

Ecstasy may be defined as a peculiar state of the nervous system, in which the person being wholly absorbed and wrapped up in some object of the imagination, the balance between the mind and the body is upset, and he becomes lost to all external impressions; or in other words, the mind, temporarily losing control over the body, runs riot, conjuring up visions and fantasies in accordance with the nature of the object which strikes the imagination. Meanwhile, the body either remains motionless, as in catalepsy, until the balance between it and the mind is re-established, bringing to mind the picture of Balaam, the Midianitish prophet, who, "falling into a trance, but having his eyes open," had revealed to him the future of Israel—or, as is not uncommon during periods of intense religious or other excitement, an enthusiast is seized with an irresistible desire to communicate to others his pent up thoughts and feelings—or when the overwrought nervous system is impelled to exhaust itself in song, as in the Italian Improvisatore—or in violent muscular movements, as in the Shakers and Dancing Dervishes.

The difference between true catalepsy and ecstasy is generally well marked; the most striking distinctive feature being, that in the former all recollection of events occurring during the attack is lost, while in the latter the visions of the excited imagination are afterwards vividly remembered. On the other hand, it is by no means easy to distinguish between the artificial or acquired form of catalepsy and ecstasy, as they frequently present many phenomena common to both.

Regarding the subject from a scientific point of view, it is well known to physiologists that there are states of mental abstraction capable of being artificially induced in many persons, in which the attention is so concentrated upon the subject presented to the mind that the *will* is suspended, while at the same time there exists such an intense susceptibility to, or receptivity of, suggestions conveyed to the mind through the senses from without, that the individual is capable of doing, suffering and saying things of which he is incapable in his ordinary condition, and of which he has no recollection when the condition in question has passed off. In these states, the mind may be placed under the dominion of one idea by the slightest suggestion or leading question, as well as by a positive assertion; so that the sub-