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TABLE MOVINGS

AND

SPIRIT RAPPINGS,

FROM

Mercersburg Review,

OCTOBER NUMBER, 1861.

BY

LEWIS H. STEINER, M. D.

CHAMBERSBURG, PA.:

M. KIEFFER & CO'S CALORIC PRINTING PRESS.

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TABLE MOVINGS AND SPIRIT RAPPINGS.

1. *Les Tables tournantes ; Les Mediums et les Esprits. Par Louis Figuier.*
 2. *Spirit-Rapping made easy. Once a Week, 1860. 403, 489 and 512.*
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Nihil sub sole novum, nec valet quisquam dicere: Ecce hoc recens est: jam enim praecessit in saeculis, quae fuerunt ante nos.—*Ecclesiastes 1: 10.*

Our delusions are like the sports of children,—they have their day of honor and when that is over their place is occupied by that which is for the time being more novel; both delusions and sports move in cycles, and the old is ever being reproduced to demand attention or wonder as in the days of its first appearance. The very Salem witches, whose wondrous mischievous performances excited our smiles years since, and made us pity the credulous New England fathers, performed no deeds more ludicrous than some of those which are known in common parlance as “table-movings” and “spirit-rappings;” still there is a family resemblance between the two which satisfies us the modern performances are not more dignified, mysterious or more calculated to challenge our respect than those produced in the last century. In previous articles published in the current volume of the Review,* we have endeavored to show how hysteria would explain many of the bodily and mental phenomena exhibited by the fanatical, and how involuntary complicity of thought would explain muscular movements which had been declared altogether beyond the agency of volition, and the result of some mysterious power. In the present article, we hope to show how these two causes may explain so much of the wonderful in the latest and most fashionable delusion of the times, that we will be justified in believing the whole to be a

Mer. Rev. XIII, 33, 238, 374.

use as our guide the impartial, critical mind of Figuier, although we should not consider his skepticism as a reliable guide in the second method of examination.

Many of the wonders of spiritualism were anticipated by the operations of Count Cagliostro, who, for a long time, occupied the attention of the French people by his pretended powers over things hidden in the bosom of the future. His magic mirrors exhibited much that has since been explained by the phenomena of hypnotism, and the influence exerted by him and his followers over the people finds an explanation in the peculiar willingness evinced by persons in a high state of nervous exaltation to assume, as their own, any direction which a strong mind may strive to give them. Other phenomena, belonging to the so-called animal magnetism, attracted attention from students in different parts of the world, but these phenomena multiplied in the year 1846 to such an extent that a furor was created on the subject.

The case of Angelique Cottin, a girl, fourteen years old, of the village of Boutigny is so remarkable that an examination of the facts will prepare us for the consideration of the Table-rappings of the United States. Early in January 1846, this young girl being engaged in weaving some silk gloves, the oak table to which the woof was attached was observed to move about, and efforts to keep it at rest proved unavailing. Her companions shrieked so as to bring in the neighbors. These requested the girls to seat themselves at the table again, with the view of seeing whether the movements would be renewed,—but the phenomena were only reproduced when Angelique renewed her position at the woof,—the table then began to sway backwards and forwards and finally it was upset. Of course the conclusion arrived at was that she was bewitched (it is a convenient thing to have some word which can be employed as an explanation for that which is obscure and unintelligible). The next morning the same movements were exhibited by the table when she took her place, and between eight and nine o'clock they increased so much in character

fraud or a self-deception on the part of those who are engaged in the manifestations. We do not deem it necessary to attempt the explanation of every thaumaturgic exhibition. *Falsus in uno, falsus in omnibus* is a very good maxim in such examinations. If a portion of the operations attributed to supernatural means is found to be clearly the result of ordinary causes, the conclusion is not unnatural that the whole may have been produced in the same way.

It seems to us a waste of time to discuss whether *spiritual* (our readers will understand that this word is employed throughout this article as simply indicating a series of phenomena or effects, which have been attributed to supernatural causes,) communications have proceeded from truthful or lying spirits, from messengers of good or the father of lies. The first thing to be done is to find out whether the whole series of phenomena could be produced by agencies which are open to scientific examination, and should such an investigation be attended with success, we are at once placed in a position to give a decision. But should we fail, then the nature of these phenomena and the nature of the pretended supernatural information may be inquired into, so as to find out whether they be of sufficient magnitude to invest with the character of the miraculous, which inquiry would be settled by their self-authenticating character; or are worthless and consist of a series of lies and deceptions, in which case it would be of no importance to know whether the devil was mediately or immediately concerned, since he may work just as effectively in doing evil, in either way. We propose the first mode of examination in this article believing it will furnish us satisfactory results, and that the presumptive dignity, which arises from a serious theological consideration of this subject, should not be allowed to rest on it and that some of our able theologians have really done injury to the cause of true religion by discussing the nature of these manifestations as serious theological errors, whereas they never rise above the level of cleverly-executed tricks. In this view we shall

that it was necessary to assign her another table for her work, and this table was immediately upset. To avoid this interference with her work, the glove on which she was working was attached to a trough weighing 75 kilograms (about pounds), but this was also caused to rock. These effects were soon communicated to the whole neighborhood, and the villagers insisted that the spirit which was, in their opinion, the cause of all these erratic movements, should be exorcised. The priest, however, desired to see with his own eyes the phenomena, and soon convinced himself that not religious rites, but medical treatment was demanded.

Careful examination being made as to the phenomena, it was discovered that various other bodies were repelled with great force, when she approached them, and even when her clothing was brought into contact,—special repulsive power seemed to exist in the lower portion of her skirts. Shocks were also received when the knuckles of her companions were brought near her face. She was prevented from occupying a chair or bed and could only be comfortable when resting on her knees in the middle of the house. With the view of having some occupation, she attempted to hull a basket of beans, but the latter, as soon as her hands were plunged in the basket, commenced leaping about in all directions. The phenomena of repulsion were exhibited in many ways, and their fame reached Paris, whither her parents brought her with the view of making some profit. Men of science attended her exhibitions, and Arago himself, at the observatory, had an opportunity of noticing the following phenomena: “She directed her hand towards a sheet of paper placed on the table, when the paper was immediately attracted with great force towards the hand.—Angélique having approached a small stand and gently touched it with her apron the stand was repelled.—Being seated on a chair with her feet placed on the ground, the chair was violently projected against the wall, while she was thrown in an opposite direction. This experiment was repeated several times, and Arago and

his companions failed to keep the chair firm and immovable." On the strength of these phenomena Arago demanded that the Academy of Sciences should appoint a commission for their investigation. Arago, Becquerel, Isidore-Geoffroy, Saint-Hilaire, Babinet, Rayer and Pariset physicists and naturalists—were appointed to conduct the same. They endeavored, by physical apparatus, to detect the presence of free electricity, analogous to that which is found in the electrical eel (*gymnotus electricus*), the electrical torpedo, &c. But no such free electricity was revealed, and the phenomena of repulsion of furniture, &c., became more and more rare. Their report (March 9, 1846) declares that *no* phenomena of repulsion were exhibited in their presence when portions of her dress were brought in contact with articles of furniture, and "the only fact observed by them was that of violent movements communicated to chairs on which she was sitting. Serious suspicions having been excited by the manner in which these movements took place, they determined to examine them very carefully, and came to the conclusion that they might have been produced by concealed adroit movements of her hands and feet."

A similar case to that of Angélique Cottin was presented by Honorine Séguin, aged thirteen years six months; tables were over-turned and chairs made to move about in the most erratic manner. The effects produced were absolutely involuntary and after some weeks disappeared never to return again. In this case, also, the electrical tests employed could detect no indications of the presence of free electricity.

Figuier thinks that the case of Honorine confirms the truth of the electric properties alleged to exist in Angélique, and proves that there was "neither fraud, nor collusion, but simply a pathological condition, which disappeared as spontaneously as it appeared, and like all abnormal troubles disturbing the nervous system may disappear. By this explanation the case of Angélique is freed from the supernatural character, which it was supposed to possess, and

the scientific explanation proves to be of more account than systematic skepticism and denial."

We are at a loss to account for the conclusion thus stated. Curious movements are attributed to electrical action, but the most delicate tests fail to detect the presence of electricity,—tests that were most satisfactory in detecting it in animals, whose physical demonstrations of power were feeble in comparison with those of the two girls, failed. The possibility, nay, the probability of these effects being the results of voluntary muscular exertions is distinctly stated by men who have examined the cases with scientific care and unprejudiced minds, and is not the conclusion most natural that what cannot be proven to be the result of electrical power and yet may have been produced by muscular exertion, has really been thus produced? We think there can be but one answer to this question. In reply to the query, "What motives could these poor girls have had thus to deceive," we have simply to say, that hysteria is the fruitful parent of manifold forms of eccentric conduct which cannot be judged of by the same rules that are applicable in cases of healthy minds acting in healthy bodies.

An accumulation of free electricity on the surface of the human body is not a very rare occurrence. In dry, cold mornings the crackling sound produced by the passage of a horn comb through the hair, is attributable to this cause. Occasionally we may find a young lady who, by shuffling her slippered foot over the hearth rug, accumulates so much of the electrical fluid as to be enabled to ignite a jet of gas, issuing from the gas-burner, or even to communicate a violent shock from her knuckles to a bystander. These cases, however, carry with them their own explanation and bear no relation to other movements, which when carefully examined, can be explained without the existence of electrical aid.

In the same year, 1846, while Angélique Cottin's case was attracting some attention in Paris, a coal merchant living in the Rue Neuve de Cluny was subjected to a series of annoyances, in comparison with which the feats of

ground and lofty tumbling executed by furniture and kitchen utensils, in the days of Mather, were simple child's play. Building stones were hurled against the doors, windows and roof. The size of the stones and the force with which they fell seem to militate against the idea that they were thrown by hand. The occupant of the house made complaint to the authorities, showing the damage done not only to his house and furniture, but also to his own body, from the missives thus mysteriously hurled against the house. The police failed to detect the cause, which was at last presumed to be the coal-dealer himself, who had become dissatisfied with the house and hoped by this means to get rid of his lease.

These cases seemed to produce others ; moving tables, dancing tea trays, and gymnastic tea pots began to appear in different parts of France. Even weighty articles of furniture, highly respected and endeared to families by years of constant association, caught the contagion and attempted the slow movements of a *minutet de la cour* when the circumstances of their construction did not justify the quick movements of the fashionable waltz. The epidemic always seized houses occupied by families who had bright and quick servants. Rarely if ever was any acknowledgment made by those suspected of being the mistresses of ceremonies at these *revels* of inanimate bodies, and, as in the days of Salem, history could only record the facts and leave posterity to reason on the causes. The most exciting and interesting events must of course come to an end, and finally the fantastic movements of household and kitchen furniture in France ceased,—the dignity of heirloom chairs and tables was no longer disturbed. But the spirit which was pro tempore quieted in France soon asserted its authority and might in our own land and here more wonderful events were produced, and were unhesitatingly attributed to supernatural agencies, which certain favored *media* were supposed capable of enlisting in their service whenever they pleased.

It has been well said that the exploded heresies and humbugs of Europe grow with remarkable luxuriance when

transplanted to the United States. . We are so eager for novelties and so energetic in our partizanship, that we carry the latter invariably to a most ridiculous extreme. Should the novelty prove to be of real value it is likely that the American mind will speedily make this available to the greatest number possible, but, on the other hand, should it be worthless the evil is widely disseminated and made to bear an abundant harvest of delusion and misery. This has been the case with Mesmerism, Homoeopathy, Hydropathy and many other forms of delusion. At times, however, we have returned the compliment and transplanted some of our delusions to European shores, where they have been kindly received and carefully nourished. Mormonism has thus grown quite luxuriantly in Europe, and gathered a number of converts. Table movings have been common to the two continents, but on our own they have prevailed so extensively as to give the appearance of an epidemic which in a few years swept the entire country, involving all classes, ages and professions. It would be impossible to give even a general outline of the history of this epidemic, or to mention the number of books that have been written on the subject, some professing to consider it scientifically, others theologically, others remarkable only for the stupid blindness of their writers, and others again for the unbounded gullibility with which their authors seem to be supplied. Some few cases must be considered and then an attempt be made at their explanation in cases where the parties concerned were knowingly perpetrating a fraud, as well as in those where they were self-deceived.

The names of the Misses Fox are connected in this country with the reintroduction of table movings. They took possession of a house in Hydesville, N. Y., from which the previous occupant had decamped in consequence of annoyances in the way of knocks at the front door, movements of furniture and various other strange phenomena, which, to say the least, were not conducive to the comfort and peace of its inmates. These ladies soon learned not to fear the

manifestations, but discovered that they were produced by supernatural beings and that the latter could be made useful as intelligence-agents to novelty-seeing humanity. At first, the sounds were supposed to be produced by rats, but examination showed that they must proceed from some other cause. Familiarity with the sounds emboldened the mother of the young ladies to address their source one evening in the month of March, 1848. To the question, "Does the sound proceed from a dead person?" there was an affirmative answer, that is to say a knock. The ages of the ladies were also correctly given by a number of knocks, one answering to each year of their lives. The whole family were attracted by this novelty—and Mrs. Fish (a married daughter of the family), living in Rochester, soon became an adept in interpreting these knockings, her father's family having removed from Hydesville, bringing along with them, *mirabile dictu*, the knockings with all their peculiarities. The whole thing was astonishing—revelations were to be had from the spirit-world by the simple payment of a fee to this family. The veil hiding the mysterious realm of the dead from the eye of man was torn down, and the spirits of deceased relatives could be summoned from "the bourne whence no traveller returns" to answer idle questions as to their ages, names, &c.;—and not only this, the manes of the great departed, whose acquaintance in life was denied to commoners, could be induced to answer the summons of any blockhead whose money was expended for the purpose. Here was a complete realization of the equality to which that great leveller—death—reduces all men, making them even subject to the whims and caprices of the living.

The nature of the exhibitions given by the Fox family differed somewhat as the company, assembled to witness them, differed. If credulity was largely developed in the spectators, the exhibitions were more wonderful and mysterious than when those of little faith and much scientific inquisitiveness were present. A reverend gentleman, whose studies had doubtless unfitted him for close physi-

cal scrutiny of phenomena, was favored with the sight of a shadowy hand which gently stroked a lock of his hair, with the contact of an icy hand on his face causing a chill throughout his frame similar to that produced by the contact of a dead body, and with the singular appearance of furniture moving about in the wildest disorder. He is satisfied that if deception had existed he could have detected it, and prefers to be credulous as to the view which suggests the action of supernatural agencies, rather than to that view which admits of fraud or cheiromantic dexterity in effecting such unusual occurrences.

But a corps of scientific gentlemen, after examining with great care the knockings and movings produced under the superintendence of this same family, do not hesitate to pronounce them the results of physical agencies employed by living human beings,—having been able in some cases to detect the probable *modus operandi*.

The believers in the supernatural causes of these phenomena were not confined to the illiterate, but were found in all classes of society. Many of the clergy, members of the legal and medical profession, tradesmen, scholars and mechanics were enrolled in the list of the so-called spiritualists. Those who paid much attention to the subject were soon recognizable in the community by a change in habits and manners, not unlike those always occurring among enthusiasts on all subjects. At least one prominent scientific scholar was enlisted in their ranks, and it was surprising to see how his natural acuteness of powers of observation were absolutely blunted by his faith, so that, that which bystanders could perceive was a badly-concealed trick was sometimes adopted with readiness by him as absolute truth. An illustration of this we will present further on in the course of this article.

Finally the excitement became so great in the United States, that a petition was addressed to Congress, signed by a large number of citizens, directing its attention to the subject and asking a public examination of the same. This petition enumerates the phenomena and asks for an exam-

ination by a commission appointed by Congress. It states that "it cannot be denied with any reason that the various phenomena of which it treats are destined to produce important and durable results, affecting in a permanent manner, the physical condition, mental development and moral character of a large proportion of the American people. It is patent that these occult powers influence the essential principles of health and life, of thought and action,—and hence they may be destined to modify the conditions of our existence, of the faith and philosophy of our age, as well as of the government of the world." For these reasons the petitioners demanded that a suitable commission be appointed to prosecute investigations on this subject.

The phenomena called spiritual may be classed under four heads—1, the movement of tables and other articles of furniture; 2, rappings and knockings which were alleged to be caused by supernatural beings with the view of communicating with man; 3, the reception of written messages alleged to be *written* by spiritual beings acting through the body of the person holding the pencil or even directly moving the pencil without any intermediation; 4, the presentation of the actual person of the spirit so as to be recognizable by bystanders. We do not pretend to say that all the protean forms, which this disease assumed, could be strictly confined to these four heads, but their consideration will put us in a position to understand the subject tolerably well.

As regards those employed in the movements of articles of furniture we must willingly recognize the fact that the majority are perfectly honest and sincere, incapable of an attempt to deceive. In such view it becomes important to discover how one may be active in producing such movements without wishing it, or even when firmly determined that he will resist any tendency to move that he may discover in the table. Ordinarily such movements are produced by the following arrangement: a number of persons are seated around the table with their hands resting on it;—conversation or levity of any kind is prohibited,—the

mind becomes entirely fixed on the movement expected. Eventually this takes place, and the rotation is accomplished with greater or less rapidity. In our article on *The Divining Rod* we referred to Chevreul's explanation of the motion of the pendule explorateur, and as he bases his explanation of table movings on the theory, then advanced we extract the following from his letter to Ampère :

“ When I held the pendulum in my hand, a muscular movement of my arm, although insensible to me, forced the pendulum from its condition of repose, and the oscillations once established were soon augmented by the influence that vision exercised in the way of putting me into that peculiar disposition or tendency to motion. Still it must be acknowledged that the muscular movement, even when it has been exaggerated by this tendency to motion, can easily be checked, I can not say by the power of the will, but when one has simply the thought of trying whether it could be checked. There is then an intimate connection established between the execution of certain motions and the act of thinking respecting it, although this thinking is not the will which commands the muscular organs. In this respect the phenomena I have described seem to me to have some interest for psychology and even for natural science ;—they prove how easily illusions may be taken for reality, whenever we are investigating phenomena in the performance of which our own organs are engaged, and under circumstances which have not yet been analyzed.”

Chevreul applies the theory of insensible muscular motion to the table-movings of the times. When a number of persons are placed around a table, their hands being upon it, they are all awaiting a rotation of the same either from right to left or from left to right, and thus they are unconsciously acting upon the table with some force. If the same direction of rotation is not expected by all, no motion will result,—or the motion will be very slight at first and then increase in rapidity. When the company anxiously *wish* that the table should move, such a result is most generally attained; when they wish that the table should re-

main at rest, motion is exceedingly rare. This theory may be adequate for the explanation of simple rotation of tables, yet there seems to be something wanting when we endeavor to apply it to the movement of bodies of great weight.

Babinet presents a theory, substantially the same as that originated by Chevreul, relating however only to the movements of tables and not taking into consideration the rappings and knockings which attend the exhibitions of mediums. "Every thing is referred to unconscious motions of our muscular fibres, to nascent or incipient motions."

Faraday has also investigated this subject with great care, and showed that the rotation was produced by the muscular force of the persons seated at the table without the aid and assistance of any other power whatever. By a very simple experiment he showed that the hands actually exercised some force before the table commenced to move. All these explanations are based upon truth, but they do not present us a theory complete enough to meet all cases. Something more is still necessary. It is true they furnish us enough to overthrow the pretensions of the spiritualists, but not enough to satisfy the man of science. Science is never satisfied with mere negations of pretended explanations; within her own domain she is never satisfied unless she can remove all obscurity and illumine the whole field of view.

As the history of novelties during this century would lead us to expect, the movements were attributed by some to a fluid, whether electric, magnetic, or vital, it was not stated. Gasparin has been the principal supporter of this theory. It is the old theory advanced by believers in Animal Magnetism. "According to the partizans of this theory, the same fluid which, emanating from the body of the magnetizer, plunges the subject exposed to its action into a state of somnambulism, is capable by exhalation from the bodies of persons forming the chain, of shaking a table and, by its own mechanical impulse, of producing motion." Babinet has overthrown this attempted explanation by the statement that *the nervous influence can not*

pass beyond the epidermis. “This is one of the most firmly established truths of physiology and a principle which must not be lost sight of, since it is sufficient to overthrow the hypothesis of a fluid applied to the interpretation of table-movings.”

But we have been following the explanations of science, without listening to those which the operators themselves furnish on this subject;—and this is simply in accordance with our purpose as stated in the commencement of this article. Their theory, however, may be stated in few words,—all dogmatic statements have this peculiarity. “If a table turns after a quarter of an hour of fixed attention on the part of the experimenters, the moving agency is spiritual; good or bad spirits, angels or demons, have entered the table and have put it in motion.” But before we are driven to the adoption of a theory, even more mysterious than the phenomena themselves, it is necessary to look still further into the realm of the natural for the explanation.

Indeed here we can resort to the curious facts which modern physiologists have studied, and to which we have adverted in our article on Animal Magnetism in the April number of the Review,—these will enable us to get something like an explanation of the phenomena. As the application of hypnotism to this subject has been well made by Figuier, we prefer to let him speak here in his own words. “Let us recollect that in consequence of the great cerebral tension resulting from a long-continued contemplation of a fixed object, the brain falls into a particular condition, which has been successively called by the names of *magnetic state*, *nervous sleep*, and *biological state*, different names designating different varieties of a condition, generally identical. Once placed in this condition, whether by the passes of a magnetizer, as has been done since the time of Mesmer, or by the contemplation of a brilliant object, as Braid operated, afterwards imitated by Philips and as the Arabian and Egyptian sorcerers operated, or indeed simply by strong moral excitement, examples of which

we have known, the individual falls into that automatic passivity which constitutes *nervous sleep*. He has lost the power of directing and controlling his will proper, and is in the power of another's will. A glass of water is presented to him with the declaration that it is a delicious beverage, and he drinks it believing it to be wine, a liqueur or milk according to the wish of him who has so strongly seized, as it were, upon his existence. Thus deprived of the aids of his own private judgment, the individual is almost a stranger to his own actions, and when restored to his natural condition he loses the recollection of the actions he has performed during the singular and temporary abdication of the *ego*. He is under the influence of *suggestions*, that is to say, accepting, without the power of rejecting, a definite idea presented to him by another's will; he acts and is forced to act without thought, without will, and consequently without consciousness. This theory solves a grave question in psychology for a man thus effected has lost his proper will and cannot be fully responsible for his acts. He acts, determined by images intruded on his brain, analogous to those visions which Cuvier supposed were fixed in the *sensorium* of the bee, and which represent the form and proportions of the cell that instinct impels it to construct. The principle of *suggestions* explains perfectly the phenomena so varied and sometimes so terrible of hallucination, and shows at the same time what slight ground separates a man laboring under hallucination from a monomaniac. It is not astonishing to find that in a large number of table turners, the hallucination survives the experiment and is converted into positive madness."

"This principle of *suggestions*, under the influence of nervous sleep, appears to us to furnish an explanation of the phenomena of table-movings in their simplest form. Let us see what takes place in the chain of persons who have arranged themselves for an experiment of this kind. Fixed attention and introspection of thought is recommended. The longer this attention continues, and the moral excitement continues, the more the brain becomes fatigued,

and the thoughts become confused. * * In such a party of persons, * * the largest number experience no particular effect. But it is a rare occurrence if one of them is not thrown for an instant in the hypnotic or biological condition. It is necessary that this condition should continue but for a second in order that the phenomena should be produced. One member of the circle falls into this state of nervous half-somnolence, having no consciousness of his acts and no other thought than the fixed idea that the table will move, and actually unknown to himself gives the impulse to the table; at this instant he may employ a muscular force which is, relatively speaking, considerable and the table moves. This impulse being given, this *unconscious* action accomplished, nothing more is needed. The individual, thus slightly biologized, may immediately return to his original condition, for scarcely has this movement of mechanical displacement been exhibited, than all those who compose the circle rise and follow the movement, or, to speak differently, make the table continue in motion, believing that they but follow its motions. As for the individual, the involuntary cause of the phenomena, since he cannot recollect any thing done in the state of nervous sleep,—he is ignorant of what he has done and is indignant if accused of having pushed the table. He suspects the other members of the circle of having done that of which they accuse him.”

It will be observed that this explanation applies to the simplest movements of tables over floors,—such movements as occur when neophytes in the psychomantic art are experimenting on small tables and other articles of furniture. The latter really are moved without any intention of deception on the part of those composing the circle,—and with the simple phenomenon of a table peregrinating a room with a circle of excited persons surrounding it, each thinking he is resisting the tendency to motion, when in fact he is aiding it, this explanation has to do. We quote from the same author his explanation as to more complex phenomena, reserving an exhibit of the means by which

these phenomena may be dishonestly produced until we have finished what we have to present concerning those persons engaged in table-moving who are self-deceived, in consequence of the nervous state into which they are thrown. "As to movements of tables in response to questions, table-legs that rise in obedience to orders, and which by the number of blows given respond to questions, the same theory is available, if you only admit that among the persons composing the circle there is one whose state of nervous sleep continues for a certain length of time. This individual, hypnotized without his knowledge, responds to questions and orders given him, inclining the table or making it give the number of blows required by the questions. When restored to his natural condition he forgets all the actions done in this way, just as every magnetized or hypnotized individual loses the recollection of acts performed during that condition. The individual is a kind of waking sleeper; he is *non sui compos*,—is in a mental condition which partakes both of the character of somnambulism and fascination. He is not asleep,—he is charmed or fascinated in consequence of the strong moral concentration imposed on him : he is a *medium*. But as this latter form of experiment is of a higher order than the first, it is not accomplished in every group. In order that the table should respond to questions that may be asked, it is necessary that the persons who operate should have practised the phenomena for some time, and that among them there should be one, a subject specially liable to fall into this condition, who habitually falls into it quickly and continues in it for some time, he must be in a word a tried *medium*. * * Custom makes the attainment of the condition an easy and sure thing. Practised mediums can in a very short time place themselves in this condition of nervous half-somnolence, which makes the fact of the rotation of the table inevitable, and the movement communicated by them to the article of furniture conformable to the demand."

The simple fact that tables were moved when a circle of persons were seated around with their hands resting on

them, was at first a novelty so strange that the world did not weary of witnessing it for a long time. Fatigue, *ennui* at length demanded something additional. This was furnished by the knocks, produced by the rising and falling of one or two of the legs of the table. It was an easy matter to attribute these knocks to supernatural causes, as their real cause was not suspected. Soon an alphabet was arranged and then the whole armament was prepared for invading the credulity of man and demanding his unreserved faith. The hypnotized individual (we are speaking now of honest operators, our attention will be claimed by the others directly,) produced such movements as answered to the questions propounded. These answers were not always correct,—nay rarely were correct,—still a ready explanation was at hand in the statement that lying spirits would sometimes displace those who dealt in truth and thus error was always possible. And here a significant fact may be alluded to. Errors were more frequent when the circle was composed of simple-minded, honest, ingenuous persons, than when the crafty composed it. One would have supposed that the former would have been the proper mediums for spiritual communication, and that the brightness of the truth would shine all the more on account of the dullness of the medium. In truth the crafty knew how to prepare themselves with suitable answers for all probable questions, and thus the unwary spectator was most frequently taken in by them.

Still another advance was demanded, however, in this mode of obtaining information from the spirit world,—human ingenuity was tasked on this question. A pencil was fitted in the end of one of the table legs, this was placed over a large sheet of paper, and when the movements were made, the answer was written out more or less legibly by the pencil. The transparent deception was still received bonâ-fide by believers; and in order to give a more ready method of writing a special arrangement was invented, a *spirit-tablet*, which consisted of an oval tablet, moving on castors, supplied with a pencil at one end; it was placed on a sheet of

white paper laid on the table,—the medium's hand was placed on the tablet and then the answer was given by the tracings which the pencil made in moving over the paper. The slow process of spelling out words from the knocks was thus dispensed with, and sentences could be put together very rapidly. But every science, art and branch of knowledge is progressive, and we are not surprized that at length all machinery is dispensed with,—the medium is placed at the table, pencil in hand, and the operator, after a moment's quiet reflection, addresses the question, the medium writes and *this* is the answer of the spirit. Here we have direct analogy, according to Figuier, between the medium, and the subject of the mesmerizer. Both are in the same psychological condition, and, when restored to the normal state, are ignorant as to what has transpired. Each at times may suppose himself animated by the spirit of some deceased person, and if his knowledge of the habits, modes of thought, style of composition and cheirography be at all accurate, the written answer to the request made will be of such a character as might reasonably be expected. If, however, there should exist ignorance on these points, then the answers will be lamentably erroneous. We have seen a note, purporting to have been written by Benjamin Franklin, the cheirography of which was a remarkable imitation of the old philosopher's, yet the substance (it was a note to one of his descendants) showed the silliness of the medium (whether honest or dishonest,)—it read thus ; —
 “If my relative will have a circle at his house, I will convince him of my existence.” The answer returned was, “Tell him that I never doubted his existence.”

But the directness of our communication with the spirit world does not cease with the use even of the pencil. There are those who pretend that their souls are taken possession of by the spirits of the departed, who then speak through their lips. The spirit evoked is then responsible for whatever is said, gets all the credit, the medium having only the muscular labor to undergo required in pronouncing the words or furnishing the requisite gesticulations.

Here we have all the extravagances of the past ages reproduced. Nervous persons in a high state of excitement have from time to time claimed the gift of prophecy, the power of presenting in a connected form the incidents of the past or of revealing the thoughts of the living. We have seen how such an asserted gift of prophecy may pass over a land like a mighty epidemic. What wonder then that this form of mental delusion should have been prevalent but a few years since, and that even now male and female mediums announce that the spirits of Webster, Clay and Jackson will, through their mouths, give their opinion on the national crisis and the duty of Americans with reference to it, or that some one of the holy Fathers of the Christian Church will denounce the Church spirit of the times, the adoption of rites and ceremonies, the practice of liturgical worship—things which might have been very good early in the history of religion, but which are now supplanted by true evangelicalism, or educated morality! The delusion, where the medium is honest, is most complete, terminating in a species of monomania,—which eventually becomes absolute madness.

In this country, many victims to these delusions have terminated their lives in Asylums and some have been driven to suicide. Such a result is nothing more than what might be expected. The hyper-excited condition of the nervous system of course is attended with a low degree of cerebral congestion, which may terminate in mental aberration or even death. One of the principal spiritualists in France (Hennequin) died in a mad house,—and many a family circle has been broken up by the entrance of this so-called spiritualism with its train of mental hallucinations and nervous extacies. Surely the psychologico-physiological explanation of this whole subject is sufficient, without any need of theological argumentation. But with this explanation there is connected a moral: persons of a nervous temperament, as they value the health of their bodies, minds and souls, should avoid all connection with table movings or spirit rappings. The brain is too easily disor-

dered,—its delicate mechanism is too easily deranged for one with such a temperament to risk the consequences of hypnotic excitement, of cerebral congestion whether great or little.

The so-called communications from the spirits always partake of the sentiments and character of thought of the medium. When the latter is pervaded with a vein of piety, the language may be scriptural; when with a sceptical or atheistic spirit, this will be found pervading the revelation. The revelations are emphatically all things to all persons. It is said a medium in Paris when asked if there was a devil, gave the following written answer:—“*J n' existe pas.—Satan.*”

The language in which the answers are given is also that known to the medium, although the quasi spirit when embodied on this earth might have been absolutely ignorant of it: the answers are never given in the native language of the supposed spirit, although the questions may be addressed in it, unless the medium should happen to be familiar with the same. We shall never forget the indignation of an old scientific friend, who addressed Cyrus the Great in Persian, when he found that Cyrus couldn't understand anything but English, and was unable even to give his name in ancient Persian.

The very nature of the communications militates generally against their originating with minds of a high order. They consist of trite moral sayings, or mere jinglings of words, in some instances of mystic nonsense. We have seen a savant delighted with the reception of this remarkable truism—“honesty must be the motto of every honest man.” This wonderful concentration of wisdom was communicated at a session when a scientific man, one of the first in this country, whose clearness of perception and accuracy of judgment, on all other subjects but table-movings *et id omne genus*, was not surpassed, through a medium (employing what was called a *spiritoscope*) who was receiving supposed communications from the other world. It was astonishing to see what trifling nonsense was received

as important truth, and how the man of science had become the dupe of the medium. During the session we managed by a dexterous application of one foot against the leg of the table to upset it in the lap of the medium. The reader may judge of our surprise, when the savant asked the question whether the table had been upset by the spirits, at hearing an *affirmative* answer returned by the medium.

But few words are required on the subject of rappings, independent of table-movings,—rappings, the locality of which has generally bewildered the spectators and given the darkest veil of mystery to the whole performance. Prof. Flint and M. Schiff have shown how these could be produced. Of course in treating of this portion of our subject we no longer insist on the sincerity of the operator,—we have now simply to do with fraud and the way in which it is accomplished. There is no nervous state here,—no necessity of hypnotism or biology to explain the phenomena,—these belong to the region of artificial magic, and are susceptible of the same kind of study and examination as those of Heller, Blitz or the Fakir of Ava. “Sounds may be produced by the rapid contraction of certain muscles, without any motion perceptible on the surface of the body.” * * For example, the tendon of the *peroneus longus* muscle, striking against its groove or the osseous surface of the fibula, is capable of producing sounds sufficiently loud to be heard at some distance. Schiff, who had succeeded in acquiring considerable skill in this way, could make at will audible sounds which were successive and regular.” Velpeau has shown that this kind of sound can be produced in various parts of the body,—the hip, the shoulders, &c. Flint attributed the sounds produced by the members of the Fox family simply to movements of the knee joint, the tibia acting against the former and undergoing a species of lateral displacement;—the sounds were always double, one evidently resulting from the displacement and the other from the restoration of the bone. He had an opportunity of examining the mechanism of the process in the case of a young lady who had taught herself

to produce similar sounds. We can understand why females most generally are distinguished in this "line of business," since the costume of the sex effectually prevents observation of the mechanism of the process.

We had an opportunity during the year 1853, of examining a case where the sounds were produced by the *peroneous longus* muscle, and were surprised at their deceptive-ness. The gentleman who was kind enough to allow an examination with the view of satisfying ourselves on the subject, stood in the middle of the floor, and the sounds seemed to proceed from blows given beneath the floor.

The so-called communications from the spirit-world, when made in audible words and sentences, necessarily proceed from ventriloquism. A writer in "Once a Week," an English journal, in several articles under the title "Spirit-Rapping made Easy, or How to come out a Medium," has given at full length an account of the mode of producing all the phenomena which are considered most surprising. Many of the wonderful exhibitions of Mr. Home, who has been figuring before the crowned heads of Europe, are sufficiently explained so as to make us place Mr. H. among the first of modern prestidigitators. It is a significant fact that when Houdin—the famous French magician was present at one of Home's attempted exhibitions before the Emperor, "no manifestation took place." An enquiring master-spirit was present, and it was probably considered impolitic to risk detection.

"The first requisite," says our author, "is an impassive countenance, exhibiting no sense of shame, or fear of detection,—a natural or acquired brass, the perfection of which will depend, of course, upon the morale of the performer. After this, the secret of the medium's power is the flexibility of her lower limbs. Her legs must do the work of arms, and her feet must be educated to act like hands. * It is no use to contemplate coming out as a medium unless you are provided with flexible legs and manipulative feet and toes." The author then goes on to give the *modus operandi* by which all the wondrous per-

performances of Mr. Home may be produced, and it is singular to see how simple are the contrivances necessary to produce the startling results. We consider the case, so far as the most prominent pretender to association with the spirit world in physical performances is concerned, to be set at rest, and are willing to look upon Mr. Home as a clever charlatan, as well as to adopt the conclusion that he is "a very clever ventriloquist, a superior player on the mouth-harmonicon; that he possesses an accordion, probably self-acting, a magic-lantern, a lazy-tongs, much assurance, an accomplice or two—perhaps many of them in various quarters—and a large circle of accommodating dupes, and of candid, half-doubting, half-credulous spectators."

In our examination of this subject we have endeavored to do full justice to those who have been sincerely desirous of avoiding any thing like deception of their friends and others. Many, nay, most all, the phenomena exhibited by them are susceptible of physiological explanation. But we have at the same time tried to show how the most surprising feats of the *great* exhibitors have proceeded from frauds practiced on the credulity of spectators. The present seems a fitting time to discuss the subject, the whirlwind of excitement has passed away. Facts have been collected, discussed and arranged. The sober second-thought of mankind, not always reliable yet by no means to be despised, has pronounced against the arrogant pretensions of the spiritualists. Theologians, who had plunged into the subject with all the zeal of the schoolmen and the exorcists of the early ages, have perceived their folly. And scientific students have taken up the subject quietly and dispassionately notwithstanding their first expressions of disgust.

In closing the series of articles on "The Marvellous in Modern times," we trust that the readers of the Review, who have followed us through what may have too often seemed to be dull detail, have learned to be cautious in giving their credence to all mysterious phenomena which purport to spring from supernatural causes. The miracle

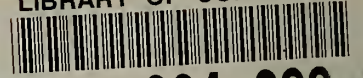
is self-authenticating. An *evident* purpose is manifest in it. Where such self-authentication does not appear, in spite of all appearances to the contrary, it is safe to conclude that the phenomena are susceptible of explanation by physical or psychological laws. There will be no end to manifestations of the marvellous, so long as the world stands, for of these it may be truly said, in the words of the Preacher: "The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun."

Frederick city, Md.

L. H. S.

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