

## PART II.—REVIEWS.

*Les Somnambules extra-lucides—leur influence au point de vue du développement des Maladies Nerveuses et Mentales.* Par Le Docteur LAURENT DE PERRY. Paris: Librairie J. B. Baillière et Fils, 1897. 8vo, pp. 226. Pr. 6 fr.

Dr. de Perry selected as the subject of his inaugural thesis (the present work) the question of the influence of visits to fortune-tellers, faith-healers, and such like upon the minds of those who consult them; a study undertaken at the suggestion of Dr. Régis, to whom the book is dedicated. The four chapters into which the book is divided, deal, the first, with the history of fortune-telling, well illustrating the truth that the credulity of the ignorant is evergreen; the second, with the circumstances under which fortune-tellers carry on their trade, and their salient characteristics, especially with a view to determining the nature of, and explaining the apparent strength of, the influence which many quacks hold on some minds. The last two chapters, and the most important ones, deal with the clinical history of cases of mental and nervous diseases which are either determined by, or aggravated by the so-called clairvoyant fortune-tellers; and with the medico-legal aspect of certain of these cases and of others of a similar nature.

“Somnambule” is, in French popular parlance, a generic term which includes faith-healers, fortune-tellers, thought-readers, etc., with a different meaning to the scientific word “somnambule” or somnambulist; and it is unfortunate that some such unequivocal and inclusive term as sorcerer, which we take it is a person who pretends to tell fates (Fr. “sort,” fate—hence “sorcier”), is not more generally used here and abroad instead of “somnambule,” fortune-teller, clairvoyant, etc. The definition of a “somnambule extra-lucide,” according to Dr. de Perry, is a person who either in the sleeping state, or in a state of simulated sleep, or in the waking state, attributes to himself or herself the power of speaking concerning the past, of knowing the present, and predicting the future; of giving consultations to, and undertaking the treatment of the sick; of influencing friends and enemies, etc.; these marvellous results being attempted

by means in reality most simple, although claiming to be supernatural; and all for the sake of lucre.

Needless to add that historical research shows that this type has always existed—"Nihil novum sub sole;" for the Chaldeans, the Jews, the Greeks, the Romans, etc., etc., had their astrologers, magicians, sorcerers, necromancers, etc., and Dr. de Perry's short account of their doings in history is not the least interesting part of his work. Moreover, just as we find, nowadays, that the consultations of our modern sorcerers may exercise a pernicious influence on some minds, we read that a sorceress is said to have been responsible for the insanity of the Emperor Caligula; and in olden times as to-day the infusion of magic herbs was prescribed by these quacks. In some respects we are less well protected against the devices of sorcerers, and one of Dr. de Perry's grievances against the laws of France is that a satisfactory prosecution of these pests is difficult and often impossible. When poor Charles VI. of France lay ill, an obscure sorcerer was summoned from Guyenne to his bed, but his incantations had no result but "to aggravate the mental affection from which the King was suffering." Two magicians called in subsequently likewise made him worse—with fatal consequences to themselves; for "carnifex capite truncavit." The modern sorcerer's penalty is fortunately (or unfortunately) less severe; the Mdle. Lenormands, Cagliostros, Cheiros, etc., have fallen on more merciful times.

In investigating the modus operandi of modern sorcerers, our author has had good opportunities, for Bordeaux is apparently one of the French towns in which their trade is most lucrative—"le paradis terrestre des somnambules;" as many as fifty well-known adepts flourish there. The best kind of practice of this art is carried on by the sorcerer—the medium, who is usually hysterical or highly neurotic—in association with the "magnetiser," who, sad to relate, may be a medical man. As regards the pretended lucidity of the medium, Dr. de Perry only corroborates the general belief of the scientific in concluding that certain phenomena exhibited are due to hypnotic suggestion, and that a good deal is simply humbug. When opportunities have presented themselves of carefully investigating all the circumstances of the case, checking results by counter-experiments, etc., as with Dr. Teste's patient enquired into by the Académie de Médecine, and a case recorded by Pitres, no evidence of

any miraculous gift on the part of the sorcerer has been forthcoming. "The lucidity and good faith of 'somnambules' are equivalent, that is to say, they only exist virtually."

While, as has already been pointed out by Pitres in his "Leçons Cliniques sur l' Hystérie," the consultations of sorcerers may endanger patients' lives (prescription of large doses of poisons), it is especially their influence upon individuals predisposed to mental and nervous diseases which is to be feared, and the cases which the author brings forward leave no shadow of doubt upon that point. Harmful suggestion, a subtle poison indeed, plays here a most important part.

In some instances, the mental affection originates directly after the intervention of the sorcerer; in others a pre-existing morbid state is simply aggravated by it. The notes of seven cases are given to illustrate the former group, including a case of hysterical mania with hallucinations of sight, etc., a case of delusional insanity, etc., and the notes of three cases to illustrate the latter.

Moreover there is a third group in which hypnotism or spiritualism may enter as a nefarious agent; for, while hypnotism may do good in suitable cases, and applied with prudence, it may be the source of serious disorders in certain neurotic cases; Cases XI.-XVII., recorded by Dr. de Perry, show the evil results brought about by hypnotic experiments and spiritualistic séances at the hands of these ignorant quacks.

In the last chapter the author shows that crime may be the outcome of the sorcerer's intervention—suicide, theft, and murder. In view of the unsatisfactory condition of the French law directed against unqualified medical practice, Dr. de Perry suggests certain modifications of it which might protect society against at any rate the perpetration of criminal acts at the instigation of sorcerers.

Outside the circle of students of mental science, this book might profitably be read by a number of people who look upon spiritualism, hypnotism, palmistry, fortune-telling, etc., as suitable pastimes and entertainments, and as a means of amusing guests at garden parties and such like; much harm in individual cases may be the result. An unfortunate reading of a hand, a hasty prediction, the thoughtless reading of a character, etc., may on occasion be the starting point of morbid ideas in the minds of predisposed subjects, as is exemplified by Obs. xvii., p. 172.