LOUIS BERMAN, *THE PERSONAL EQUATION*

Louis Berman's *The Personal Equation* (1925) is a book that explains the relatively new science of endocrinology, the various glands that secrete hormones, their impact on individual lives and character, and their relation to psychology and personality. "Are We Gland-Controlled Marionettes?" Berman asks in the title of the second chapter. "The answer apparently is yes," *Booklist* summarized his argument, "unless, by a proper application of the increasing knowledge of what the scientist calls the chemistry of temperament we learn to control the glands which control us. The author points out that here lies the solution of the personal equation."

We all accept now that hormones from testosterone to adrenalin to estrogen impact our behavior and moods, but the concept was still new in popular culture, having only been identified in medicine two decades earlier. Some reviewers straight-on appreciated the explanations: "Dr. Berman has cracked the shell of this difficult subject and has given an easy access to its meaty center," said Martin Ross in *Literary Review*. "He has taken an absorbing theme, and by gradual stages has made easy of assimilation of that which was previously hard to digest." Other reviewers were torn between appreciating the clarity and force of his explanations and doubting them. "Better than character analysis, this newer study," wrote the *Boston Transcript*. "But we think that no matter what efforts to popularize the subject are

made, the doctor as specialist will be the only trustworthy analyst in future." *Outlook* wrote, "Dr. Berman is far ahead of modern science, so far ahead that some scientists cannot see him at all. Perhaps this is jealousy. And, then again, perhaps it isn't." Joseph Jastrow, in *Saturday Review of Literature*, wrote:

> Dr. Herman is a skillful popularizer and is under the temptation of his gift to make telling statements that heighten the color-scheme of his picture. Those who follow his personally conducted tour will "get off" at different stages of the journey; and biologists and psychologists alike, if of critical temper, may discredit the entire enterprise.

And some endocrinologists indeed took exception to his use of debatable assumptions and theories Berman presents as facts, and theories he presents as established causes. In the *American Journal of Public Health,* for instance, M.P. Ravenel wrote:

> The author wields a facile pen. His gifts of expression and his skillful use of words so beguile one that the average reader is apt to go along with him and accept all that he says at its face value. Unquestionably he knows his subject, but his apparent desire to make a readable book, in which he has succeeded admirably, and the expert way in which he applies his knowledge to existing as well as theoretical conditions, leads him into some inaccuracies which should be noticed.

But even Ravenal agreed that Berman brought important news and a much more grounded and rational approach to the topic than any other book for a popular audience. He was a scientist of his time and not particularly innovative in his thinking—he talked about "intersexual" forms, for instance, but with a certain horror of what he termed abnormality, which included feminine characteristics in men and masculine characteristics in women, always assuming that any deviation from the norm was the "overdevelopment" or "underdevelopment" of one gland or another.

Berman was only 32 and an associate professor at Columbia University when he published the book. He went on to be a research neurologist at various institutions, write important clinical papers, publish more books for a popular audience, and serve on several prestigious boards in medicine and criminology. He died young—at 53—of a heart attack in New York City.