

Hypnotic Power.

By MRS. WESTAWAY.

There is a keen popular appetite for supernatural wonders, and no sooner is one delusion exposed than another arises to take its place. Animal magnetism, electro-biology, mesmerism, and spirit-rapping have each in turn excited interest of greater or less duration until the delusions were exposed by the searching light of scientific knowledge, resulting in the ignominious retreat of the chief exponent of the wonder and the chagrin of the many dupes. Quite recently a law case concerned itself with the claims of a self-styled Dr. Bodie to cure by means of hypnotism, and the examination revealed most plainly that his performances (for such they really were, with the music-hall stage for setting) were of a bogus nature. Cases supposed to be cured were of such a slight nature that an excited imagination triumphed over bodily weakness sufficiently long to allow the person to walk off the stage as though cured, while really serious cases were sent away with a recommendation to use Bodie's Embrocation. In some cases hypnosis was performed, but the most wonderful performances were confined to a circle of confederates.

It is but right that such frauds should be exposed, for wielders of hypnotic power are "playing with fire." Quite lately a case of death was reported from America, the circumstances being that a man was hypnotised and the performer jumped on his rigid body. The man never again revived, and it was found that death had resulted from internal injuries. Even when death does not result, there is danger, immediate or remote, and it certainly would be a public gain if performances introducing hypnotism were to be declared illegal. In fact, the laity should not be allowed to intermeddle with this occult force, which baffles even the scientific men who seek to know it better.

The human mind is a wonderful essence, and ages of study and research have failed to reveal the full extent of its powers. Not only can the mind act on the body of the individual, but its influence can be felt on the minds of others, often in a most mysterious way, and hence have arisen the various sciences and pseudo-sciences dealing with the human mind. Investigations from a scientific standpoint have been of value, but charlatans, who have prostituted their shreds of knowledge for the sake of gain, or to cause amusement, have thrown discredit on the real science, and have hindered the progress of discovery.

The outward manifestation of hypnosis is

simple. It arises from constrained visual attention. A prism or bright object is fixed slightly above the level of the eye of the person operated on, who gazes at it intently until change of mental condition is brought about. At first there is mental excitement, but as the organ of vision is tired, the brain is lulled to rest, and nervous sleep is induced. A few passes by the operator's hand cuts off connection with the bright object, and the person, though seemingly asleep, acts as though awake, but is completely subservient to the will of the operator.

As early as the second century such phenomena were known, and cures apparently wrought by the influence of hypnotism were regarded as miraculous. Aristides, born 129 A.D., after a long period of travel returned to Italy, and on his return was seized with a curious illness which lasted for 13 years. The history of this illness is fully described by him in six "Sacred Discourses." Visions and dreams characterised the illness, and the outcome was some wonderful cures, wrought by means similar to those adopted by Mesmer—that is, by putting the patient in a hypnotic trance.

Joseph Gassner, a Roman Catholic priest, of Swabia, seems to have been the next to employ hypnotism to any great extent. He held that all diseases arose from demoniacal possession, and could only be cured by exorcism. He believed himself to be possessed of miraculous powers, but, as a matter of fact, the source of his curative remedies was hypnotic sleep. In 1776 he was visited by Mesmer, who studied his methods and modified his own plans of action.

Perhaps no exponent of hypnosis has attracted more attention than Franz Anton Mesmer. He was born at Weil, 1733, studied medicine at Vienna, took his degrees, and commenced practice. At first he was interested in astrology, and from confused ideas concerning astral influence introduced magnetism as a healing power. To this he added hypnosis, but after meeting with Gassner, and finding that hypnotic trance could be induced without magnetism, he adopted the simpler method.

The attitude of the public mind is well exhibited in the case of the Syrian captain, who was furious when he was told to adopt the simple expedient of washing in a small river, and Mesmer's popularity was largely owing to the luxurious entourage of his operations. In the early days of his practice an oval vessel was placed in the middle of the room, in which was disposed a number of bottles filled with magnetised water, and arranged with the necks pointing to the circumference of the vessel.

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