

Medical Matters.

THOUGHT-FORCE AND THE EFFECT OF SUGGESTION ON HUMAN CHARACTER.

At a meeting of the Ethnological Society (Society for the systematic study of human character), Dr. Bernard Hollander recently delivered a lecture on "The Influence of Suggestion on Human Character."

Human character, he declared, is due to a mass of suggestions; suggestions from *within*, transmitted by heredity from our ancestors, and suggestions from *without*, due to the influence of our environment. The two determine our character. Suggestion enters into every act of life, colours all our sensations, and constantly influences our judgment. Even scientific men, who in their own branch of learning accept nothing that cannot be mathematically demonstrated, are often highly credulous in other matters, hence there are ardent believers in spiritualism amongst them.

The works of poets and artists depend a great deal on the power of receiving and conveying suggestion. In commerce, too, suggestion plays an important part. The best salesman is he who can dispose of goods which the purchaser had no intention of buying, at least not at the price asked. The art of advertising depends almost entirely on the power of suggestion. But one of the best examples of this force of suggestion, is that of a person who has fallen in love. He fails to see the blemishes in the object of his fascination, and is completely blind to the attractions of other persons; frequently his whole character becomes changed.

In politics, suggestion is also powerful. It can show itself in the personality of a strong leader. Moreover, a few simple words, cleverly chosen by a political party, may suggest to a whole mass of people a truth or an untruth, people not stopping to enquire the reason. Sometimes there is over a whole country a wave of political hysteria caused by suggestion.

We are all given to auto-suggestions, that is, suggestions from our conscious self to our sub-conscious self. For example, the wine which we pour out of a dusky bottle bearing the label of a celebrated vineyard always seems better than it really is. Judges and lawyers know how little credence can be given to the declarations of even disinterested witnesses concerning the details of some event at which they were present, because what they saw is distorted by auto-suggestions. Great liars and successful swindlers must have the capacity of suggestion and auto-suggestion to an extraordinary extent to be able to lie to themselves and to others, until they themselves are no longer capable

of distinguishing clearly between that which has been experienced and that which has been invented.

If any further explanation is needed to impress us with the power of suggestion, the examples of those great men, who have extracted a gigantic life work from a grudging brain speak to us with lofty eloquence. Emotional conflicts and wounds, discouragements, unhappiness, and tribulations of all sorts, can be kept out of human life, or at least their effect can be minimised. Last, but not least, character defects can be overcome and diseased conditions of mind and body alleviated and cured. Thus mankind may learn that men may lift up their minds to the enjoyment of life by the aid of the natural springs of human force, and lead a better, healthier, and happier existence.

Suggestion is used largely nowadays in the treatment of nervous ailments and morbid states. Ungovernable, backward, and destructive children, and adults with criminal impulses have been reformed, and guiding ideas of conduct and noble ideals instilled. People who have acquired a crooked way of thinking, people with obsessions and delusions, and suffering from other mind disorders, as well as people addicted to the drink, drug, and other pernicious habits, have been cured by this method. There is no loss of individuality as is sometimes supposed, but, on the contrary, appeal is made to the subject's better nature, and his superior self and personality put in command over his weaknesses; he is taught to take a different attitude to things, to break himself of the ideas which govern him and wreck his life, to learn self-control, to enable him to do the thing which in his best moments he desired to do, but was not able to accomplish unaided. Last, but not least, he is taught to concentrate, to be master of his brain and not its servant, to prevent his mind from "wandering," and to switch his thoughts on and off, as we switch electricity on and off. This is exactly what worrying people cannot do.

Suggestion alone, however, will not effect a cure, unless the constitutional weaknesses are attended to at the same time. Doctors recognise more fully than ever that man is a compound of body and spirit, and that both the psychical and physical factors have to be taken into account by those who undertake the treatment of disease. Even in purely mental disorders, the constitution is weakened by the constant indulgence of morbid thoughts and habits. Herein "Christian Science" fails, for it pays no attention to bodily needs, and that is where it does positive harm to the patient.

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