

It remains that the immediate change in the children, due to the Apparitions, was so amazing and the penitential and mystical life of the two younger ones and their early and heroic death so overwhelmingly impressive; and that the world-wide spread of the devotion to our Lady of Fatima is so startling; and that the ecclesiastical approbations are so weighty, that it would be rash in the extreme to doubt that a divine communication was made by God, through our Lady, at Cova da Iria. None the less, we are *obliged* out of sheer reverence to that divine message to seek to disentangle 'warp and woof'.

WHAT I SAW AT KONNERSREUTH

BY

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Aude Sapere (Hahnemann).



AVE the courage of your own convictions': this is the sense of the above maxim. From it follows logically the duty of expressing one's own opinion even if it differs fundamentally from 'official medicine'. For there are situations in which silence does not represent a virtue

but a fault.

The judgment upon Theresa Neumann of Konnersreuth (Bavaria,

Now Fr de Fonseca says that in 1915 Lucia and four little girl friends (not Jacinta or Francisco) saw a dazzling vague diaphanous apparition apparently human in form. This apparition was twice repeated during the following weeks. Now Lucia was to say (1941) that the angelic apparition impressed them so much because it was the first vision to be so distinct (*assim manifesta*). We seem free to accept one of three views—either the children saw the 'sheeted form' when Lucia's mother said they did—in which case it is odd that they told her about that and not about the Angel; or, that she was wrong in her dates and that had been a sort of preliminary vision a year earlier—a faceless form which the child described as best she could as a 'man in a sheet'—and then it is odd that no record exists of the fuss that parents surely made about such a story (for the children had been frightened); or, we might take the purely rationalist view that Lucia, brooding over this event, had transformed it in the course of years into the angelic 'clear' (also triple) apparition, which the children mentioned to no one. But this would imply an enormous mental 'development' of the original experience which we could hardly accept. For the angelic apparitions were related in minute detail. The other problem is, that when Lucia after long years in her convent began to reveal the second part of the 'secret' confided to her by the Apparition (i.e. the spread of the devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary) she says that the Lady often spoke (as from July) of 'my Immaculate Heart' and indeed showed it to her wreathed with thorns, so that she could have had no doubt as to who the Apparition was, though the Lady had emphasised that she would not reveal who she was or what she wanted till October 13th. I form no opinion about this; it must be left to the study of theological experts and psychologists.

Germany), pronounced in 1927 (Erlangen) by Professor Dr G. Ewald, late director of the 'Psychiatrisch-Neurologischen Universitätsklinik' at Göttingen, is still today looked upon as a 'dogma' in medical quarters. His verdict is *hysteria*.

In my view that diagnosis is wrong, as I myself was able to ascertain at Konnersreuth on 12th and 13th October, 1944, with my own observations. As a pupil of the 'Psychiatrische Klinik', at the University of Vienna, Paris, etc., I also may venture a judgment on this question, since, as is known, the famous researches into hysterias started from Vienna.

My assertion will not surprise those who know the story of the origin of the expert 'dogma'. At first there was the deep impression which the experiences at Konnersreuth gave to Professor Ewald. Then this impression in course of time faded and gave place to the opposite influence of his superiors of those days. Finally, the regard for his future career during an era of materialistic medicine was of some consequence. All that taken together produced the expert evidence which culminated in the designation: 'Hysteria'.

Even if that diagnosis were correct it would, indeed, only mean the substitution of one unknown for another. And in any case the greatest precaution should have been used in introducing the word 'hysteria', for this reason, that it always has a pejorative flavour which, particularly among laymen, suggests an attitude of contempt.

My experience of the popular misconceptions regarding the events at Konnersreuth has made it seem necessary to sum up the question from the medical point of view. Let me say first that from a sojourn of many years in foreign countries I have had the benefit of acquaintance with many of the best features of the modern revolutions in medical science. I am particularly grateful that my apprenticeship was not restricted to the neuro-psychiatric school but that I was also trained in the best neuro-surgical schools. But, as Goethe has it, 'Wisdom broadens the mind but also impedes it; action animates but limits', I would speak here not so much from professional wisdom, but from the experience of the facts as they appeared to me and as I wrote them down from memory a few days after my return from Konnersreuth to my war-scarred hospital.

My visit to Konnersreuth occurred on 12th and 13th October 1944. I had come from Vienna via Prague and Egen, and after a journey of twenty-one hours, prolonged by the inevitable effects of bombs, air raid alarms and the disorganisation of war, I reached Waldsassen in the Upper Palatinate. There I first visited and examined the magnificently endowed Cistercian Abbey before making the four-mile uphill climb to Konnersreuth on foot. Here I presented myself at

the presbytery and was at once received by the parish priest, Father Joseph Naber, in spite of a refusal from the porter. He made a very favourable impression on me both then and later; old in years (he had been parish priest for 36 years), he was mentally alert, discreet but warm and expansive, he was certainly a realist and kind, but not 'mystical' or *exalté*.

After some discussion he promised to try to arrange for me a special meeting with Theresa Neumann. But I must be prepared to wait an hour, for Theresa liked to hide herself, was difficult to find, and refused most of the callers. But I had scarcely waited ten minutes in the parlour before the door opened and there stood before me Theresa Neumann herself. She had had a mind to call on her sister, who was employed at the presbytery as housekeeper. The parish priest told me later that she had hesitated at first but had suddenly abandoned her usual reserve and followed him into the parlour. He soon left us to ourselves so that I was able to have a detailed conversation with her for about three-quarters of an hour.

Accustomed to taciturnity, I did not ask any questions. At first I was even too shy to interrogate her, aware as I was that so close to me, just the other side of the table, sat such a 'far-famed phenomenon'. In her dialect of the Upper Palatinate, which is difficult to understand, she told me about a mishap of the day before (Wednesday 11th October) which Father Naber had already mentioned briefly. Theresa Neumann had been at her favourite occupation of decorating the high altar for Adoration Day in the parish church. A board had tilted and she had fallen from the scaffold on her right hand and had hit the back of her head violently. Afterwards she felt numbness, retching, giddiness, swelling, and a painful limitation of movement in the wrist of her right hand; this lasted until the day of my visit.

So Father Naber suggested (and Theresa Neumann tolerated the idea) that I should examine her with a view to ascertain whether she was suffering from concussion. The examination resulted in the suspicion of a slight fracture at the end of the right 'spoke-bone' but at the same time it brought the rare and welcome opportunity of examining to some extent the bodily frame of that unique 'case'. First of all there were the stigmata on both hands and feet which have been frequently described. These are usually covered by mittens and are on both hands above the third middle hand bone, rather smaller inside than outside, where they measure about four-fifths of an inch in length and two-fifths of an inch in width. They are set around and covered by a very thin, transparent skin. And it is just the same above the third middle foot bone.

Theresa's behaviour was absolutely unaffected. You would have thought you were dealing with an ordinary country woman, or perhaps with a rich peasant's wife: determined, clear, almost vivacious in her primitive way of speaking, strong-boned, about five feet nine tall, of healthy complexion, and with strong hands suggesting rustic toil.

A black kerchief showed only a tuft of grey hair, above her well proportioned face. A black jacket covered her broad shoulders and hips, and her clothing was completed by the already mentioned black knitted mittens, a dark skirt, a black apron, and finally by black stockings and shoes. Not a trace of irritation or affectation, not even the slightest suspicion of coquetry or 'hysteria' could be seen in her behaviour, and still less in her words. On the contrary, she seemed to be a simple, unaffected, almost dense country woman, but gifted with mother-wit. I had formed quite a different idea of Theresa Neumann and she would have been disappointing at the first meeting had it not been for her deep-set interesting eyes. With these she looked at me for some time, and they suggested that what I saw of her nature was only a trivial veil, behind which there was yet hidden something extraordinary, which distinguished her indeed essentially from her sister, who had shortly before, at my irritating ring, opened the gate. But the features and build of both sisters were very much alike.

The private interview of about 40 minutes turned mainly upon the use of popular medicine. Theresa Neumann has daily about 10-20 child and adult patients, who come to see her about their injuries, as they have no medical practitioner in the vicinity. They are treated with ointments or, in case of internal diseases, with tisanes of medical herbs. Externally she uses Peru balsam and particularly an alcoholic extract of pine tops (I believe it is called: 'Spitzel-Wasser'—top water, in her dialect). Another dialect expression frequently used was 'Puzzln', meaning children (little Puz; 'Putze' meaning 'goblin' in Middle High German), therefore she spoke also of (St) 'Mary with the 'Puzzi', and took a lively interest in my 'Puzzlin'. Six children did not seem to be very many in her opinion, as her parents had ten, of whom she was the eldest. The next day I made the acquaintance of two nephews and a niece, the children of one of her sisters. Those two nephews were twins, though very unlike each other, and in my capacity as a neurologist, I examined one of them, Konrad Hertl, at the request of Theresa Neumann's parents and that in her sitting-room, which had formerly been the tailor's workshop. Thus I had the opportunity of meeting the parents too, and was able to talk with them for about half an hour without interruption. The

tranquillity and seclusion of the simple home in the small yellow one-storied house with the irregular walls was much more in keeping with their tastes than those former times when they were troubled with crowds of 2,000 visitors a day.

On that Friday, 13th October, Theresa Neumann, at the suggestion of Father Naber, had appointed half-past nine a.m. as the time for my visit to her bed-sitting room at Neumann's small house to witness the ecstasies combined with the bleedings. These, as is well known, appear on most Fridays, generally in accordance with the events of the ecclesiastical year. They usually begin shortly before midnight on Thursday. It was so on this day. We were shown in punctually at the fixed hour and were led by Father Naber to the first floor. And I here came to the event which I do not hesitate to consider even in my medical experience as the greatest of my career despite a very wide and varied acquaintance with such things. I am still today under the influence of that event.

In the left-hand corner of the room large enough to possess two windows, of which the left one was somewhat screened, stood a tall bedstead with white bedclothes. A human being with white headcloth and nightdress reclined on the bed in a half-sitting position. One could see at first only the white hands with one red spot on the back of each and, also, the face. But what a face: quite pale, hollow, the nose yellow like wax, boldly protruding, together with the chin, almost as in the case of someone dying, or at least after a very long illness. A streak of blood, about 2in. broad, reached from both eyes to the lower jaw, growing smaller at the bottom, and having stained the brim of the coverlet and the headcloth as well as the sleeves. Those streams of blood coming from the eyes seemed dark red, streaked, and already somewhat dried up. Standing near the door, at a distance of some ten feet from the bed, I stared unflinchingly at the head of the patient, who was obviously very ill. Only with difficulty was it possible to recognise in her the simple, but healthy-looking Theresa Neumann of the day before. She had reached in her *via crucis* the point just after Christ's first fall under the cross. While I was present she witnessed Christ's second fall. The vision was several times so moving that she rose to a sitting position on the bed, at the same time keeping her arms slightly bent. It was an attitude of perfect artistry, combined with such a grace of movement as may be found only in the suppleness of the Japanese, but which nobody would have expected in the rather uncouth, rustic person she had been only the day before.

She groaned intensely several times and murmured incoherent words in her dialect, which sounded still more difficult to understand

on that day, though I could detect some resemblance to the dialect of my native country, the neighbouring Upper Austria. And she mixed those words with bits of sentences in a foreign language, which Father Naber translated and said were Aramaeic, according to the expert evidence of various philologists. As is well known, Aramaeic was the Hebrew dialect spoken in Palestine in the time of Christ.

He said that Theresa was 'stone-blind', an impression she had at once made on me, too. Her half-open eyes mostly looked straight forward or at the coverlet, but frequently also to the right where a cloth was hanging against the wall. For the rest, one heard in the room only the constant twitter of perhaps more than a dozen birds in a big cage set into the wall opposite the bed. A pretty domestic altar in the baroque-style stood opposite the door. The visitors who were present with me now left the room at the priest's invitation, while he suggested that I should come nearer the bed and take the left hand of the patient. The stigmata on the hands were not now bleeding, but they appeared more clearly than yesterday, owing to the clarity of the skin on this day. When the priest asked Theresa whether I had been there already, she denied it but conceded at once that she had talked to me already once before.

There now followed some information of a private nature about myself and my family, partly on being questioned by the priest, partly spontaneously. Between the answers there was an interval of about three minutes, during which she again went through a stage of the *via crucis*, with outward signs of suffering. Then I bent over her to within eight inches of her face to see as precisely as possible the blood-marks and, first of all, where they came from. The blood seemed to come from the spot where the lower lids rise from the cheeks, but also from the cheeks themselves, although a marked bleeding spot was not discernible. It seemed to be a regular blood-weeping, or alternatively, blood-perspiration, remotely comparable to the 'parenchymatous' (tissue of a soft organ) trickle-bleeding in the case of operations in a brain debris cavity, but even more slowly and diffuse. When I took my departure at about a quarter past ten, Theresa Neumann said, still in her somewhat incoherent manner: 'One must pray much, in order to get over the hardships. . . .'

I jotted down these memories of the event before reading with care what had been written on Konnersreuth. That was possible only at home after the war. In doing so, I discovered that there had been only quite trifling differences, compared with the accounts written by visitors of former times. Though already eight years have passed since the last printed publications on Konnersreuth, as far as I can discover from them, the phenomena have not changed at all. Moreover, the

events of Konnersreuth remained the same also after the war, as visitors of recent times (September 1945) report. In course of the 'defence to the bitter end . . .' (April 1945), SS. guns went into position against Konnersreuth too, and the small house of the Neumanns itself was hit.

The absence of the death-scene in those events of Friday morning, October 13th, was unusual, but it was not the first occasion. At that time the visions of Theresa Neumann ceased before the final phase, so Father Naber informed me. The crown of thorns also never appeared, i.e., the bleeding from a chaplet of wounds in the head, which, however, leave the forehead always unhurt. This was explained by supposing that the heavy fall on the back of her head two days before was in some way responsible: for indeed Theresa Neumann had been frequently spared the entire suffering on Fridays when she had been confined to her bed by some temporary illness. While I was there she had much pain in her right wrist, which, to be sure, had swollen a good deal two days before, owing to the fall. But in her ecstasy she did not seem to remember it, because when the priest asked her the reason of these pains in her wrist-bone, she answered (in her dialect): 'I don't know . . .'

At midday on that day I spent almost an hour with Father Naber. He reported that Theresa Neumann had that morning had a vision about the present Pope Pius XII, to the effect that he was seriously suffering from a liver complaint and from his stomach. (Inquiries privately made at a later date confirmed the exactness of the vision, since the Pope had been ill temporarily at about that time, but owing to the war details could not be learned till now). Father Naber also showed me the body-linen of Theresa Neumann's Good Friday Passion. Once a year, as is known, she witnesses the flagellation, combined with the crowning with thorns, which cause the stigmata in her hands and feet and side to open, blood-weeping, etc. The white headcloth could be seen with the blood-spots corresponding to the crown of thorns; further, a bandage with coagulated blood from the wound of the left breast, where the blood-clot represents a true cast of a wound in soft parts of the body, about two inches long. Innumerable blood spots, about the size of a small palm, repeatedly rimmed and brownish coloured, could be perceived on the bed-jacket, which had long sleeves, to be buttoned up to the top, and reaching down to the hips. Particularly large were the traces of the bleeding wounds in the hands, and of the flagellation.

Of course, I could not see anything of the greatest phenomenon, namely, that she has abstained for 18 years (since 1927) absolutely from taking food and avoids as well any liquids, except a few cubic

inches of water to enable her to swallow the Host. Certainly, this supernatural manifestation is a 'negative' thing and cannot be examined during a short visit by a single person. But the personality of Theresa Neumann as well as her environment do not allow me to entertain the slightest doubt that her abstinence from food is real.

At Waldassen, the nearest larger town, I examined the original medical certificate and the original photographs, among them also that of the wound in the breast. This was at the house of the Neumann's family physician, who had been resident there for years. Unfortunately, all medical documents regarding the first illness towards the end of the first World War are missing, as no neurological examination nor X-ray photographs were made. We can only conjecture today of the nervous disease of that time, lasting several years. Of that time, now already more than 25 years ago, there exists only a short exchange of notes, concerning some slight accident. But Sanitary Councillor Dr O. Seidl is a representative of his profession far surpassing the average country doctor. His rich library, endowed as well with books on theology and history of art, confirmed me in that opinion, together with a long conversation I had with him, when I learned that he had been occupied for years with 'para-psychological' problems. For example, he had conducted a stomach operation under hypnosis, when ether was unavailable and other modern anaesthetics had not been invented.

It is significant in Theresa Neumann's normal psychology that she, in accordance with her energetic constitution, can readily sympathise enthusiastically with a call like Joan of Arc's. This means that she is not a natural contemplative. Although the contemplative life, therefore, forced upon her by her previous ailments and her present extraordinary condition, does not suit her at all, she renounced the practical profession of a missionary sister and resigned herself to her fate. But the visions cannot be dismissed with the slogan of 'auto-suggestion', still less can the slogan be applied to the origin of the stigmata in that form, size, and shape. For anything of this nature, produced by hypnosis or auto-suggestion (in hysterical persons, for instance) looks, nevertheless, essentially different from our case; so too do wounds arising from continuous self-mutilation. In Vienna, during 10 years immediately after the first World War, illness was welcome to some of the unemployed, because it meant hospital and protection against hunger and cold. That great distress gave the medical practitioner many opportunities, as the army surgeon had in the second World War, to recognise simulation and self-produced ailments. But that is not the case with Theresa Neumann's stigmata, because they show two principal differences: they do not heal up,

and yet they also do not suppurate, although they are in no way dressed or sterilised, and, on the other hand, they do not show any traces of manipulation or self-mutilation.

They are quite unlike the wounds in the hands of an artist known to me, who night after night had had his hands nailed alternately to a board, but had used antiseptic precautions. He could, we may remark in passing, regulate the bleeding as he wished; but this was not of much significance because he belonged to those human beings, particularly rare in Europe, who can influence the rhythm of the heart (and thus the throb of the pulse) arbitrarily.

It is just as mistaken to try to explain the real blood perspiration of Theresa Neumann by the so-called *indicans* perspiration or something of that sort. A professional colleague of mine in Vienna has that power. But again, it looks essentially different, rather like well-diluted red ink. Quite apart from its very different local distribution, the exuded red liquid always proved to be a known pigment, but in the case of Theresa Neumann it is undeniably blood.

The case at Konnersreuth represents nothing new, when we consider the many historic instances of people who have received the *stigmata* and other supernatural powers, and who are to be found only in the Catholic Church (in the Roman as well as in the Greek-Catholic). They number about 300, 40 of them men, and the majority come from Romance countries, and begin with Francis of Assisi in the 13th century. Our case is probably the one which has been the most thoroughly examined and is therefore perhaps the most famous one, but by no means the only living one. It is finally, only a ring in the following historically verified chain which will hardly have come to its end in Theresa Neumann:

Anna Katharine Emmerick (born Dülmen, West Germany, 1776), stigmatised in 1798, died in 1824; Margarethe Gschir (born Steinach, Brenner, Austria, in 1798), mystically favoured in 1824, stigmatised in 1834, died in 1869; Viktoria Höcht (born Wolpertswende, Palatinate, Germany, in 1867), stigmatised in 1890, died in 1909; Anna Schäffer (born Mindelstetten, Bavaria, in 1882), stigmatised in 1909, died in 1925; Theresa Neumann (born Konnersreuth, Bavaria, in 1898), stigmatised in 1926, living. (I owe the above data to H. P. v. Lama, of Innsbruck).

The alternative diagnosis of the physicians was the same in most of the pertinent cases, namely, hysteria or humbug. Since the latter could soon be excluded, the former false diagnosis of hysteria lasted usually the longest, at least with the majority of those medical men who hold materialistic views. Why? Because the symptoms are similar but not the same, in proportion as natural illness (for instance,

hysteria), or supernatural occurrences leave their traces behind. The organs where the phenomena appear, the human body, the human spirit, are the same, the 'last part of the act is common', but not the origin. A difference which is not at once plain to everybody.

What, then, can be said in general by the physicians about Theresa Neumann and her extraordinary phenomena? It is very meagre:

1. It is not a disease, therefore it is not hysteria.
2. It is not humbug.
3. Her concurrent maladies (inflammation of the throat, for instance) are irrelevant and represent ordinary phenomena, likewise also her first illness (paralysis, etc.), although the diagnosis of the latter is not exactly certain; but the symptoms are certain, though also only fragmentary. Nevertheless, the organic symptoms were so serious and so reliably authentic that the evidently sudden healing cannot be explained medically, i.e., naturally.
4. What can be done *by medical men* to change these negative statements into positive ones? Nothing. Just as there would be no sense in trying to explain the deep effect of a Bach cantata on an audience by calculating the number of oscillations of the sounds produced, so also it would seem impossible to detect the cause at the back of these phenomena by clinical examinations, however subtle they might be. For it is on quite a different plane, and outside the scope of medicine as understood today. That is the reason why this science in this case is unable to explain, and can only describe.
5. Although it will not be possible, therefore, to give an aetiology of the symptoms, a completion of the medical documentation made so far seems, nevertheless, to be necessary, since they are already many years old. First of all, X-ray photographs must be taken and the abstinence from food examined anew by investigations into the metabolism. These examinations can only be made in a hospital. An international commission of experts should be brought together as controlling physicians, who, with their different backgrounds and attitudes to her conception of life, would watch one another closely, much as it is the case when a potentate is confined to his bed.
6. The judgment of such a mixed commission of physicians, as impartial as possible, ought to be able to convince even the most obstinate sceptics of the supernatural nature of the Theresa Neumann phenomena; in so far as they are open to conviction.
7. But neither written nor spoken words, nor photography, film, nor record can reproduce the 'something' which belongs essentially to the events at Konnersreuth. The brush of an 'intuitive artist', or perhaps the forceful language of a Nietzsche combined with Goethe's

eye penetrating into the secrets of nature would be required to do justice to them. Only personal contact with Theresa Neumann can give a pure picture of the sublime happenings there. Therefore, I am grateful to my good fortune in having been there, particularly as a physician.

ENTRY INTO THE NIGHT OF THE SENSES

BY

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IF we are right in supposing that when Richard Rolle describes the third and highest degree of love he is really considering the illuminative rather than the unitive way, we can fit him very neatly into a pattern of spiritual development. Thus we discover his own personal experiences of burning love and heavenly sound entering into his description of 'Singular Love' which is in his own eyes the most perfect state. The special but accessory favours which he had received from God at the beginning of this new way of life were the love in his breast, which was so fervent as to convey even a physical sensation of heat, and an interior sound of heavenly music. And these we find as part of the permanent state of love which he calls 'Singular'.

Singular love is when all comfort and solace are closed out of thy heart but that of Jesus Christ alone. It seeks no other joy. For the sweetness of him who is in this degree is so comforting and lasting in His love, so burning and gladdening that he or she that is in this degree may feel the fire of love burning in their souls . . . then the soul is Jesus-loving, Jesus-thinking, Jesus-desiring, only breathing in the desire for Him, singing to Him, burning for Him, resting in Him. Then the song of praise and love is come. . . .
(*The Form of Living*).¹

But although this way of love seems to be very permanent and very comfortable 'so that the soul is so much comforted in the praise and love of God, and till death comes is singing spiritually to Jesus and in Jesus and of Jesus' (id.), nevertheless there are many sins which are still lurking in the soul even after the hardships of purification and which are still hindering the completion of the process of supernaturalising the whole man. There are times when the soul is given some special assurances as to the pureness of its love, but never can a man be satisfied or complacent about his state. He is always in danger, however many graces God may have poured out upon him.

In this degree of love thou shalt over-come thine enemies, the

¹ Selected writings of Rolle edited by Heseltine.