

EDITORIAL

HOMAGE À JANET

Richard P. Kluff, M.D.

This year marks the centennial of the publication of Janet's classic work, *L'Automatisme Psychologique*. From the first it was widely recognized as a landmark within the psychological sciences, and it remains one of the major foundations of the study of dissociation. A man of stellar intellect and prodigious energy, Janet was a professor of philosophy at the age of twenty-two. He was described as a man who knew not the meaning of rest: by the end of his long and illustrious career, he was said to have published over 17,000 pages of scientific contributions. He was not an academician without a firm clinical grounding. He was considered among the most effective psychotherapists of his era, and conducted a successful and flourishing private practice.

While teaching philosophy at Le Harve he undertook research with psychiatric patients under the auspices of Drs. Gilbert and Powilewicz, and applied his vigorous intellect to the study of hysterics, psychotics, and epileptics. He pursued a medical degree only after he was widely recognized as an important contributor to the scientific literature of the day and had published *L'Automatisme Psychologique*. His ideas became accepted so widely and so quickly that within a decade and a half they often were no longer credited to him by his scientific contemporaries—they had become part of the common psychological vocabulary of the day (Ellenberger, 1970). Janet worked closely with Charcot on his wards at the Salpêtrière while he undertook medical training, and was given the responsibility of organizing and directing a laboratory for research in experimental psychology. It seemed that Janet and his mentor would continue what promised to be a fruitful and stimulating collaboration, but Charcot died shortly after Janet received his medical degree.

In many ways this event would cast a long shadow on the career of Janet, even though he would survive his mentor by 54 years. Charcot's successors were more neurologically and biologically oriented than Charcot, and accorded relatively little importance to psychotherapy. Furthermore, Charcot's reputation did not survive him intact. Errors were found in his work, and the efforts of those with whom he had been affiliated were cast under suspicion. As a result, although Janet remained able to keep at his work under the realm of Charcot's first successor, Raymond, who appears to have allowed Janet to continue as before, those who followed Raymond gradually stripped Janet of his wards and his laboratory. By 1910, although he held a prestigious professorship in experimental psychology at the Collège de France, had a successful private practice, and was accorded international renown, his adverse circumstances at the Salpêtrière

made him realize that he no longer could do any clinical teaching. He had to turn down the students who applied to him. His lectures were well-attended, but mostly by foreigners and non-specialists.

This set of circumstances made it nearly impossible for a school of thought or a group of followers to form around Janet. Therefore, he developed few scientific disciples who might expand upon his observations and ideas. Those who were exposed to Janet, however, noted his insistence upon originality of observation and independence of thought. One might infer that Janet would have eschewed the notion of others elaborating a *Janetian* psychology.

Furthermore, Janet's conflicts with Freud were deep and bitter, as each asserted that the other had claimed credit for his own ideas and failed to acknowledge his contributions appropriately. Some notion of the depth, breadth, and duration of this mutual animosity can be gleaned from the accounts of Ellenberger (1970) and a painfully candid appraisal offered by Perry and Laurence (1984). One result of this was a general antipathy toward Janet among the early psychoanalysts, which augured a near eclipse of interest in Janet and his work as psychoanalysis became an increasingly important force among the mental health professions.

Without a group of colleagues who were associated with his ideas and their promulgation, disregarded and/or attacked by many of those who embraced the psychoanalytic movement, and always inclined to independence both in thought and in his choice of his topics of research (which at times put Janet out of step with prevailing ideas and interests), Janet and his work diminished in prominence and influence.

Janet continued to practice into his eighties, attended lectures on newer ideas in psychiatry and taught until he was eighty-three, lectured into the eighty-seventh year of his life, and explored new areas and ideas up to the time of his death, when he was working on a book on the psychology of belief. He explored so many aspects of psychiatry that many who thought of him in connection with his early work on hysteria and dissociation had difficulty in associating him with his other areas of study (Ellenberger, 1970).

It is unfortunate indeed that nearly two generations of mental health professionals have had but a minimal exposure to Pierre Janet. Some recent textbooks of psychiatry do not even have his name listed in their indexes. A priceless intellectual heritage has gone unacknowledged and unclaimed for far too long.

Within the last two decades there have been several signs that this long and unconscionable neglect of Janet and his

ideas may be coming to an end. Janet's ideas are being revived in the study of hypnosis (e.g., Hilgard, 1977), the unconscious (e.g., Bowers & Meichenbaum, 1984), and throughout the renaissance of clinical and experimental interest in dissociation and multiple personality disorder.

In recognition of Pierre Janet's enormous contribution to the study of dissociation and in honor of the centennial of *L'Automatisme Psychologique*, DISSOCIATION invited Onno van der Hart, a contemporary Janet scholar, to develop *A Reader's Guide to Pierre Janet on Dissociation* that can serve as a valuable resource for scientific investigators and clinicians

alike. Dr. van der Hart and his collaborator, Ms. Barbara Friedman, have undertaken laborious and demanding efforts to make a summary of many of Janet's major works available to the modern reader.

We hope that through their endeavors those of us who study dissociation and struggle to understand and treat the dissociative disorders can appreciate the power and acumen of the ideas and observations of Pierre Janet, who is at one and the same time one of our most distinguished and venerable scientific and psychotherapeutic predecessors, and one of our most thoroughly modern colleagues. ■

REFERENCES

- Bowers, K.S., & Meichenbaum, D. (Eds.). (1984). *The unconscious reconsidered*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Ellenberger, H.F. (1970). *The discovery of the unconscious*. New York: Basic Books.
- Hilgard, E.R. (1977). *Divided consciousness*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Janet, P. (1889). *L'Automatisme psychologique*. Paris: Felix Alcan. New edition: (1973) Société Pierre Janet: Paris.
- Perry, C., & Laurence, J.R. (1984). Mental processing outside of awareness: The contributions of Freud and Janet. In Bowers, K.S., & Meichenbaum, D. (Eds.). (1984). *The unconscious reconsidered*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.