SYNÆSTHESIA

BY PROFESSOR A. H. PIERCE
Smith College

Though contributing little, if any, new material to aid in the understanding of synæsthesias, Marinesco (1) presents an unusually rich assemblage of facts. First, a case of colored hearing is described with particular wealth of detail. The subject is a Roumanian woman of thirty-five. It is remarked incidentally that her heredity is bad. All spoken or written words and sounds are colored, the endless variety of color and shading being the special feature of the case. The colors are always seen hovering in space; and ordinarily in the form of a strip or patch, usually brilliant, and in all grades of transparency. Sometimes the letter or word is seen dimly outlined on this colored background. The color of a word is generally determined by the colors of prominent vowels and consonants. Many details are given, and two excellent colored plates reproduce concrete instances. Reading is accompanied by very vivid auditory imagery, and the usual color experiences are evoked.

From a collection made before his death by Edouard Grüber (of Jassy) the author cites a considerable number of cases of colored hearing, schematized forms, etc. A table, representing the reports of 23 individuals, is drawn up for a comparison of the colors given the letters of the alphabet and the notes of the musical scale. The main result is to emphasize the wide range of individual variation.

Analyzing his material, the author concludes: (1) that no generalizations can be established as to sound and color correlations; (2) that the color of words is sometimes that of a prominent constituent, sometimes that produced by a mixture of the colors of the components; (3) that synæsthesias are not indicative of pathological conditions; and, finally, (4) that their existence points to an individual predisposition the main features of which are a special impressionability of the visual and the word-hearing centers, and an unusual diminution of inhibitory influences of these centers upon each other.

A condensed historical summary and a bibliography of the less commonly cited titles add to the value of the article.

REFERENCES