all but universal. When it involves matters of every-day real importance, we seclude the victims and subject them to medical treatment; when it deals wholly with the unreal, we—well, sometimes we call them philosophers and sometimes we canonize them; but it is the same disease, with varying intensity, throughout. The man who sees snakes in the air is sick; he who beholds angels is supremely blest!

Is there any cure? We are happy to believe there is: in time, and the slow development of the race toward perfect sanity. For untold millenniums the human race has been stumbling upward through intellectual infancy, acquiring much and forgetting much. By degrees men are learning to distinguish the real from the imaginary, to abide more and more by reason and sound experience, putting less and less faith in conjectures. Ultimately men may develop into a race purely rational, capable not only of habitually drawing right conclusions from correct premises, but of always refraining from positive judgment until the premises have been fully established and properly verified: a race constitutionally sane.

But progress in that direction cannot be very rapid until men have ceased, in each and every department of thought, to make a virtue of insanity: in other words, have ceased to set faith in the unverified and inconceivable above every other faculty, studiously training the young to be irrational. Not until the current methods in education are exchanged for more wholesome and rational methods, not until men have learnt at all times and in all connections to treat conjectures as conjectures—pleasant to think about sometimes, and sometimes very useful as aids and inspirations in the pursuit of knowledge and the development of character, but never to be mistaken for truth or rated as a superior kind of truth—then, and not till then, will the race cease to be liable at all times to outbreaks of epidemic insanity. Then, and not till then, will it be impossible for swindles of the Flint and Mummler and Katie King and Keely motor order to flourish outside of insane asylums.

HOW TALL ARE WE?

In discussing the results of the tables of measurement of drafted and enlisted men, prepared from the records of the Provost Marshal General's Bureau, made during the late war, Dr. Baxter remarks that probably no question of anthropology has been more debated and none left in a more unsatisfactory condition than that of the mean stature of the full grown man. The reason for this he finds principally in the confused manner in which measurements have been prepared for the purpose. "Heights of young and old, of men of widely differing natures, of picked men, such as soldiers and militia, of men and women, of students under the age of full growth; of convicts, a class generally below the mean height of their countrymen; of men measured in shoes and men measured without shoes, have been compared together in tables pretending to exhibit scientific conclusions!"

The half million sets of measurements, from which the conclusions to be summed up in this article were derived, are open to none of these objections. They were actual measurements, not guesses. They were measurements taken with a reasonable exercise of care by surgeons sworn to do their duty, furnished with needful aids and appliances, and without object or interest in evading or slighting their official instructions. And the records include the measurements of rejected as well as of accepted men, so that they fairly represent, not a picked portion of the men of the country, but the whole.

It is proper to observe here that the measurements made use of in this report were chiefly those of men examined towards the latter part of the war, after the finest fighting material of the country had been enlisted; consequently they under rather than overstate the average development of the American people. It was a time, too, when large bounties invited many of the better class of foreigners to enter our service: a partial explanation, perhaps, of the fact that in every instance the mean height of our foreign-born soldiers was above that of the nation represented. Under such circumstances, it is gratifying to see that the first rank in stature is won by our native Americans, a somewhat discouraging circumstance to those who assert that our country and climate are destructive to the white race. Curiously, the list

is headed by a small number of aboriginal Indians. Dr. Baxter is of opinion that this is not due to their being picked men, but to the fact that the Indians are really a tall race. In Mr. Gould's tables of statistics, gathered by the Sanitary Commission, 517 Indians show a mean height considerably above that of the following table. If compared with the natives of the United States only, the Indians (enlisted Indians, that is) would rank as ninth in the list of States.

Here follows the table showing the superiority in stature of 501,068 men, of different nationalities:

Table with 4 columns: Order of Superiority, Nativity, Number of Men Examined, Mean Height in Inches. Lists various nationalities including United States, Norway, Scotland, etc.

Two thirds of the native-born white Americans were fair-complexioned, but their mean stature was one tenth of an inch below the dark-complexioned. Among the natives of British America, England, Ireland, and Germany, the fair exceeded the dark in about the same proportion, while the dark show a slight superiority in stature, except in the case of Ireland, the light and dark complexioned natives of which had precisely the same height.

Graded according to the mean stature of the inhabitants (American born whites), the different Northern States stand as follows:

Table with 4 columns: Order of Superiority, State, Number of Men Examined, Mean Height in Inches. Lists Northern States including Kentucky, Kansas, Minnesota, etc.

According to Dr. Coolidge's examination of United States Army statistics, from 1839 to 1855, the mean stature of recruits from Georgia, Tennessee, North Carolina, South Carolina, Alabama, and Virginia ranged between 68.272 inches for the first and 67.488 for the last named. The average for the whole country, obtained from Dr. Coolidge's tables, was 67.357 inches, about one third of an inch below that derived from the records of the Provost Marshal General's Bureau (67.672 inches) for the Northern States; while that obtained by Mr. Gould, from the statistics of the United States Sanitary Commission—on the whole less accurately taken—was smaller yet, by about one hundredth of an inch. The close correspondence of the three sets of observations is an indication of the accuracy of the whole. Altogether they are the results of measurements of nearly a million and a half of American born white men, and the resulting mean stature of the whole is 67.646 inches. Even the lowest mean obtained would entitle the American people to the first rank among the nations in point of stature.

REMARKABLE ARTESIAN WELL.—At Prairie du Chien, Wis., an artesian well daily discharges 869,616 gallons of water. The well is only 960 feet deep, but has need enough to raise the water 900 feet above the ground.

SHOCKS of earthquake were felt, on July 5, at Corinth, Greece. The direction was east to west. On July 17 three violent shocks occurred in Vienna.