

GREAT CROP OF HEALERS

THIS YEAR'S GROWTH OF FAITH CURES AND PROPHETS.

Many of These Inspired Persons Are Sincerely Ignorant—Others Are "Out for the Stuff" and Prey on the Superstitious—They Are White Men, Black Men, Negro Men, and Thief—Some Examples of Ancient History.

One of the most remarkable phases in the experiences of very many people this year has been the multitudinous recognition of spiritual "healers," religious prophets, and other variously named but equally endowed beings, supposed to possess powers superior to those possessed by the rest of mankind. The year 1896 can be said to date the renaissance of the movement. Never has there been so great a manifestation of real or feigned supernatural power. No fewer than twenty-five healers, prophets, or special sect leaders have gained widespread fame, and hosts of the smaller fry have existed and thrived within the limited horizons of local districts. The range of power claimed by these persons has extended from the simple therapeutic precepts of the religious "doctor" to the more advanced and ambitious assumptions of the "Messiah." The figurants have sprung from every walk of life, from that of the humble peasant to the refined man of science. Nationality has offered no bar to the aspirants. French, Irish, Mexican, Italian, Swiss, negro, Indian, and American have all figured in the movement. The masses influenced have been heterogeneous. The gatherings such, for instance, as clamored for the laying on of the hands of Schlatter have been made up of the dregs of society, as well as of its more favored members; urbanites, country people, natives, foreigners, old, young, the weak in intellect, the physically perfect who wished to gild the lily; the physically imperfect who wished to get well; the lame, the halt and the blind; in short, all sorts and conditions of men, women, and children. Their faith was unbounded in many instances, and where this was the case many cures have been reported. It has been asserted, on the one hand, that it is simply the parable of the apostle walking on the water, and that, on the other, it is simply hypnotic effect, similar to that which the Hindu exerts on his audience at long range, making it see snakes, growing plants, and other objects which do not as a matter of fact exist. Be this as it may, it is proper to say that this faculty of modern healers and prophets is divided between earnest believers in a Heaven-sent power and charlatans.

This has also been a year of spiritual manifestations, of visions, and shrines. Thus we have had Tilly-sur-Seulles, the visions of Pauline Delpont, those of Dolores Luiz, the Mexican Joan of Arc; the visions of Lida Nelson of Pleasant Valley, Ind.; the marvelous cures by the bone of St. Anne, and those by the relic of St. Anthony which is preserved in the Catholic Church of St. Anthony of Padua, in this city. Among the modern healers and prophets we have had Schlatter, the "healer"; Huntsman, the "Modern Christ"; Bedward, the "Black Prophet"; Rodgers of bogus Bible fame; Mlle. Couédon, the "Mouthpiece of the Angel Gabriel"; Vignes, the Swiss healer; "Dr. Dervin," who distributed "Heaven-sent ointment"; Dolores Luiz, mentioned above, the "Vision-Seeing Maiden of Tabasco"; Dr. John S. Willetts, who was the predecessor of Rodgers; Ferdinand Stutzki, the head of the Apostolic Christians; W. E. Hammond, the young Illinois farmer, "who heals by the spirit aid"; Dr. Cyrus Teed, who lives in state on Estero Island, in Florida, and is the leader of the "Koreshans"; F. W. Sandford of Maine, who styles himself the "Chief Apostle of the Holy Ghost and Uz, Bible School"; Bill James, the Puyallup Indian healer; Bradley Newell, one of whose ambitions it is to treat the Prince of Wales, and who is rapidly becoming a millionaire; George Clark, "the great objector of the Vermont Legislature"; Albert Larrabee, Manley Rawson, and others. The list could be continued indefinitely, for healing and prophecy seem to be bred in the air, and to be contagious. In addition, we have had a public-prayer test, colonies of religious free lovers, and a religious sect the members of which sleep in coffins.

One of the greatest "healers" of all time was Alexander Abnoticus. He flourished in the early years of the Christian era, and, by means of his prophet snake, Esculapius, drew thousands to his temple. But his fame was not comparatively greater than that of Francis Schlatter, the "Man Christ." The reason is easily found. Alexander lived when credulity and superstition were rife in nearly all breasts; Schlatter lives after centuries of progress. The encyclopaedia and general enlightenment have raised the present human race to a level far above that of the time of Alexander. Schlatter becomes the more wonderful for all this, or else he must be held as an argument in favor of the unchangeability of mankind. He was born in Alsace-Lorraine forty years ago, but his healing career began in New-Mexico. At one time he lived in Jamesport, L. I., and worked at his trade of cobbler. He made money readily, but spent it all in trying to acquire a thorough knowledge of English. He is a Roman Catholic, but is very liberal minded, and in Denver, where his sway was greatest, he was equally liked by clergymen of both Catholic and Protestant denominations. The man, personally, is simple, uneducated, and uncouth in appearance. His magnetism was acknowledged to be profound by all who came in contact with him, and he exerted a definite influence even on the unbelievers who were treated by him. His manner of wearing his hair gave him an appearance resembling that of the Christ. He looked like an ancient type of spiritualism placed in a modern setting. One of the schools of painting in France delights in pictures like one which shows the crucifixion taking place, but with the cross surrounded by figures of men and women wearing modern blouses, trousers, and skirts. The scene in front of Schlatter's abode in Denver contained just such a motif. His disappearance from the home of Mr. Fox, his patron, was as mysterious as was the first public manifestation of his power. His cures were lauded and his failures were brushed up, but that he did undoubtedly perform miraculous cures was certain, from reports based on good authority. His patients increased until, on the day he disappeared, they numbered 5,000 in line. A note left behind him stated that his "mission" was ended. He had gone, and the suffering crowds bewailed his loss as heartily as though he was the genuine Messiah that many thought him to be.

The "Man Christ," whose name has been successively Mason T. Huntsman, Huntsman Mnason, and "P. B." Mnason, is the accepted head of the "Church of the Living God," which has its headquarters at the "Lord's Farm," near Woodcliff, N. J. This organization has been in existence for several years. At first the members of the sect, who were called "Angel Dancers" by people round about, were subjected to ridicule and even prosecution and imprisonment for breaking some of the laws of the State; but now they are in a certain sense respected and are given the credit of being true to their precepts. The head of the organization is a healer and claims a certain power to banish any or all the ills of those who have faith in the efficacy of prayer. Mnason, who now bases the spelling of his name on certain Biblical chapters, and who says the prefixed initials, "P. B.," have a mythological significance, has, like Schlatter, an intensely magnetic personality, and is rapidly gaining converts to his queer sect. It is, perhaps, the only religious sect which is absolutely without any ceremonial observances. Sunday is observed among the members no more than any other day, the theory being that every day is a Sabbath in itself. The farm tenanted by the sect once belonged to Herman Storms. The latter is now a non-entity in the community. He is very old and at first protested against the Angel and Dancers, but finally succumbed to force of numbers, and argally and deeded his land to his daughter Mary, who is under the control of Mnason. His wife and sons are also in accord with the doctrines of the healer. One of the sons is a graduate of Rutgers College, and is a civil engineer by profession. The colony now numbers about fifteen men and women and the principal tenets of the faith seem to be "unceasing submission to God" and "the continual casting out of the devil." The first part seems to cause the colony no trouble, but the latter part sometimes disarranges the economy of the farm; for his S.anic maj-

esty may, in the eyes of the members of the sect, have entered the food, which must then be instantly destroyed, or the room, from which he must be turned out. These visitations at times render the farm life very uncomfortable. The converts drop their worldly names on entering the community and assume cognomens of Biblical import. Thus there are John the Baptist, Daniel, Matthew, Luke, Mark, and others. As no money is made in any way by the members of the sect, they can be accredited with sincerity in their intentions. But the central figure is Mnason, who is the soul of the organization, and without whom it would languish.

Dr. Cyrus Teed, the "Chicago Christ," who owns Estero Island, in Lee County, Fla., and who is the leader of the "Koreshans," has already been described in THE NEW-YORK TIMES. He is the master as well as the "lord" of his flock, and he rules over them with all the assurance of an absolute monarch. Unlike most of the healers, he has a consort, who is the queen of the colony, and who is known as "Victoria G. O. J. Horesh." His mansion is named "Beth-Ophrah." Teed is a sort of veiled prophet to his followers, who are not, except in the case of a few officials, allowed to enter the sacred palace. The followers are practically slaves, inasmuch as they have signed over to their leader all their worldly goods and are compelled to indulge in a life of unremitting toil, regardless of weather, natural aptitude, or physical ability. Teed, to the Koreshans, is the actual incarnation of Jesus Christ. His followers are "angels," and are supposed to be without sex. There is no marrying nor giving in marriage. The children brought into the colony are taught to believe that Teed is their father. The worship of Teed as God and the blind obedience to his word are the two principal laws of the colony. Teed says he will die soon, but will rise again from the dead, although he will hereafter remain invisible to the faithful through time and eternity. He claims to be able to heal by the laying on of hands, and to be able to duplicate any of the Biblical miracles. He is now preparing for his taking off, and is getting his "New Jerusalem" in readiness for the event. The Koreshans believe he can destroy and create at will, and invest him with supernatural powers. They carry on a manufacturing plant, run two newspapers—"The Flaming Sword" and "The Pruning Shears"—and are quite independent of the outside world. Teed comes nearest of all the moderns to Alexander of Abnoticus.

Thousands of pilgrims flocking to Vialas, in Switzerland, proclaim the wonderful healing powers of M. Vignes. Vignes is a peasant, seventy-two years old. He is of the stern Huguenot type and is well off in this world's goods. He is a faith-curer, and when asked for advice he simply replies: "Have faith and you will be cured." His "magic touch" has, however, cured thousands of various ailments, and the crowds still seek him. It is said that a company is being organized to provide for the accommodation of the pilgrims who hail from Berne, Basle, Zurich, and other places in Switzerland.

The career of Alexander Bedward, the Black Prophet of the West Indies, is indicative of the power of the strong mind to dominate the weak. Bedward called himself the "Prophet of the Lord Jesus." He was arrested by the Government and sentenced to two years' imprisonment for highly seditious language, but he escaped on a technicality. He was once an inmate of an insane asylum, but that does not prevent him from accumulating a considerable fortune from his ignorant followers. His plan was to "bless" the waters of Hope River, so that they would become "healing" in their nature. He blessed them every day, and thousands of negroes of both sexes would bathe in the stream in the hope of becoming purified from their illnesses. The mixing up of the sick and the well, the healthy and the unclean, is said to have propagated much disease. Bedward, with a lieutenant named Shakespeare, would go to the waters every day in regular procession, bearing crosses and banners, on which were such devices as "Alexander Bedward, the Servant of Jesus." After singing hymns and taking up a diligent collection, Bedward would bless the waters and extol the crowd as it plunged into the stream. After several hours of this he would go away, and the healing power of the water was supposed to depart with him.

Another colored prophet is "Dr." Anderson Rodgers, who prophesied the ascension of his followers for March 5 last, but who left them in a position corresponding to between the "devil and the deep sea." His disciples made such a disturbance in the neighborhood of their church that the police had to interfere. They were told that if they ascended at a given time all would, of course, be well, but if not, they would have to go to an insane asylum. Converts were made over all Georgia, and even the convicts in the prisons believed in a quick deliverance. Unlike the Millerites, no sumptuous robes were bought, but most of the fanatics sold or gave away most of their possessions. When the end came, those who were not put in jail were scattered to the four winds, not in a literal sense, as they expected, but by the strong arm of the law. The sect was started some years ago by a white man, Dr. John S. Willetts, who left this earthly sphere with the assistance of the White Caps. The minds of the colored people were greatly inflamed by the publication and distribution of a negro Bible.

"Dr." Patrick J. Dervin, the "Wizard of Marion Street," distributed "heaven-sent ointment" for a while during the early Summer, and wonderful reports of the cures of his lotion get abroad, but the County Medical Society had him arrested for practicing medicine without a diploma, and his career was cut short. Mlle. Couédon's collapse exploded the Parisian bubble of excitement concerning the inspired prophecies of the "mouthpiece of the Angel Gabriel." This young woman adapted her prophecies to the needs of the moment. She even told Emile Zola that he would finally be admitted to the French Academy. She convinced the journalists of her sincerity and flourished for a time, but finally went down before a more thorough examination. Dolores Luiz, the Mexican Indian girl who sees visions of the Virgin, and who has made some wonderful prophecies, is worshipped as a saint by the lower classes of Southern Mexico. She is a descendant of the Aztecs, and exhibits all the magnetism, fire, and concentration of the fanatic. Religious fever and excitement are now running high, and the possibility of a popular outbreak is much dreaded by the upper-class Mexican residents. Dolores, who is hailed as a Joan of Arc, declares she sees the Virgin, who appears to her and reveals future events. The visions of Pauline Delpont are slightly different in tone, although of like import. Delpont is a boy nine years old. He is the son of poor French peasants and lives at Laroque, in Cevennes. In spite of his early ignorance, the boy has suddenly displayed an ability to speak French, Spanish, German, Japanese, Hindostanee, Latin, and Greek. In his visions he generally sees St. Joseph, who reveals things to him. For instance, the church bells of St. Amiens lay buried in the ground for a century or more. The spot was unknown, but Delpont was able to point it out to some peasants, who, after digging, found the bells and replaced them in the church.

Bradley Newell was once a Vermont blacksmith. In two years he has accumulated a fortune, set up a fine establishment, and is now on a visit to England, where he hopes to be introduced to the Prince of Wales, and all because he suddenly exhibited powers as a healer. W. E. Hammond, a young Illinois farmer, also heals by the spirit aid. He has allowed his wife and family to shift for themselves while he devotes himself to "higher things." He is very poor, as he will not accept money for his services. "Apostolic Christians" is the name of a queer sect in this city. Ferdinand Stutzki is the leader of the organization. The keynote of the religion is that the second advent of Christ will occur Sept. 2 next. The Rev. F. W. Sandford is a Maine healer who styles himself the "Chief Apostle of the Holy Ghost and Uz Bible School." He has been able to rid his mother of sciatica and claims some other equally remarkable cures. He has a number of disciples. "Prof." Zaeks Shavno is a colored healer who is being prosecuted in New-Jersey for treating a Mrs. Jane Harris, who died while under his care. Even the Indians have a healer. Bill James, a Puyallup residing at Mud Bay, Washington, is reported to have performed wonderful miracles in the medical line.

Pennsylvania is overrun with pow-wow men and women, the South has its voodooes, witches in general are believed in all over the country, and superstition is rife everywhere. On the other hand, we have cases where the authenticity of visions is devoutly believed in by intelligent persons and evidence is produced to prove the statements made. Thus there are the visions at Tilly-sur-Seulles, in France; the Mexican image of Guadalupe, the miraculous cures from faith in relics in different churches, and other manifestations of a like nature. Altogether, the year has been remarkable for the many instances of the kind.