

Clinical Notes and Cases.

Notes on a Case Treated by Hypnotic Suggestion.⁽¹⁾ By
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MR. PRESIDENT AND GENTLEMEN,—You will, I know, agree with me that there is no doctor who has not frequently been at a loss to know what treatment to adopt in a case which, although apparently simple and straightforward, continued to show no signs of improvement, and when we are dealing with mental cases this is, I think, especially noticeable. But, after all, we must admit that the means at our disposal for the treatment of mental diseases are very inadequate—differing widely from many medical and surgical conditions in which the only and proper treatment is invariably followed by recovery. In most mental diseases I am afraid we must acknowledge that there is still no specific treatment guaranteed to cure any given case: recoveries frequently occur when least we expect them, cases which we deem recoverable frequently disappoint us.

I feel justified, therefore, in bringing the following case to your notice as illustrating a method of treatment which, at least, should not be lost sight of in dealing with cases which are presumably, shall I say, hopelessly mental, and in connection with this case I am raising the question of treatment by hypnosis and suggestion.

This form of treatment is at present giving rise to much discussion. We all know, I think, how much suggestion, with or without hypnosis, has been used during the recent war, when dealing with cases of shell-shock, neurasthenia, hysteria, and cases showing a variety of symptoms common to each of these conditions. Hypnosis has been used in order to produce sleep; I have seen it used, and have used it myself with excellent results. Along with suggestion it has been used to cure many conditions, and by making the patient, as it were, live through his experience again, and thereby reinstating the emotion of fear, mutism, amnesias, stammering, tremors and hysterical contractures have been successfully cured.

Quite recently, in the *British Medical Journal* (²), there appeared a short and interesting article on "Hypnosis, Suggestion, and Dissociation," by Dr. William Brown, and with that writer we will, I think, agree when he says that the one satisfactory method of treating the various forms of functional nervous disorders is that of mental analysis and re-education, and he suggests the term "autognosis" or self-knowledge, which embraces the two conceptions of analysis and re-education, and is better than the term "psycho-analysis." Dr. Brown goes on to point

out that suggestion with hypnosis is undesirable for the reason that it treats the symptoms and not the cause, and that the patient is passive and abnormally suggestible.

I think it is difficult, however, to draw a sharp distinguishing line between the cause and the symptoms. By mental analysis we may get at the root of the illness, and perhaps find out the cause of the symptoms, and then by re-education the *symptoms* may be, as it were, *made* to disappear.

Whilst this is true, it is equally true that if persistent and distressing *symptoms* can be made to disappear the normal cerebral mechanism has a chance of re-establishing itself, and the person, cured from his illness, may then return to what was his normal. What I mean to suggest is that it is not *always*, in my opinion, necessary before a recovery can be obtained to probe into the hidden depths of a person's life and try to find a "flaw," or attempt to correlate some circumstance in a person's past life-history with present symptoms. There are some who are not contented until they find, or imagine they have found, some circumstance in connection with a person's sexual life, but with these observers I cannot agree. I willingly admit that the sexual influence as part of one's life—for, after all, it is an instinct, mysterious, of great importance, but often latent—is of considerable importance, but I fail to see why what is a perfectly normal part of one's, so to speak, "make up," should be blamed, as it so often is, for producing all kinds of mental states and symptoms.

When we have to deal with an apparently chronic mental case, or at least with one which has for many months shown marked mental symptoms, such a method as treatment by hypnosis with suggestion would, at first sight, appear to offer no hopeful chance of recovery. The following case, however, shows that even a long-standing case can be successfully dealt with, and the result obtained even from this one case certainly justifies the opinion that treatment by this method is always worth consideration.

The case which I bring to your notice is that of a young lady, æt. 20, who came as a voluntary boarder to Bootham Park Hospital. Her hereditary history is unimportant. Up to the commencement of her illness she was in every way normal mentally, although she was of a keen, sensitive, artistic, and highly-strung nature.

About eighteen months before the onset of her illness she was treated for a severe attack of anæmia, and, although she made a good recovery, she was left in a rather reduced state of health.

As in the case of most people, the war had made a marked impression upon her, not only on account of her fiancé's unknown fate—for he was a prisoner of war—but also on account of the terrible sufferings to which our men were exposed, and, as her mother said, the appalling

bloodshed seemed to "get on her nerves." In addition to this she seems to have thought a great deal about the war from a religious point of view, and, like many other people, tried to find out from Biblical comparisons and references if it in any way portrayed the approaching end of the world.

These thoughts caused her to become dull and rather depressed—perhaps quite a natural depression for a person who was so much affected and so much impressed by all the truly terrible circumstances which the war entailed. Suddenly all her symptoms became more pronounced, and, from what I think was an almost natural depression, she passed into a state of profound apathy, with some confusion, intense misery, and at times marked emotionalism, a condition which remained more or less unchanged up to the time of her admission to Bootham Park on April 16th, 1919. Careful investigation of the history in connection with the onset of this marked change for the worse in her condition revealed the fact that it immediately followed on a dream, which was as follows: She dreamt that the sun and moon came into collision, and that, as a result, there was poured out over the whole world a deluge of blood, in which she, along with others, was to be submerged. She awakened in the morning in a state of fear, and felt convinced that she was on the brink of some great catastrophe. She became confused and dazed, depressed and emotional, and, after remaining more or less in this state for a few months, she, of her own accord, sought admission to Bootham Park.

On admission her expression and general demeanour denoted great misery. She looked dazed and terrified, readily admitted that she felt very ill, but on many points her conversation was quite rational. She became very emotional and pleaded with me to make her better, saying that she felt as if she was living in a mist and that she felt detached from everything. Her misery found its outlet in copious weeping, and I was at once struck by the complete absence of any of the usual ideas which are so commonly associated with the true melancholic state—I mean the self-accusations and the melancholic delusions. I felt very strongly—and at that time I had not obtained the true history—that there was something to account for her condition, and, further, even then she appeared to me to be as if in a "dream-state." Her physical condition showed nothing abnormal, but she was much reduced in health and her cardiac action was somewhat feeble. On the evening of the day of her admission I visited her, and endeavoured to get into conversation with her and explain her symptoms. She did not readily converse with me and did not appear to understand all that I was trying to impress upon her. I decided, therefore, to use hypnosis as an aid to suggestion, and in the usual way I put her into a condition of very light sleep. At first, when I was impressing upon her to try

and detach her mind and think of sleep, she became very restless, but this soon disappeared ; she closed her eyes and passed into a condition of absolute calm, which was immediately followed by light sleep. During this state she was able to answer my questions and listen to my suggestions. I explained her condition fully to her, told her that her misery and strange thoughts were all the result of her dream, and impressed upon her that, as she now understood her condition thoroughly, she would in the morning awaken from her sleep feeling better.

I then put her more deeply under hypnosis and left her sleeping. She slept for about five hours and in the morning was calm and composed. She had a quiet day, slept for over eight hours on that night, and in the morning was in every way rational. She at once said that she was better and wished to return home. I urged her to remain here for a short while in order to build up her strength, but as she was determined to leave I communicated with her mother. Her mother visited her and said that she found her perfectly natural in every way—a state which she had not seen her in for about seven months. The mother urged me to allow her to take her home, and finally I consented. She was discharged from here on April 21st, five days after her admission and about seven months after the onset of her illness. I heard from the mother about three weeks ago, and she informed me that her daughter was keeping well, but was still in somewhat poor physical health.

The facts which I have related in connection with this case and the results speak for themselves, and certainly give strong support to the belief that suggestion treatment may be of very great value, and that suggestion may be greatly helped by hypnosis. It is not often that in mental hospitals we meet with cases which can be dealt with in this way, but I am convinced that hypnotic suggestion could in a great many cases be employed with excellent results.

To me this case was one of great interest, and I am pleased to have had this opportunity of bringing it to your notice.

(¹) Read at the Annual Meeting of the Medico-Psychological Association of Great Britain and Ireland at York on July 22nd, 1919.—(²) *Brit. Med. Journ.*, June 14th, 1919.