

Paper on "Occultism" or "Spiritualism"

FOREWORD.

My first thought, when asked to write a paper for this evening, was to tell you something about the work I am most interested in at present. We have been reading and hearing a great deal about China and India, and were particularly interested in the accounts of midwifery in those lands, so that to sketch you a contrast between midwifery as conducted at Home and Abroad would have been an easy task.

Had I done so, you would have seen that that to which their most anxious thought and attention is devoted, is—not asepsis—oh no, they know nothing of harmful microbes, but the dire necessity of appeasing the multitudes of malignant spirits waiting to injure mother and babe.

My interest being thus aroused in spiritualism, I began to study it, and was horrified to find how great was the hold it was acquiring in our own lands. I knew, as you do, that many people were putting themselves in the hands of metaphysicians, mindhealers, or whatever you call them. Time was when we saw no harm in doing so. I knew also that our own town abounded in fortune-tellers, and that scores of people distracted by anxiety were applying to occult sources for news of their loved ones. Knowing all this, I longed to speak to you about it, but hesitated lest the subject might be considered by some uninteresting, or unsuited to this audience, and realising my own inability to do justice to it.

As the outcome of uncertainty, I wrote to the superintendents of two of our mental hospitals and their replies dispelled any shadow of a doubt as regards the suitability of the subject, making me realise that as nurses we should know all about these things, chiefly that we may warn and help others, who are being led on to ground more dangerous than any at Rotorua.

Dr. King's letter speaks for itself.

Dr. J— comments on the coincidence of my writing just after several articles had appeared in their papers on the subject, and telling me how he would have answered certain statements made; and it is our privilege to read that unpublished reply.

COPY OF LETTER FROM DR. TRUBY KING.

"I think your idea to give the nurses an address on the harm done by the growth of occultism, superstition, etc., an excellent one. It always amazes me that persons of any sense can consult fortune-tellers, etc., and attach importance to what they profess to be able to foresee and foretell, and the same applies to the consulting of uneducated and ignorant quacks who profess to be able to cure disease by what they call "suggestion" or 'faithhealing.'

"You ask my opinion and experience as to the mental effects of occultism on the people who deliver themselves over to dabbling in such matters, the effect on the stability of the mind and nervous system.

"One cannot give details in a few lines on so complex a matter; but I may say in general that no class of patient is more unsatisfactory to deal with than the woman (and they, the occultists, are mostly women), who come to us with the history of having been for a longer or shorter period, in the hands of occultists or spiritualists, or of having given much attention to such things.

"The stereotyped story they tell us is that they seem to have lost their 'will-power,' and this loss or normal governing power, tends to involve even the humblest functions of organic life, for instance, control and regulation of the urinary and bowel functions. Twice in the course of three months I was consulted by highly refined middle-aged ladies who had become depressed and melancholic, because after being treated by a 'suggestion expert' and occultist for constipation (which the expert seemed for a time to have cured) they found themselves quite unable to evacuate the bowel, without direct or indirect orders or messages sent repeatedly from the expert.

"One of these ladies, who was travelling round the world, and only sojourning in Dunedin for a few months, found herself unable to leave New Zealand because the bowels failed to clear themselves without messages coming to hand from the expert. She said that if she went to Timaru o