

THE PHYSICAL REACTIONS OF DOWSING

(ADDRESS TO THE BRITISH SOCIETY OF DOWSERS, READ ON OCTOBER 14TH, 1935, BY DR. J. A. SIMPSON EMSLIE, M.B., Ch.B.).
MR. PRESIDENT, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

I am sure that to all of us dowsing is a very interesting, complex and mysterious subject. At the present time there is a great deal of controversy as to the cause of the phenomena that occur in the human body. There are two main schools of thought, and they are both hypothetical. First, there are those who believe that radiations occur, not only from living things, such as plants and animals, but from inanimate objects as well, such as water, minerals and stone, and, in fact, anything that you care to mention. They believe that these radiations are picked up by the dowser who is susceptible to them.

The other school of thought hold that phenomena are produced by psychic causes, and are associated with telepathy and clairvoyance. Whatever the cause, however, the reactions as they occur in the human body are well defined, and here we are treading on more certain ground. A knowledge of both Anatomy and Physiology help us. We can study the physical movements which take place—these are the movements of the rod and also the pendulum, and a knowledge of physiology explains why these movements occur in the way they do.

In talking to many dowsers and also in reading articles in the Journal, I find that there is a great diversity of opinion as to how the movements occur and also regarding the actual movements themselves. This, unfortunately, tends to still further complicate an already complex subject, and it is my intention this afternoon to put before you certain facts and observations which, I think, will tend to simplify and explain these physical reactions.

REFLEX ACTION.

Now in the first place it is obvious that a muscular movement takes place, whether we use the rod or whether we use the pendulum. In the case of the rod, when it moves upward you find that the hands are also flexing at the wrist, and when the pendulum is used you find the whole arm is moving slightly, giving the pendulum its circular movement.

Now, we ask ourselves, what type of movement is this? Is it a voluntary movement or is it involuntary? The answer to that is, that it is undoubtedly involuntary. One means by that that it is not under the control of the will. We do not put the rod up consciously, the movements of the muscles which take place come on by their own accord. This involuntary movement is known as reflex action.

Now I will give you a few examples of what reflex action is. If I cross one leg over the other and let it hang loose and give a sharp tap below the kneecap, my leg springs forward. Medically this is known as the knee-jerk. Here involuntary muscular action has taken place causing the muscles above the knee to contract, with the result that the leg extends. Again, if somebody lightly scratches the sole of the foot you draw your leg up. The same applies if, unconsciously, you put your hand on something very hot. Your hand is withdrawn before you have had time to realise what has happened.

There are many other types of reflex action; yawning, sneezing and coughing are all reflex. If a crumb of bread goes down the "wrong way" a contraction of your windpipe takes place and severe coughing follows, which you are unable to control, and it is absolutely involuntary. Now the reactions in dowsing are exactly the same as this. We first have a stimulus, such as the tap below the knee, the scratching of the sole of the foot or the crumb of bread in the windpipe. A message is conveyed up a set of nerves to the spinal cord and from there the stimulus passes down another set of nerves—the motor nerves—to the muscles which cause the movements such as I have described.

Now in dowsing, say we are looking for a well, is it not possible that the water is the stimulus and the action of our hands is the muscular reflex response? I think there is no question that it is.

There is another very important physiological fact, and that is that the brain controls these reflexes—it inhibits them. If there was no brain-control these reflexes would act most severely, and the slightest stimulus would set them off. In fact, if there was no control, by tickling the sole of the foot the whole leg would be drawn up, and it would go into a spasm which would remain for some time.

Nature provides for this control by nerves from the brain to the spinal cord to meet the various reflex arcs occurring below. Now, as you can understand, if these nerves from the brain to the spinal cord are damaged, either by injury or disease, the reflexes which are controlled by them will immediately become very exaggerated if they are stimulated. Clinically this is what we do find.

Diseases such as cerebral hæmorrhage or "shock," injury to the brain, and many nerve diseases destroy these nerves, and we get our greatly increased reflex action.

If we wish, therefore, to prove that the physical reactions of dowsing are reflex, what we have to do, is to get a person suffering from one of these diseases and see what happens. They

should be extraordinarily good dowzers from the point of view of reaction.

I have been very fortunate in seeing two cases ; both were in a way similar, having had small cerebral hæmorrhages, presumably caused during birth. The last case I came across was at our Inchmarlo meeting in July, and I was able to demonstrate his extraordinary reactions to some of the members, including our President.

When this man was using the rod his reactions were so severe as to practically throw him into a spasm. In his case he was affected on one side more than the other, with the result that this side acted very much more, and he told me, on occasions, the reaction was sufficient to make him lose his balance and he would fall to the ground. When dowsing, his arm, leg and muscles of the face were all contracted on the affected side. This, indeed, therefore, is proof that the reactions of dowsing are reflex. I have something more to mention about this man when we consider the movements of the pendulum.

Now, as I have said, the brain controls these reflexes to a very large extent, so that it would seem that in dowsing what we actually do is to take off our mental control. It is in a way the exact opposite of voluntary will. We do not inhibit our reflexes so much, so that they become more sensitive.

It is a curious fact that there are certain emotional states which do the same thing, such as fear. When we are in that condition we start and jump at the slightest noise and our heart goes racing, which means that our mental control is lessened. These emotional states leave us rather exhausted and pale, and it is well known that many dowzers experience the same symptoms after dowsing for any length of time.

I think there is no doubt our sympathetic nervous system is markedly affected. The palor which is produced in the face is caused by contraction of the blood vessels of the skin, and this is entirely under the control of the sympathetic system. It is quite possible then that we may get other symptoms such as headache and a rise in the pulse rate as some have noted, but I do not think these symptoms would manifest themselves until the dowzer began to show signs of fatigue.

THE ROD.

First let me say that the rod is nothing more or less than an indicator of muscular movement. The material of which the rod is made matters not the slightest. Its shape, however, is important.

Many have the idea that the rod must be made of some wood or material which has an affinity for water, such as willow, hazel or broom, but we know that we can find it with any type of rod—steel wires or whalebone, and, in fact, it is not necessary

to use a rod at all. By flexing the fingers slightly you will find that in passing over water flexion takes place at the wrist and so the hands move in an upward direction.

Another erroneous idea is that there is an electrical current passing along the rod, and one hears of dowzers talking of positive and negative poles or potentials. This, of course, is quite impossible, as many of the rods are non-conductors of electricity.

Some have specially coloured rods and materials in the rod itself. These can be of no value; the only value they may have is to help the dowser to concentrate on what he is finding.

The V shape of the rod, however, is of importance. As we hold it in our hands it acts as a spring, and in this way it will exaggerate the very smallest muscular movement. Therefore the more spring the rod has the better. That is why whalebone is so very good and is used by many.

There is another factor here, and that is, by holding the rod one has to flex the fingers, and in this way tone is put in the flexor muscles. It is known that a reflex will act more easily if there is already tone in the muscles.

By using the rod we are only indicating movement in the flexor muscles of the forearm. Now it should be possible to indicate movement in any muscle we care to choose, as long as we take our mental control off it and allow the reflex to take place, and this is what we do find.

By holding the arms well out and putting tone in the extensor muscles of the arm and thinking of the extensors, you will find that the rod will tend to move down, although this is a difficult movement to carry out because extension is limited. This can also be demonstrated even with the tongue, if it is held midway between the roof and floor of the mouth. You will find that the reaction will make it rise towards the palate. Again, this was also shown by an experiment on the masseter muscle of the jaw. This experiment was carried out by Dr. Lintott, in Guy's Hospital, when he made patients bite on a rubber ball and the movement of the masseter muscle was thereby conveyed to an instrument which registered the contraction.

I now believe that everybody is a potential dowser, and that it is not a gift which is given to only a few. I have in many instances been able to make people dowse who could not do it at all before and it was no "influence" of mine which was conveyed to them, but simply an explanation of how to relax their muscles and allow the reflex to occur.

One of the main reasons why so many people fail is that they hold the rod so firmly in their hands, with the wrists fixed, both their flexors and extensors being contracted, that it is absolutely

impossible for any movement to occur. Once they are able to stop concentrating on the rod and are able to concentrate on the water and keep their wrists slack, then they find that an involuntary movement will take place.

Just before I leave the rod there is another very important point I wish to mention. Many dowers say that the rod turns down and others say it turns up when they are over water. Some dowers may find it turns up for one thing and down for another. I am now going to tell you that that, in my opinion, is of no importance whatever. It depends entirely on how you hold the rod. The muscular movement is the same in both cases—that of flexion.

I have studied a large number of dowers on this point, and in those who got a downward movement I was able to get the opposite by making them hold the point of the rod slightly higher, and in all cases I noted the reaction was really flexion. It is very easy to make the rod go down, particularly if you hold the point of the rod slightly below the horizontal. You may ask, why does it always go down for one substance? My answer to that is that unconsciously it is very easy to make the rod go down, particularly if you know the substance you are reacting to, but it is flexion that has occurred all the same.

Now, briefly, I will say a few words about the pendulum.

THE PENDULUM.

The circular movement that takes place is also due to reflex muscular movement. If you watch a person dowsing with this instrument you will note that the whole arm is imparting the movement. Anything in the nature of a pendulum will do—a key, a ball, or a ring attached to a piece of string. Like the rod, it does not matter what is used. Its action is only showing up a muscular movement.

Now here the reflex action appears to be somewhat different from that of the rod, in that its movement is a rhythm and it is this action which causes the pendulum to gyrate. If held in the right hand the action is clockwise—the same direction that one normally uses when stirring anything—and if held in the left hand the motion is anti-clockwise, which is to be expected seeing that we are using the exact opposite set of muscles. I believe the rhythm is quite a normal one, and I am quite sure that many of you will have noticed that, on occasions, when you have been sitting on a chair with your feet on the floor, that a jerking, rhythmic movement takes place when you raise your heels off the ground. The condition called “clonus,” known to medical men, is just an exaggeration of this movement, and it occurs in those patients as I mentioned before who have had the mental

control of their reflexes cut off. I was able to demonstrate a well-marked clonus on the dowser at Inchmarlo of whom I spoke before. It was very easily produced on slightly bending his knee and jerking his foot upwards. On doing so a rhythmic movement commenced at the ankle and this continued as long as I kept pressure on the toes.

On the first case of this type that I examined I was fortunate in being able to demonstrate a clonus in the dowser's arms as he held the rod, so that I am quite sure that a small rhythmic movement occurs in the arms when we use the rod, but it is so small that it is difficult to see or demonstrate. Now all this goes to prove that no matter what instrument we use our physical reactions are the same.

There is a point I might mention here, and that is the action of a dowser on another person. If a novice is trying to use the pendulum with no success and a dowser places his hand on the arm holding the pendulum, gyration very often takes place, and it is thought some "influence" has passed from the dowser into the novice. This is not the case. What has really happened is that the dowser's own movements are communicated indirectly to the pendulum. The same applies to the rod. If the dowser holds one end of the rod and a novice the other, the dowser's upward movement will give the impression to the novice that he now can do it because his end will also tend to move up, whether he tries to hold it down or not. I am sure you will all have seen this done.

And now, in conclusion, I will just summarise the principal points in this address.

CONCLUSIONS.

(1). All instruments used in dowsing are to indicate muscular movement.

(2). The muscular movement is involuntary and is reflex action

(3). The brain controls the reflexes and in dowsing we take off that control.

As I have mentioned, everybody is a potential dowser, and with a little knowledge and practice they can become successful. The more often one dowses the easier does it become. Errors, unfortunately, are very easily produced, mental suggestion being one of the worst to catch the unwary.

If one imagines that water should be present, then perhaps one will react whether it is there or not. A person who can concentrate well, and whose mind is not influenced by suggestion will be an accurate dowser.