

PSYCHO-THERAPY.

By MISS GLADYS TATHAM.

From evidence on ancient Egyptian monuments, we find that Psycho-therapy, or healing by the mind, was practised extensively by the priests of that country about 2,500 years ago. Sufferers from various diseases were brought to the Temples, and many cures were effected; to the laity of those days they were evidences of the direct intervention of the gods, but to us they appear as increased testimony of the *power of suggestion*. In Greece, Æsculapius and his pupils made use of mesmeric passes and the influence of music in nervous and mental conditions. In Rome the Sibyls appear to have put themselves in a state of hypnotic trance when they were uttering their Oracles. Many sufferers are carried to the Temples to be healed in the East to-day, and Lourdes has become famous through West and East for the "miraculous" cures effected there.

In the British Isles little interest in Psycho-therapy seems to have been aroused till the beginning of the 16th century, when the effect of the heavenly bodies on human diseases began to be studied, and the belief gradually gained ground that not only did the stars influence men, but that men born under various stars influenced each other. This idea would seem to acknowledge that disease might be affected by other than physical means.

The Scotch nation has contributed at least three prominent investigators of the subject. As early as 1665 a Scotsman named Maxwell started a theory, similar to the belief held by many at the present time, of a human aura and the influence of the "rays" emitted from one person to another. In France, nearly a century later, Dr. Anton Mesmer (1734-1815) taught that a mysterious force or "fluid" emanated from the person mesmerising to the subject who was being mesmerised.

Although not Scotch by birth, Dr. John Elliotson took his M.D. degree from Edinburgh University. Afterwards he toured the medical schools of the Continent, and continued his studies at Guy's and St. Thomas's Hospitals. In 1817 he was appointed assistant physician at the latter, and some years later senior physician. To him we owe the use of the stethoscope in England and many innovations in medical treatment. University College next became the scene of Elliotson's labour, and the Hospital owes its origin to him. Baron Dupotet, a follower of Mesmer, visited England in 1837, and Elliotson was led to investigate mesmerism. His experiments at the Hospital were ridiculed, and finally forbidden; so he

resigned his post there in 1838. He was asked to deliver the Harveian Oration in 1846, and chose mesmerism as his subject. His statements were met with abuse and disbelief, but he continued his experiments till his death in 1868.

Dr. James Esdaile, of Perth, did much to prove the value of mesmerism in producing anæsthesia and abolishing shock after severe operations. Dr. Esdaile was also a graduate of Edinburgh University; but he did not make his first mesmeric experiment till 1845, when he operated on a native at Hooghley, India, under hypnotic anæsthesia. He was afterwards so successful that a small Government Hospital was placed at his disposal in Calcutta, where he performed hundreds of major operations painlessly. He died in 1859.

But the first man in England to discover the real influence of suggestion on the human mind was Mr. James Braid. He was born in Fife, 1795, and also graduated at Edinburgh, where he practised for some time. Later he went to Manchester, where he spent the remainder of his life. In 1841 he witnessed a "mesmeric séance" for the first time. After being present at others, and experimenting among his friends, he became convinced that the phenomena were purely subjective. Two years later he published his views in book form, and proposed that the phenomena attending his séances, etc., should be termed hypnotic (from the Greek *hypnos*—sleep) instead of mesmeric. He always tried to dispel the idea of any mystery about his proceedings, and said he could teach any intelligent medical man to obtain the same results. In 1859 an account of Braid's hypnotic work reached Bordeaux, and from that time the value of hypnotism has never been lost sight of in France. Braid died in 1860. Hypnotism apparently languished in England for many years, but to-day the influence of suggestion is acknowledged and used therapeutically in every European country; this revival is largely due to the energy of Dr. Liébeault, of Nancy. Suggestion is a most powerful aid to cure in most nervous or functional diseases, and it can be used with marked benefit for the relief of pain due to organic lesions. In France its use is wisely restricted to medical men, and performances by public entertainers are illegal.

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(To be continued.)

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