THE "EMMANUEL CLASSES."

BY E. T. BREWSTER.

In all our runnings to and fro, and our consequent increase of knowledge, there is hardly anything more calculated to take away the mental breath than certain recent excursions of the youngest of the sciences into the region of the sub-conscious mind. It turns out that underneath the bright and tidy apartment in which the conscious soul keeps house, there stretch cellars and galleries, chambers and caverns and sunless seas of our human nature, whereof no man knows the limits.

Especially striking, of late years, has been the effect upon mind and body of suggestions skilfully addressed to this strange other self and accepted by it. Bernheim, of the Nancy Hospital, dealing with an especially suggestible patient about to visit the dentist, tells him, without hypnosis, that he will feel no pain whatever. The man, believing the impossible, submits without discomfort to the loss of five grinders; and when by way of experiment, the operator twisted the last round and round in its socket, the victim minded not at all and laughed as he spat out the blood. Dr. Woods of Hoxton House Asylum, London, on the basis of more than one thousand cases, reports mitigation of distressing symptoms by suggestion, often without hypnosis, in such unlikely diseases as rheumatic and typhoid fever, pneumonia, pleurisy, and even tabes dorsalis. One has only to dip into the writings of such eminent physicians and men of science as Charcot, Bernheim, Wetterstrand, Bramwell, Tuckey, van Renterghem, Janet, Prince, Sidis, to find himself in a world where the working of miracles is a part of mere office routine.

Naturally, the special field of the new psychotherapeutics is the mental and nervous diseases, especially the milder sorts which are unaccompanied by organic lesions. One recalls at once the strange case of "Miss Beauchamp" with her four alternating personalities studied by Dr. Morton Prince, Professor Janet's "Mme,
D." who forgot everything as fast as it happened, Rev. Thomas C. Hanna to whom Dr. Boris Sidis restored the lapsed memories of his entire previous life. One might multiply such cases indefinitely. One and all they yielded to treatment largely psychic and nine-tenths suggestion. Curiously, the latest discovery of scientific medicine is that there is such a thing as a mental disease.

Curiously, too, with Dr. Sidis's recognition of the "hypnoidal" and related conditions, and the general tendency now-a-days to dispense with hypnotism and to tap the sub-consciousness by way of more normal states, the methods of science tend to assimilate themselves to the time-honored devices of quackery. The whole tribe of metaphysical healers, mind-curists, viti-culturists, magnetic healers, astrological health guides, medical clairvoyants, vibrationists, psychics, occultists, osteopathists, together with the practitioners of all the rest of the original, unique, and only genuine systems, have always worked their cures largely by suggestion without hypnosis. They all, under various forms, appeal from the body to the soul. Naturally, having a method at bottom sound, they have cured with it, even if they have also killed.

The victim of one of the milder nervous diseases, who without knowing precisely what is the matter with him feels generally out of sorts with himself and the world, ought, of course, to put himself in the hands of some medical man who has made a specialty of blues and fidgets. Such are, as yet, unfortunately, few, inaccessible, and expensive. A quack also may cure him, though with the quack he is taking long chances. Least likely of all men to do such an one any good is the general practitioner. The ordinary medical man, trained to treat only such afflictions as manifest themselves in pain or pulse or temperature, is, as an eminent psychologist lately remarked, about as competent to deal with a disorder of the soul, as a veterinary to treat a case of hereditary gout.

Practically then, as things are now for nine out of ten sufferers from neurasthenia, hypochondria, nervous headache, morbid fears, periodic depression, irritability of temper, nervous dyspepsia, and the rest of the "imaginary" diseases, the only hope is to get worse, develop, let us say alcoholism, or actual insanity. Then they stand a chance to be taken in hand and cured. Otherwise all but a favored few drag out their lives, at the worst unable to earn a livelihood or adjust themselves to any plane in society; even at the best getting through their day's work at such a cost that there remains no margin of profit on their labor. Such persons are often of no mean natural parts. Intelligent, sensitive, keenly alive to their condition, they
suffer cruelly from all sorts of disorders, lacking the kindly anodyne that is apt to accompany bodily afflictions; while frayed nerves and hyperesthseias of the special senses bring them pains which no well person can understand.

To such "unhappy neuropathic subjects who live on the borders of insanity without ever fully entering it" a single Christian body makes a special mission. Emmanuel Church in Boston, extending its ancient charge concerning the sinful, the sick and the poor, has in these last days undertaken to care also for the nervous. Thus at the same time it withstands heresy and false doctoring.

Such an attempt is by no means inappropriate. In any case the psychopathic subject is to be cured largely by faith—faith in the suggestion offered by his physician, faith in the methods of some quack, faith in the tenets of some semi-religious body. Whenever the victim of insomnia really believes in his heart that the electric vibrator, or the chapter from Science and Health, or the commands of the eminent specialist are going to send him to eight hours of blessed sleep, to sleep he will inevitably go. If then, one is to be saved by some sort of faith, what is better than a faith in science supplemented by a faith in God?

The particular Church which has undertaken this most significant enterprise is itself peculiarly well chosen for its task. Of all Protestant bodies, the Episcopalians have their roots set deepest in the past, are most especially the heirs of the Christian ages. The denominational label is itself a guarantee of sobriety and good taste. Even the building suggests sanity. In it, the paint and plaster, the nondescript architecture of the ordinary American city church edifice are replaced by sand-stone and dark oak, while the middle-Gothic manner of the whole is carried out to the least detail. It is a very unusual building. Its design breathes consistent faith; its structure, reality.

Nor is the practical conduct of this mission to the nervously afflicted less dignified than its material setting. The Rector of the church, Rev. Elwood Worcester, Ph.D., D.D., and his assistant, Rev. Samuel McComb, D.D., who have especial charge of this work, meet in the usual way such persons as care to consult them privately. On such occasions the pastor's study, becoming a sign of the times, resembles a consultant's office. Half the patients are from out of town, a considerable majority are, at the beginning, unknown to the clergymen. There is an attendant to take their names, their cases are recorded as if they were putting themselves into the hands of any specialist. Indeed there are present, one or two young physi-
cians, specialists in nervous diseases and in sympathy both with Emmanuel Church and the Psychopathological Society, to add their special knowledge to the experience and insight of the two pastors. In one way and another, the afflicted are advised, helped in various special ways, and when the case seems to require it, recommended to the care of a general practitioner to be set right in body before they can be benefited in mind. Often, for this mission is something better than self-supporting, the gifts of the well-to-do bring needed comforts or respite from over-work to those who suffer also in estate. Thus in various ways are the more sorely troubled made ready for the teaching function of the Church.

On Wednesday evenings from eight until a little after nine, Emmanuel Church is filled—filled a great deal fuller than city churches are wont to be of a Sabbath morn—with a company which in outward aspect is not to be distinguished from any city congregation. He who looketh upon the heart probably sees a very different sight. Here come for help those who suffer in mind or soul or nerves or will. There are business men hard hit in pocket who lack the courage to begin again, mothers whose children get on their nerves, wives who for sheer weariness have ceased to love their husbands, persons in authority who have lost their nerve and cannot control their subordinates, the bereft who grieve beyond reason. There are school teachers who have become suddenly afraid of their pupils, students whose brains have turned to cotton wool, book-keepers who add figures in their dreams,—the unbalanced of all sorts, who drink when they should not, or do not sleep when they should, who have lost the zest of life and for mere nerve weariness find it no longer worth living.

To all such, Emmanuel Church brings its evangel. Hymn and service, the solemn surroundings, the sense of companionship in affliction, attune their minds to the preacher’s words. Simply, with much reiteration, the clergyman, or the physician who sometimes takes his place, explains the modern doctrine of the subliminal and its relation to their conscious lives. He shows them how to utilize the hidden resources of their own nature, to gain self-control, “to draw from their own wells.” He instructs them in the practical details of auto-suggestion, tells them the signs of the permeable, “hypnoidal” state between sleeping and waking, when the subliminal consciousness wells up to view, and as Myers told the British Medical Association, the foreman of our mortal shop shuts down the works and comes to take orders from the proprietor.

Auto-suggestion is, then, the basis of the treatment. This is
re-enforced, on the one hand, by the strange condition of high suggestibility, which, as Sidis and others have shown, is induced in any throng brought together by a common and unifying interest; and on the other, by that most wholesome of all emotional experiences, a dignified religious faith.

For the whole affair is in the highest degree dignified and decent. After the formal address there may be a few moments of testimony from the laymen in the audience, or the leader, perhaps an eminent specialist, may answer briefly written questions which have been deposited in a box near the door. Sometimes at the end of the service, as many as care to do so, agree, by raising the hand, to make for the coming week a special effort in some particular direction—to avoid worry, let us say, or ill-temper, or over-work. One need not dwell on the advantage of collective effort nor on the comfort to the nervously afflicted, always liable to excessive egoism, of realizing how large is their company in misery. Nothing let me add, is done without the sanction of competent medical authority.

This series of meetings began in November and continued until the approach of hot weather. In February the movement had so far grown that another set of meetings were arranged for Monday afternoons at five and continued for some six weeks. These, held in the chapel instead of the main church, are naturally intended to be of a somewhat more intimate nature than the larger gatherings. There is more chance for the interchange of personal experience, more opportunity for individual instruction and advice, and the lending of appropriate and helpful books. Even this, however, is a distinctly formal service, always dignified and sane—though no doubt invalids telling of their pains may at times seem unduly prolix to other invalids waiting to tell of theirs.

The main thing is, however, that the scheme works. Certain kinds of devils do come out by prayer and fasting. I cite a few typical cases on the authority of Dr. McComb.

There was, for example, a clergyman, to give due precedence to the cloth, who sick with the cure of souls, could sleep only with the aid of drugs. A year of this, and life had become a wretched slavery to narcotics, a bondage doubly grievous to one in his position. Almost in despair over his condition and prospects, he attended the Emmanuel classes. He was taught to sleep, learned his lesson—and slept. Now he is substantially cured and free. But with a contrariness unfortunately common in nervous cases, even now at times he loses faith and for the moment sinks.
Like this, but even more serious is the case of a young woman the victim of nervous prostration. This showed itself as almost constant insomnia combined with fixed ideas and periodic maniacal outbursts. Within a week this woman had begun to sleep, and while she was still far from being well, her mental states had become normal and she was sane again. Dr. McComb notes, somewhat naively, that in other instances "attendance at the Wednesday night meeting has been followed by a peaceful sleep to which the patient has for a long time been a stranger."

Or to turn to less serious cases—which after all would appear to be the special field of this unique mission—an experienced and perhaps too conscientious school teacher simply lost her nerve. She came to fear the children under her care, and in consequence became unable to control them, while her condition was aggravated still farther by fear that she should be driven to abandon her profession. In this situation she became a member of the Emmanuel classes, learned to understand her trouble and the way out. Her faith in herself was restored. Believing herself to be able she became so; and is now doing her work better than ever. To a slightly different type belongs the case of a business man who suffered from a sort of moral anesthesia. The common incidents of life ceased to call forth their normal emotional reactions. To joy or pain, the happiness or the misfortunes of his fellows, he could present only a moral callousness that was cutting him off from everything that makes life worth living at all; so that life, ceasing to be emotionally interesting, became indifferent to him. This man was instructed to treat himself by appropriate suggestions repeated aloud mechanically to himself as he went to sleep. Whatever may have been the precise nature of his trouble, under the treatment advised, the lapsed moral feelings attached themselves once more to his waking mind, so that at last accounts he reported himself much improved and fairly on the road to recovery.

One would like to keep on indefinitely with cases of which these are typical. I content myself with noting that while no false hopes are ever held out to those who suffer from incurable diseases, such persons are often relieved of unnecessary symptoms and supererogatory pains, and taught to bear calmly the inevitable.

On the other hand, there appear also at the Emmanuel classes not a few persons who suffer from some of the common lighter diseases of body and are the patients of regular practitioners. These are, one need not say, never treated for their particular infirmities. Nevertheless, much can be done to instill something of the cheerful
courage which, as every nurse and physician knows, often makes
the difference between a prompt and thorough recovery and a re-
tarded and imperfect one.

In short then, the lectures and classes and private conferences
at Emmanuel Church do nothing that physicians do not do, nor do
they do it in any essentially different way. Yet the contagion of
numbers, the appeal to religious motives, the economy in saying a
thing to five hundred persons at once, enable the Church to supple-
ment most efficiently the hospital and the consultant’s office. Sud-
den and miraculous cures have been common enough through the
Christian and the heathen ages. The mission at Emmanuel Church
sets in motion inner processes which heal slowly by the *vis medi-
catrix naturae*. The methods are the methods of science, but of
science re-enforced by the power of an ancient faith.

The movement has, in addition, certain wider aspects. It re-
stores health to the infirm; it also hints at restoring ancient and
unused powers to the Christian Church. While the philosopher is
explaining how priesthood and medicine, once a single profession,
have become differentiated into two, behold they are one again.
While the apologist is explaining why the healing miracles have
cesssed from the modern Church, they begin again. While the clergy,
with one voice, are lamenting the inroads of the newer religions
and therapeutic cults, their single claim to attention is surpassed.
At least Emmanuel Church is meeting a realized need. Three
months after these classes had begun, and long after the novelty
had worn off so that the newspaper headline knew them no more,
I heard the Assistant Rector preach to pews crowded to discomfort;
when only half an hour before, at another large church a single block
away, there were present for a regular service, and that during
Lent, only the organist, the preacher, seven women, and myself.