Marquis de Puységur

1st March 1734 – 1st August 1825

Creator of the term ‘Somnambulism’
Mesmer’s follower, Marquis de Puységur, began attempts to induce a state he called ‘artificial somnambulism’ in his patients instead of emotional crises. Although he still conceived of this as a kind of supernatural process, the induction of sleep-like state prefigured the later methods of hypnotism.

He was a French aristocrat from one of the most illustrious families of the French nobility and is now remembered as one of the pre-scientific founders of hypnotism, developed from Mesmer’s ‘Animal Magnetism’, or Mesmerism.

Puységur learned about Mesmerism from his brother ‘Antoine-Hyacinthe’, the Comte de Chastenet. One of his first and most important patients was Victor Race, a 23-year-old peasant in the employ of the Puységur family. Race was easily ‘magnetised’ by Puységur but displayed a strange form of sleeping trance not before seen in the early history of Mesmerism.

In further working with Victor, he noticed a change of personality when in ‘crisis’ – he was more confident. Furthermore, Victor had no recall in normal life of what had happened during the ‘crisis’. Puységur noted the similarity between this sleeping trance and natural sleepwalking or somnambulism and named it ‘artificial somnambulism’. He termed the patients ‘Somnambulists’.

Today we know similar states by the name ‘hypnosis’, although that term was invented much later by James Braid in 1842. Some characteristics of Puységur ‘artificial somnambulism’ were in any case specific to his method. Mesmer wasn’t interested in ‘Somnambulism’.
Puységur rapidly became a highly successful ‘magnetist’, to whom people came from all over France. In 1785, Puységur taught a course in ‘Animal Magnetism’ to the local Masonic society, which he concluded with these words:

I believe in the existence within myself of a power. 
From this belief derives my will to exert it.
The entire doctrine of ‘Animal Magnetism’ is contained in the two words: ‘Believe’ and ‘Want’.
I believe that I have the power to set into action the vital principle of my fellow-men;
I want to make use of it; this is all my science and all my means.
Believe and want, Sirs, and you will do as much as I.

1784 Puységur learned about ‘Mesmerism’ from his brother Antoine-Hyacinthe, the Comte de Chastenet.

1807 Puységur gave lectures on ‘Animal Magnetism’. He concluded that the entire doctrine of ‘Animal Magnetism’ is contained in the two words believe and want.

1825 He died 1st August at Buzancy, Aisne, France.