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# AMBROISE-AUGUSTE LIÉBEAULT, THE FATHER OF NANCY'S SCHOOL OF HYPNOTISM DURING XIXTH CENTURY: PART I

By Brice Lemaire

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Ambroise-Auguste Liébeault was born on September 16, 1823, in Favières, to farming parents.

The youngest of his siblings, from a modest family, he was destined for the priesthood by his parents and entered the minor seminary in 1838 at the age of fifteen. It was only in 1844 that he enrolled in the Faculty of Medicine in Strasbourg, where he was a student of Charles Schützenberger.

In 1848, while studying at the University of Strasbourg's Faculty of Medicine, he was captivated by his reading. It would have a profound impact on his thinking, his practice as a country doctor, and more broadly, on his future career of international renown. Ambroise-Auguste Liébeault then discovered animal magnetism at the age of twenty-five in the Husson report, a report tasked with determining the status of animal magnetism. Among other things, he discovered in this report, which caused a scandal and was never published by the Academy of Medicine, "the recognition as real of most of the phenomena observed in magnetism. The report notably mentions the removal of a tumor performed by magnetic sleep in 1829 by the surgeon Jules Cloquet, during which "the patient showed no signs of pain. And the commission declared: "Considered as an agent of physiological phenomena or as a therapeutic means, magnetism should find its place within the framework of medical knowledge."

Liébeault continued his medical studies and at this time became fascinated by the work of magnetizers such as Charles Lafontaine and Baron du Potet, as well as other imaginative practitioners like de Faria, Noizet, Bertrand, and Hénin de Cuvillers. He quickly began magnetizing young people using their theories and techniques with excellent results.

He obtained his medical degree on February 7, 1850, and settled in Pont-Saint-Vincent in Meurthe-et-Moselle. Liébeault thus spent ten years of his career as a country doctor without using magnetism."

His interest in hypnotic suggestion was rekindled after reading a communication presented by Velpeau and Broca on January 27, 1860, to the Academy of Sciences on Braid's work and hypnosis. Settling in Nancy, he undertook new therapies using hypnosis, achieving notable successes and cures. His colleagues ridiculed him, and his wealthy clientele abandoned him. From then on, he devoted his life to treating the working-class population of Nancy free of charge. Liébeault, finding a new vocation, removed his medical doctorate plaque and adopted that of a healer. In 1864, he began writing his seminal work, *Du sommeil et des états analogues* (On Sleep and Analogous States), the first serious attempt in France to study the phenomena of hypnotism experimentally and without negative

preconceptions. The book was published in 1866, and only one copy was sold! The Medico-Psychological Society, in 1867, disdainfully rejected the author's theories.

For twenty-five years, Liébeault remained alone, ignored by his colleagues, yet continuing to work surrounded only by the esteem and admiration of his patients. In his work, Liébeault integrates Braid's model into his practice and develops his understanding of the imaginationist model. This work is an excellent synthesis of magnetism in its imaginationist branch and hypnotism in its suggestionist branch. The emphasis is placed on suggestion and on trance. Considering visual fixation useless, he states: "Suggestion is the key to Braidism... one must attach, in sleep, the subject's mind to one idea, one single idea." He makes verbal suggestion the most important factor in the creation and the use of the hypnotic state. He uses direct suggestion, with force and authority, in which the message conveyed is explicit and directly leads to the desired response. In this direct approach, according to him, "the idea is suggested, and its realization depends on the will of the individual who retains their free will."

Liébeault practices hypnosis daily on his patients, which allows him to acquire extraordinary experience, a synthesis of his experiments and his knowledge. His reputation spreads in his region as well as in France.

For Liébeault, sleep is necessary for the production of hypnotic phenomena, such as catalepsy or paralysis, but it must also allow for the creation of states beneficial to the patient and their healing. He also uses suggestion to utilize hypnotic sleep and untangle the knots of the past that underlie adult pathologies. He then has an intuition for regression to the cause, a technique central to Elmanian hypnosis.

"We tell him that sleep will probably cure his illness, that this sleep will be peaceful and restorative, and that everyone could experience it under the same circumstances and without unpleasant consequences. We ask him to sit and focus his attention on the idea of sleeping. Then, fixing our eyes on him, we suggest a heaviness in his eyelids and limbs and a growing inability to move." Continuing to speak of sleep and the symptoms that should soon appear, we finally say that these symptoms are realized. We then say that even the lightest sleep is beneficial; and if we cannot achieve this state in the patient, we show them the results obtained in other people who have been more easily influenced, and in this way, we often achieve our goal."

Through his daily practice and the thousands of cures he achieves, Liébeault, a simple country doctor, begins to gain a reputation that reaches Hippolyte Bernheim, a prominent professor of medicine at the University of Nancy. It is in 1882 that Bernheim visits him, and, as great