

"COUEISM"

J. Harding Fisher, S. J., in America

A strange phenomenon is taking place in England. Men and women, it is said, are passing through the streets with a dreamy look in their eyes, murmuring apparently cabalistic, but really familiar words, and as a result of this mere repetition they are hoping soon to be radiating health and happiness. The explanation of the strange fashion is very simple. M. Emile Coué made a visit to London, explained his system of "Self Mastery Through Autosuggestion," American Literary Service, New York, demonstrated its efficacy by actual cures and went back to Nancy, leaving behind him renewed hope for the regeneration of the world. M. Coué has been at his curative work in France for many years, but it is something new in England. Recently it made its way to the United States in the form of a pamphlet and soon perhaps we shall have "Couéism" in full swing in our midst.

One of its chief recommendations is its freedom from complexities. Believe that you are going to get well, says the author, and you will be well. The method of producing this belief is by autosuggestion, that is to say, by implanting the idea in oneself by oneself. Suggestion by another may be necessary to start the process of autosuggestion, but the instrument of health is in the hands of the patient. The simple regime is set down in the author's book. After some preliminary meetings between the practitioner and his patient, which have for their object to produce the proper attitude of mind, the practitioner is instructed to act as follows:

"Before sending away your patient, you must tell him that he carries away with him the instrument by which he can cure himself, and that you are, as it were, only a professor teaching him to use this instrument, and that he must help you in your task. Thus, every morning before rising, and every night before getting into bed, he must shut his eyes and in thought transport himself into your presence, and then repeat twenty times consecutively in a monotonous voice, counting by a string with twenty knots in it, this little sentence: 'Every day, in every way, I am getting better and better.'"

The patient may, if he prefers, particularize the way in which he is getting better, but results will be more universal and more effective if he fixes his mind on general rather than specialized improvement.

At first sight, it would appear that the mere repetition of these words is totally inadequate to effect a cure of any kind, but M. Coué declares that the method indicated gives absolutely marvelous results. Indeed, by following his advice, he says, it is impossible to fail except with two classes: those who cannot understand what is said to them on account of lack of mental development, and those who will not understand. He also adds that it is easy to understand why cures must follow.

M. Coué's explanation of the inevitable connection between the thought of health filling the mind and actual health, is fairly simple, once his assumptions have been granted. There are, he says, in man two absolutely distinct selves, the conscious self and the unconscious self. It is the unconscious self that dominates the organism, and is the grand director of all its functions. This unconscious self presides over all man's actions, whatever they are. Moreover, he declares, every thought filling the mind becomes true for us and tends to transform itself into action. If, therefore, the unconscious self believes that a certain organ functions well, it will function well; if the unconscious self believes that a certain organ functions ill, it will function ill. Health or ill health result, therefore, from the thoughts in the mind, and all that is necessary, in order to regain health, is to make the unconscious self believe that the diseased organ is functioning well. As soon as this thought fills the mind, an order is transmitted by the unconscious self to the affected organ. The organ obeys with docility, and at once, or little by little, performs its functions in a normal manner.

M. Coué illustrates his explanation by an example: On one occasion he assisted at the extraction of a tooth of one of his patients. He suggested to her that she was feeling nothing. Autosuggestion followed on the part of the patient, and she believed that she was feeling nothing. As a consequence, the order to feel nothing was transmitted to the part affected; it obeyed with docility, and the patient actually felt nothing. A hemorrhage ensued, but M. Coué suggested to the patient that the hemorrhage would stop in two minutes. This thought, through autosuggestion, filled her mind; at once her unconscious self sent to the small arteries and veins the order to stop the flow of blood, so they obeyed, contracted naturally, and the flow of blood ceased.

What M. Coué wishes to have effected in the patient is the training of the unconscious self. Make yourself believe that you are going to sleep at night, he says, and insomnia will disappear; make yourself believe that you are going to be cheerful, and depression will leave you, and so of all physical

and moral disorders. Autosuggestion is a veritable panacea. Fill your mind with the thought that you are getting better, and you will get better. Keep on repeating the formula until the thought it conveys becomes encrusted in the unconscious self and health will result automatically. But the will must be kept out of the process, for the will, according to M. Coué, is not free. Whenever the will comes into conflict with the imagination, which, in his terminology, is another word for the unconscious self, the former always and without exception yields to the latter. Therefore, it is useless and even harmful to attempt to re-educate the will, especially in the treatment of moral disorders.

Such is Couéism, and such is the author's explanation of the way it works. As has been the case with many a man before him, M. Coué's practice is better than his principles. The therapeutic value of suggestion and autosuggestion has long been recognized, and from the very beginning of medical science the best physicians have made constant use of the mental factors in the treatment of disease. In following their example, M. Coué has made no new discovery. Assuming that he has had the remarkable success which he claims, and that his ability to eliminate or lessen physical and moral ills has been due, as he says, to his ability to bring to bear on the body the influence of the mind, we shall probably be not far from the truth if we say that his only contribution to the science of healing consists in the fact that he has devised a simple, practical method of producing motor images that tend to react beneficially on the organism. It will do no harm; it may do good, if persons who are morally or physically ill repeat his formula, morning and night.

His explanation of his cures, however, will not bear scrutiny. His fundamental postulate, "that two absolutely distinct selves exist within us," is false. The essential unity of human personality is a fact. If it is sometimes said that we have a secondary personality, this statement is true only in the sense that occasionally or under abnormal circumstances there is, in the phrase of Dr. James J. Walsh, "a tapping of deeper levels in personality than most people realize that they possess."

This theory of dual personality, besides being false is very dangerous. Dr. Walsh years ago pointed out that morality would suffer seriously if the field of autosuggestion were given a quasi-scientific basis. It needs no great metaphysical acumen to see the truth of his warning. If we can only persuade ourselves that the blame for our misdeeds is to be laid, not on our conscious selves, but on another self, the unconscious and absolutely distinct from our conscious self, which acts in blind obedience to autosuggestion, we shall have a very easy way of shirking responsibility. It is of this precisely that M. Coué tries to persuade us. He scouts the very idea of free-will, for he says, to quote one of many passages: "Thus we who are so proud of our will, who believe that we are free to act as we like, are in reality nothing but wretched puppets of which our imagination [another term for the unconscious] holds the strings." Quite logically he says: "Certain criminals commit crimes in spite of themselves, and when they are asked why they acted so, they answer, 'I could not help it, something impelled me stronger than I.'"

Nor does he permit us to say that we are at times responsible. He maintains that it is the unconscious self "which, contrary to the accepted opinion, always makes us act, even and above all against our will when there is antagonism between these two forces." The implications in the moral order involved in such statements are so clear that they render comment superfluous.

It is also superfluous to call attention to the futility of a system that first sets up "the unconscious" as the general director of all our actions, and proceeds to describe in detail the manner in which the unconscious acts. Unless M. Coué is possessed of conscious unconsciousness, neither he nor any one else can know anything about the operations of the mysterious thing of which he speaks so confidently. His unconscious self is a figment of his imagination, and his descriptions of its operations is imagination in its second flight.

M. Coué's theory is an insult to the Creator. God is not the bungler He would be if the theory were true. Man has an ineradicable conviction that he has free-will; that he is under the obligation of ruling his actions by this will in the light of reason, and that he is, therefore, responsible for his conduct. According to Couéism, man is only a wretched puppet, living in a world of delusion, and this by the direct action of God. Man has conscious intelligence and will, the obvious purpose of which is rational self-direction; but, according to Couéism, both have failed of their purpose, and the only hope of self-direction is consciously to control the unconscious. An all-wise God could not make such blunders.

Our thoughts are friends or enemies, they are our glory or shame, our happiness or misery, our solace or destruction—summed up, they are the Alpha and Omega of life.

IS THERE A WAY OUT?

That the present industrial situation is hopelessly tangled and that there is no immediate prospect of a satisfactory solution of the difficulties, by which we are not only confronted but surrounded and hemmed in from all sides, requires no further proof. It is painfully and patently obvious. The backbone of the strike may be broken; the mines, with the beneficent assistance of bayonets and machine guns, may be kept open; the railroads may keep on moving freight and passengers, and the strikers may be starved into surrender and absolute submission, yet this will not settle our labor troubles nor usher in an era of industrial peace and prosperity. The smothered fire will break out again; and at each renewed outbreak the situation will be worse and more difficult to cope with.

Industry has gotten into a blind alley. It cannot get any further on the old road. The strike has become a chronic condition. It returns with inevitable and rhythmic periodicity. Under such circumstances, the complete breakdown of the economic order is but a question of time. It will be impossible for industry to bear indefinitely the terrific waste involved in the ever recurring walkouts. The drain is excessive and constitutes a loss that eventually must lead to absolute exhaustion. Worse than that, by reason of the repeated strikes and lockouts the relations between capital and labor have become so strained that some day they will snap. That is the future which society is facing. There is no exaggeration in this description of the situation nor can it be accused of undue pessimism. Much cause exists for alarm. Entirely too much explosive material is heaped up round about us. And, in America, events travel at an enormous speed and very little is needed to set them in motion.

Some, very foolishly, imagine that the ruin of the labor unions will bring us industrial peace and that, when the open shop throughout the country and in all branches of industry has been established, things will go smoothly. That is a fatal error and a destructive delusion. If organized labor, through which the wage-earner finds legitimate and articulate expression, is crushed, industrial disorders will multiply and the last things will be worse than the first. Organized labor stands between society and anarchy. It is well to remember that the articulate speech of organized labor is infinitely better than the inarticulate mutterings and the mad grumblings of discontent and despair that come from a laboring class that has been deprived of a legitimate means to express its grievances and voice its reasonable claims.

The public, of course, resents the inconvenience which is put by reason of the strikes. It demands consideration of its rights. But what does it do to secure the rights of the workingman? Is it at all concerned that the laborer receive his just hire, as long as it enjoys peace and well being? The object of society is to protect the rights of all and to see that no injustice is done to anyone. If it neglects this duty, it need not be surprised that the injured party will try to secure his own rights regardless of the welfare of society. If the community at large persistently tolerates abuses and wrongs against any section of its members, that section, in seeking relief from these abuses and wrongs, does not consider the inconvenience of the community. If redress can be found through the established agencies of society, it would undoubtedly be wrong to resort to self-help that might interfere with the welfare of others. The public must realize that if labor has duties towards society, society also has obligations towards labor. The public cannot repudiate its duties and, nevertheless, insist on its rights. Unless, therefore, we one and all unite in supporting the claims of the workers to a fair share in the goods of this life, both material and spiritual, we ourselves are to blame for the effects of his resentment, for we are siding with those who refuse him justice and fair dealing. This side of the problem has been conveniently overlooked by the public. It is time that it should awaken to its grave responsibility.

That will be the only way out of the industrial tangle if the public makes it its duty to probe industrial conditions to the very bottom and remove whatever injustice there exists. Experience has sufficiently and abundantly taught us that capital and labor cannot arrive at a fair settlement between them. There remains nothing then but that the matter be taken out of their hands and settled for them in an impartial and just manner. In this settlement, however, property rights must not be held more sacred than personal rights and the claim of labor to a living wage must be absolutely recognized. Only in social justice can we arrive at social peace and prosperity.—Catholic Standard and Times.

We ought to rejoice in seeing and realizing how of ourselves we can do nothing, and to praise God, Who can do all things, Who can even make use of us to do great things, if we only let Him.—Father Arsenius, O. F. M.

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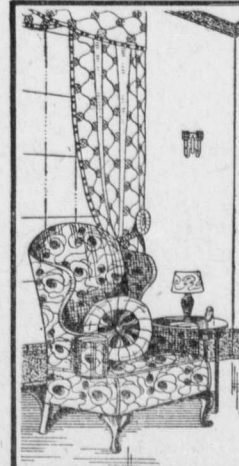


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