

Lying Actually a Disease

Dr. Pieron declares that, like Paresis, it may come without a Moment's Warning, and creates an Irresponsible Condition

RECENTLY in Paris the Court of Cassation declared through the mouth of its presiding Judge, in a bourgeois divorce case, that a certain witness was "not only incapable of speaking the truth, but that apparently he could not even think it." In other words, the said witness was declared to be irresponsibly mendacious, and that he was a congenital or hereditary liar. Naturally enough the Paris press seized upon the incident and gathered the opinions of medical experts as to the extent to which irresponsible mendacity existed in human nature. The results can hardly be said to be encouraging, and a pathetic enough consideration is the undoubted fact, according to medical testimony, that the habit of lying may, all unconsciously to ourselves, overtake us at any period in life, and follow us down to a dishonored grave.

Dr. Pieron, who is a medical publicist of note in the French capital, says that the brain, in the course of its development—that is, up till the fiftieth year in average men—may at some point or other develop a malformation which will have the effect of destroying the ratiocination or reasoning faculty. Like paresis, of which mendacity is a kindred disease, it may come upon the most truthful and the least suspecting man without a moment's warning, and just as the result of a sudden "kink" occurring in the cerebral structure.

Lying, says Pieron, is not by any means a monopoly of women and children. The male grown-up, even if he does not naturally evince the tendency to exaggerate or invent—a certain indication of degeneracy—is always liable to become a victim of the lying habit. The natural and spontaneous liar who has reached maturity lies because he is physically or mentally still an infant, and can neither exercise any power of criticism either subjectively or objectively,

and is wholly devoid of reasoning as to the effect his lies produce upon his hearers or upon their objects. He will lie maliciously, just as recklessly or as easily as he lies spontaneously or simply, the result being incalculable as far as he is concerned. They are unfortunately amenable to the influence of stronger wills, and can, under quasi-hypnotic power, be made to assert almost anything, the truth or untruth of their declarations being to them not only an entirely absent consideration, but without the scope of their mental or moral purview.

The so-called harmless liar, says Pieron, differs only in a slight degree from the malicious or brutal liar who lies for motives of revenge, jealousy or cruelty. The physical malformation is almost identical in both cases, the difference being only one of morbidity and a more diseased condition of the nerve cells which produces the state of hysteria, of which lying is perhaps the most pronounced symptom.

The children of drunkards and lunatics, more than any others, evince the disposition to lie and to deceive, and it is an unfortunate fact that considerable ability and even religious and conscientious spirit—as, for example, in money matters—may exist side by side with the tendency toward mendacity. In women who are the children of lunatics and drunkards the lying spirit often manifests itself, although a keen sense of honor is still preserved in the common dealings of life. The woman remains, however, wholly unconscious of her lapse, say, in cases of infidelity. She is, says Pieron, in the position of a person who has no recollection of having done wrong. She will deny her guilt and lie away her soul, really in good faith, simply because she refuses to persuade herself that she is doing wrong or that she has done wrong. Though such a woman