

## SLANDER

### A DANGEROUS DISEASE

By Nicholas de Roerich

THE Chinese Hospital Dialogue advises:

"Doctor, when I have formed a habit, is it hard to break?"

"I think if you are in earnest it can be done. As the proverb says: 'there is nothing difficult in the world, except the fear of an insincere heart'."

It is most touching to see that a modern hospital book closes on such a wise proverb. Verily, remove fear and insincerity and at once the heart will recuperate. How many dangerous diseases have been caused by ignorance and its children: fear, covetousness and malice. As the next progeny of these we find the creeping asp of slander.

Slander is the transmission of a lie. It makes no difference whether the lie is transmitted in light-mindedness or malice or ignorance—its seeds will be equally destructive. I recall the remarkable reply of Kuindji, who himself was against every form of lying. Kuindji was on bad terms with Diaghileff. A certain artist, knowing this and probably anticipating that Kuindji would enjoy a bad report about Diaghileff, told Kuindji some ugly gossip about Diaghileff. Kuindji listened patiently and then interrupted the artist with a thunderous exclamation: "You are a slanderer!" The man who had transmitted this gossip, after such an unexpected defeat, tried to justify himself by saying that he did not make up that gossip, but that he only transmitted it "for information, even without any back thought." But Kuindji was adamant. He continued to look grimly at the unfortunate informer and repeated: "You brought me this vile news, consequently it is you who are the slanderer!"

How many of such self-justifying slanderers intrude upon an atmosphere of creativeness. They scatter the most poisonous seeds and try to cover themselves with the shield of non-responsibility. They, as if, did not think of any consequences, they only repeated it for information, as if every slander and lie is not being repeated "for information" only.

It is not sufficiently emphasized that slander and lies are ugly. It is not pointed out that these fragments of darkness encumber and poison space. It would seem that people should know well how anger and irritation poison the system, but then every liar and slanderer in some measure sinks into lethal hatred and first of all poisons himself. Hatred lives also around jealousy and ignorance, and around that same perversity of the thinking apparatus, which is so difficult to heal. A child may be unsociable, queer, suspicious but, it is not born hating; this evil quality is taken up from the many examples set by the elders.

"Slander, slander—something will always remain!"—What malicious care is expressed, in order that something hateful should remain. In this manner certain people are more concerned with the preservation of evil than of good. The good in some measure will always be selfless, whereas evil, first of all, is egotistic. And if a man will begin to assure that he has committed something evil for the sake of good, believe him not, undoubtedly he wanted to justify his selfhood or tried to distinguish himself selfishly in the eyes of a superior. One has to be surprised how weak are the laws that punish slander. In some countries the persecution of slander is almost impossible. One can convince oneself only, that not by laws which persecute slander, but by preventive measures, one may considerably weaken this poisonous asp. This may be attained also in schools, but still more so this can be achieved in

home life. Exclude from the family circle all trifling gossip and you will save the younger generation from committing great slander. If youngsters do not hear from childhood any mutual accusations nor any seeds of gossip and slander, they simply will not respond to this type of "recreation." If at home there is no card playing, then the first foundations of their character will form themselves without the necessity of murdering the most precious time. The future of family life very much depends upon the parents themselves. Perhaps precisely now one is led to remind of the hereditary possibilities of the family, for very often instead of an attractive principle, the family creates but a repulsive element. And there, wherein lies repulsion alone, there—because of the absence of attraction—lies the beginning of chaos.

Gossip and slander—what an infamy!

There are many epidemics. It has gradually become evident that not only the generally accepted scourges, like plague, cholera and the other infectious diseases, but also many other illnesses are contagious. And what if slander also represents a contagious manifestation and moreover an epidemic one? There are many forms of very contagious psychosis. History mentions continuously facts of mass psychosis, which at times took really threatening dimensions.

If one were to investigate the sources of slander, one would no doubt find that in the pure, worthy and cultural atmosphere slander does not thrive. Observe the home as well as social atmosphere of notorious slanderers and you shall find the real seat of this dangerous psychosis. Even ordinary falsehood is not pronounced everywhere. There are such places in the world and such people, in the presence of which the slanderer and liar feels himself so uncomfortable, that he will not dare to resort to his favourite malparlance. But there, where slander is pronounced lightly, there look for an old-established evil. The microbes of slander feel themselves there greatly at home.

Let us not feel astonished if among works on psychic diseases there will appear real medical treatises on slander, on its causes and methods of propagation, and let us hope also about preventive measures.

One thing is clear—that, if life is in need of newly affirmed foundations, then first of all, all fatal epidemics must be overcome. Among these scourges of mankind special attention will be paid to the multiplicity of psychosis. Curing drunkards, drug-addicts, thieves and all criminals in the field of sexual perversity, will no doubt lead also to the cure of one of the worst perversities—the vice of slander.

It will be noticed how different perversities manifest themselves simultaneously. When observing a slanderer or a notorious liar, you will find that the rest of his life is not pure. Undoubtedly he will be subject to other forms of criminality. In future state hospitals, besides the wards for drug-addicts, drunkards, thieves and other criminals, there will be one for the most dangerously infectious disease—the ward for slanderers.

And old English law provides that precisely slanderers are punishable by flogging. But let us leave it to the psychiatrist to decide what measure of healing is best suitable in such a dangerous and abhorrent disease.

When one acquaints oneself with the Pasteur Institute, one will probably be asked not to remain too long in one of the laboratories. One will be warned: "here are specially dangerous microbes." In future psychiatric hospitals visitors will be asked to leave quicker a certain ward, and it will be added: "The microbes of slander are very contagious!"

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