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psychiatry in history

Charles Lloyd Tuckey and the “new hypnotism”

Gordon D. L. Bates

The second coming of medical hypnotism

At the end of 1919, a distinguished group of Edwardian physicians, scientists and other notables petitioned the British Prime Minister for a civil list pension for one of their colleagues who had fallen on ‘straightened circumstances’ as a result of illness. The unlikely subject of their lobbying was a hypnotist: Charles Lloyd Tuckey, a member of the Medico-Psychological Association (the forerunner to the Royal College of Psychiatrists), who could no longer practice because of cancer and paralysis. The correspondence can be found in the records of the mysterious Bounty Fund in the National Archive at Kew (PROT1/12460 C677293).

The campaigners or memorialists, as they described themselves, included the renowned Canadian physician, William Osler, the eminent Great War psychiatrist, F. W. Myers, the parliamentarian, Gerald Balfour and two physicists and fellows of the Royal Society, Oliver Lodge and William Barrett. They argued that Lloyd Tuckey merited a pension because of his contribution to society in bringing medical hypnotism to the UK in the 1890s. They praised his ‘courage and single-mindedness’ in bringing the technology from France when the prejudices against ‘animal-magnetism’ or mesmerism were still very prevalent. By the end of the century, the trance state induced by mesmerism was better known as an essential component of magic shows or spiritualism. In the letter, they invoke, but do not directly mention, the controversial figure of John Elliotson, the founder of University College Hospital and populariser of the use of the stethoscope, whose medical career was destroyed by his advocacy of mesmerism in the 1840s.

Charles Lloyd Tuckey was the author of *Psycho-Therapeutics: or, Treatment by Hypnotism and Suggestion*, the first English language textbook on medical hypnotism that ran to seven editions between 1889 and 1921. According to his contemporaries and obituary writers, he was a charismatic and popular speaker who toured the local groups of the British Medical Association across the UK, demonstrating and lecturing on the healing applications of the trance state. Across the medical press and gentleman’s journals such as *The Nineteenth Century*, he made the case for its therapeutic use by the medical profession and restrictions to its trivial use in popular spiritualist seances and by stage magicians. In the 1890s, he was engaged in a very public dispute in both medical and lay journals with the editor of the *British Medical Journal*, Ernest Hart whose opposition to medical hypnosis was as forceful as his other campaigns against insanitary conditions and the anti-vaccination lobby.

The last paragraph of the letter to the Prime Minister makes a claim that will surprise many: ‘Dr Tuckey’s work has prepared the way for the recent great increase of the practice of psycho-therapeutics, a branch of medicine which, after long neglect in this country, is generally recognised as one of the first importance and destined to undergo great further development in the near future’. Whereas most historians and psychiatrists will know that the massive number of psychological casualties caused by the First World War was responsible for a change in both the public awareness and recognition of mental illness, fewer may be aware of the direct lineage of talking therapies from hypnosis. The case for this genealogy was first made by the medical historian and psychiatrist Henri Ellenberger in his classic monograph, *The Discovery of the Unconscious*, first published in 1970. Despite this, the importance of hypnosis is still not widely appreciated as a result of the hagiographic Freudian histories of dynamic psychology that place Freud as the originator of psychotherapies and ideas of the unconscious. In fact, it can be reasonably claimed that by using it in his book title, Lloyd Tuckey established the term *psycho-therapeutics* in the UK, a good two decades before Freud’s work appeared in English translation.

Readers will be pleased to know that this early pioneer of psychological therapies was rewarded with a pension of £200 and lived for a further 5 years. Tellingly, he could not be given a civil pension by the Department of Health as his contributions were considered ‘not scientific’, a recurring criticism of hypnosis. However, David Lloyd George did see fit to provide him with a pension from the Royal Bounty Fund, a secret unaccountable trust that only the Prime Minister could award without public scrutiny.

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The British Journal of Psychiatry (2019)
214, 19. doi: 10.1192/bjp.2018.168