THE DRUGGIST FROM NANCY

Whatever else he may have done, Monsieur Emile Coué has at least put the city of Nancy on the map. In spite of its industrial and railway importance, its population of 120,000, its ancient university attended by over 2,000 students, and its noteworthy architectural embellishments, few Americans, except men who served overseas, know anything about it. Nancy has now suddenly become famous, not through the efforts of one of its distinguished scientific professors, but because the proprietor of a pharmacy, a kindly, simple-hearted druggist, having gained a modest competence in compounding prescriptions, retired from business and is devoting himself to relieving the mental distress and anxieties of his fellow-men. Monsieur Coué’s therapeutic theories may be open to question, but his human sympathy is of a fine type, and so we are glad to present to our readers a picture of his personality drawn at close range and to place after it a sketch of M. Coué by a member of The Outlook’s editorial staff.—The Forecasts.

I—MONSIEUR COUE AT HOME

BY LYMAN BEECHER STOWE

On the second of last October we traversed the long, narrow Rue Jeanne d’Arc (romantic in name only) for a long distance, until we came to the number given on our letter of directions and found ourselves in front of a tall two-family stucco house set a few feet back from the pavement and surrounded by a high wall. A group of people were coming out of the iron gate and a badly crippled young man on crutches was being helped up the front steps by a woman, presumably his sister. We were met just inside the gate by a strong-featured, black-eyed French peasant woman, of whom we inquired for Monsieur Coué. After we had explained that we had been told to call at two o’clock and showed our letter, she led us around the house through a little pebbled garden, through a diminutive gate in the rear wall, across a lane, and into another walled and pebbled inclosure on the other side. Here were thirty or forty people of all ages and conditions—peasants predominating—some standing in groups and talking, some walking about, and some seated on long wooden benches. To the left was a small one-story stucco building; to the right a somewhat larger square two-story building, back of which was a kind of tool-house with a wheeled chair or two inside. Several fruit trees completed the landscape.

After a few minutes people began to pour out of the two-story building, all of whom were crowding around a short, thick-set man with gray hair and goatee, waxed mustaches, penetrating brown eyes, and a kindly but quizzical smile. He walked with a slight stoop, and was strong-featured, black-eyed French peasant, of whom perhaps twenty were peasants. As many of us as could find chairs sat down, and the rest of us stood. Monsieur Coué stood in the middle of the larger room and gave us a brief exposition of his theory and method of conscious auto-suggestion. After this he passed around the room and asked each person in turn what his or her trouble was. A woman complained of a pain in her back. He placed the tip of his finger on the spot she indicated, closed her eyes, told her to close hers, and repeated in a rapid and monotonous tone: “Ca passe, ça passe, ça passe” (It’s going, it’s going, it’s going), and kept this up for several minutes. Then he asked her if it had gone. She replied it had, but added, “Out; pour le moment.” He turned upon her and said: “By that remark you will it back at the end of a moment. Say it has gone! Never say ‘It has gone for the moment!’” In several instances his quick repartee brought a laugh all round the room. The atmosphere was one of cheerfulness, almost at times of hilarity, never of sadness and depression. One young peasant woman expressed the fear that she was losing her mind. He assured her that if she really were losing her wits she would probably have no such anxiety, and then he made some remark which made her laugh.

A woman in deep mourning sat near me, evidently a woman of culture, who with her a young girl of twelve or thirteen whose face twisted into contortions every minute or two. She had, I assume, some form of Saint Vitus’s dance. At the close of the conference the face of this unfortunate child was perfectly calm. How long it remained so of course I do not know.

After he had questioned the patients and performed some simple hand-clapping tests designed to demonstrate the dominance of the imagination over the will, he stood in the center of the room with his eyes closed, asked us to close our eyes, and gave us a little talk in which he enjoined us to believe that all our bodily organs were functioning as they should, concluding with the little formula: “Tous les jours, à tous points de vue, je vais de mieux en mieux” (Every day, in every way, I am getting better and better). This we were told to say in monotonous tone and without thought night and morning, counting off each statement on a knotted string—the purpose being to register this idea upon the sub-conscious.

After the conference we made an appointment to meet Monsieur Coué in his office at six o’clock that evening for a private talk. In this talk he told us how he had evolved his theory and method from a study of hypnotism. The hypnotist suggests to his patient while unconscious. Monsieur Coué has the patient suggest to himself while conscious. In the course of the conversation he referred to the pressure under which he was working. He pointed, by way of illustration, to his desk piled almost to overflowing with the day’s mail, as yet unopened. He showed us a large scrap-book entirely filled with newspaper cuttings about his work, and
THE OUTLOOK

II—MONSIEUR COUÉ IN NEW YORK

BY ERNEST HAMLIN ABBOTT

It is the shrewdness in M. Coué's face that makes the first impression; then it is the humor; and, finally, the good nature and the kindliness. If you like the provincial Frenchman, you will like Coué. He is typical of the substantial citizen of a small French town who has perhaps inherited a modest patrimony, has conducted his business wisely, and has saved his francs. He might well be the Mayor of Bazolles. With a reputation that extends over all the world and has spread greatly in America, this short, rather stout, gray-haired, gray-bearded druggist remains in outward appearance just as he would have been if he had continued in his former business.

He not only gives no sign of assuming greatness, but he gives no sign of assuming modesty. There is no assumption of any sort about him. When he disclaims any special powers, he does so, not in a deprecatory manner, but in the way of merely stating a fact that needs to be understood.

This man from Nancy (whose name as he pronounces it sounds like that of former Senator Quay spoken quickly and crisply) definitely disclaims being in any sense a healer. He does not pretend to cure people of anything. He has not the attitude of the physician. Neither has he any of the aspects of the preacher of religion. He is not a prophet of a new faith. He disclaims any special interest in religion or in anything like religion. He offers nothing as a substitute for faith, as he offers nothing as a substitute for medicine.

He seems to be more like a teacher; and not like a college teacher, but like a kindly teacher of children. His methods are simply those of the schoolmaster who wants to get an idea into the schoolchildren's heads.

He has seized upon one idea in psychology. It is that the imagination is the ruler of our unconscious thoughts, decisions, and acts. There is a great deal in our lives that is unconscious. Some writers, without much justification for the term, have called it the subconscious. The familiar old trick of a boy sucking a lemon in the full sight of a German street band in order to make their mouths water and thus incapacitate them for playing is a good illustration of the action of the unconscious. Those German band players, try as they may, cannot avoid their plight. The very sight of that lemon appeals to their imagination and makes the saliva flow.

M. Coué cites an example of the novice on a bicycle who wants nothing at the time so much as to avoid the rock in the road and nevertheless because he imagines himself hitting it makes directly for it. It is this power of the imagination that he asks his fellow-men to employ for their own good. As he says, the imagination leads us. If we lead the imagination, therefore we shall lead ourselves.

M. Coué cites an example of the novice on a bicycle who wants nothing at the time so much as to avoid the rock in the road and nevertheless because he imagines himself hitting it makes directly for it. It is this power of the imagination that he asks his fellow-men to employ for their own good. As he says, the imagination leads us. If we lead the imagination, therefore we shall lead ourselves.

He is apparently perfectly aware of the limits of the power to which he would have us appeal. He knows perfectly well that no amount of imagination will make an eye that is truly blind see, or will enable one suffering from true paralysis to walk. He is not interested particularly in diagnosing disease or in curing those ills with which modern medicine and surgery are battling.

For this reason, he does not greatly interest the modern scientifically trained medical man who engages in his work with the scientific devotion of the biologist. Nevertheless he has perhaps a contribution to make to the professional ideas of the practical physician. He would like to make a course in auto-
suggestion a part of the medical school curriculum. His idea, if grasped by a patient, would make that patient probably more adaptable to treatment. His idea will probably make the lot of many incurable invalids happier.

But chiefly he presents his idea as one which ought to be employed for the better guidance of ordinary normal conduct. He offers it as a guide to enable people to control themselves better, to secure what the conscious will sometimes not only fails to secure but often drives away—as, for instance, sleep, when one for no obvious reason persists in lying awake at night.

What danger there is in M. Coué's teaching is not in the teaching itself, which is essentially a commonplace of psychology, but in the misuse of it and in the false notions that may cluster about it.

The most injurious effect is likely to be the same as that which follows any movement for self-improvement. It will tend to make people think about themselves. It will tend to confirm the no-

(3) Keystone

M. ÉMILE COUÉ ON HIS ARRIVAL IN AMERICA