



Our Foreign Letter.

FROM FRANCE.

IT is well known that hypnotism has been adopted in the treatment of a variety of cases by some of the leading French physicians, that very marked results have been derived from its use, and that the possibilities of this power for good and for evil are incalculable. We hear of painless surgery—under hypnotism—and by way of contrast of horrid murders—by suggestion. On the whole, this power is yet unfathomed.

The other day I met and conversed with a lady who I was told had been hypnotised with advantage after being confined to her bed for eight years, suffering from some mysterious complaint that “bent her fingers and toes,” and “curved her limbs.” She was an intellectual and sad looking woman of about 56, and belonged to the wealthy and educated class. She discussed modern art with me, and it turned out in the course of conversation, that my new acquaintance was greatly interested and “well up” in this subject, as well as in many others; so that it could not have been *ennui* that threw her on a bed of sickness.

I was told that she had suffered very much, that all doctors had given her up, and that hypnotism had been tried as a kind of “hopeless attempt”—“for the sake of doing something.”

Of course this lady's case has led to many discussions on the blessings of hypnotism in scientific hands.

The very next day after meeting this lady, a case of fraud was tried in Paris. The case was that of an old lady, who was said to have been hypnotised into leaving her property away from her relations. It was said that there existed no logical reason for this act of hers, that she had had no special sympathy with her present heirs, but on the contrary had felt affection for her relatives.

At the end of a very interesting trial, the verdict was given in favour of the heirs the testator had chosen herself—hypnotised or not—the court refusing to consider the argument as legally acceptable. And yet, who knows? What an unpleasant train of thought reflections on hypnotism may awaken, and at the same time the social dangers of superstition are nowhere more fully recognised than in France, where the law hunts down modern witches and wizards with relentless severity. None the less, it seems, they flourish and increase. Quite a succession of cases of this description have lately been brought before the tribunals of Paris. These cases show that at present—even more than in the so-called “dark ages”—professional humbug is at the height of popularity with all

classes. Legal measures do not crush it. It keeps step with the decline of the popularity of national religion, and is in no wise influenced by the logical “moral lessons” now taught in French Government schools, instead of the “old-fashioned” Bible stories and hymns.

So well paid are these “Professors of the Mysterious,” that repeated fines will not deter them from returning to their trade.

That these psychological quacks frequently pave the way to the lunatic asylum is undoubted, as it is impossible that anyone ever so little under their unhealthy influence can be perfectly sane. And thus the terrible fact stands clearly out; all the science and art, the vaunted progress of modern times, has not bought for the cleverest people in Europe a *general* appreciation of the property best worth having—the healthy mind in the healthy body. On the contrary, healthy minds are said to be decreasing.

A student of the subject recently suggested that superstition, a large proportion of the nervous disorders of the day, criminal (that is morally diseased) children, and youthful suicides were off-shoots of one parent root—training minus religion.

Wonderfully logical and graphic *moral guide-books* are used in French government schools. They set forth in plain and graceful language the excellence of industry, truth and charity. One cannot fail to admire the lucidness of their style. They are “up to date” in every sense.

And yet somehow these clever guide-books have *not* done what the old-fashioned Bible stories did. The younger generation and the children “moralised” on this modern system have *not* improved in firmness of character, in clearness of purpose and simple honesty.

A woman of action, a woman who devoted all her splendid mental and physical powers to the alleviation of human suffering said to me: “If I had not *faith* to believe that pain is not purposeless, even where the reason for it is hidden, if I did not believe that although it is the result of unchangeable past it will be soothed in the harmony of a grand future, *I should go mad.*” And what shall the less gifted say? Logic will never replace religion. Man wants spiritual food *naturally*, and where he does not receive it in the form of a pure and reliable creed, which is the form most wholesome and safe to him, he takes it out in spiritual stimulants, and sickens morally and mentally, exactly as his body does under similar circumstances.

It is restful to turn from such vexed questions to “sixty quiet women,” who do “good in silence,” calling themselves by the touching title of “Servants of the Poor.”

This Society of Sisters was founded twenty-five years ago, when the horror and shame of war was shuddering through France.

Their duties are to serve the poor, especially in sickness; they are, in fact, devoted district Nurses.

There is no work, however trying, that these Sisters shrink from, and no form of suffering they do not try to comfort. They are so unpretending and quiet about their labours that very little is generally known about them away from their own field of action, where they prove themselves veritable messengers of mercy and are universally respected.

They have four houses, a mother house at Angers a branch establishment at Paris, one at Joinville and another at Parthenay.

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