

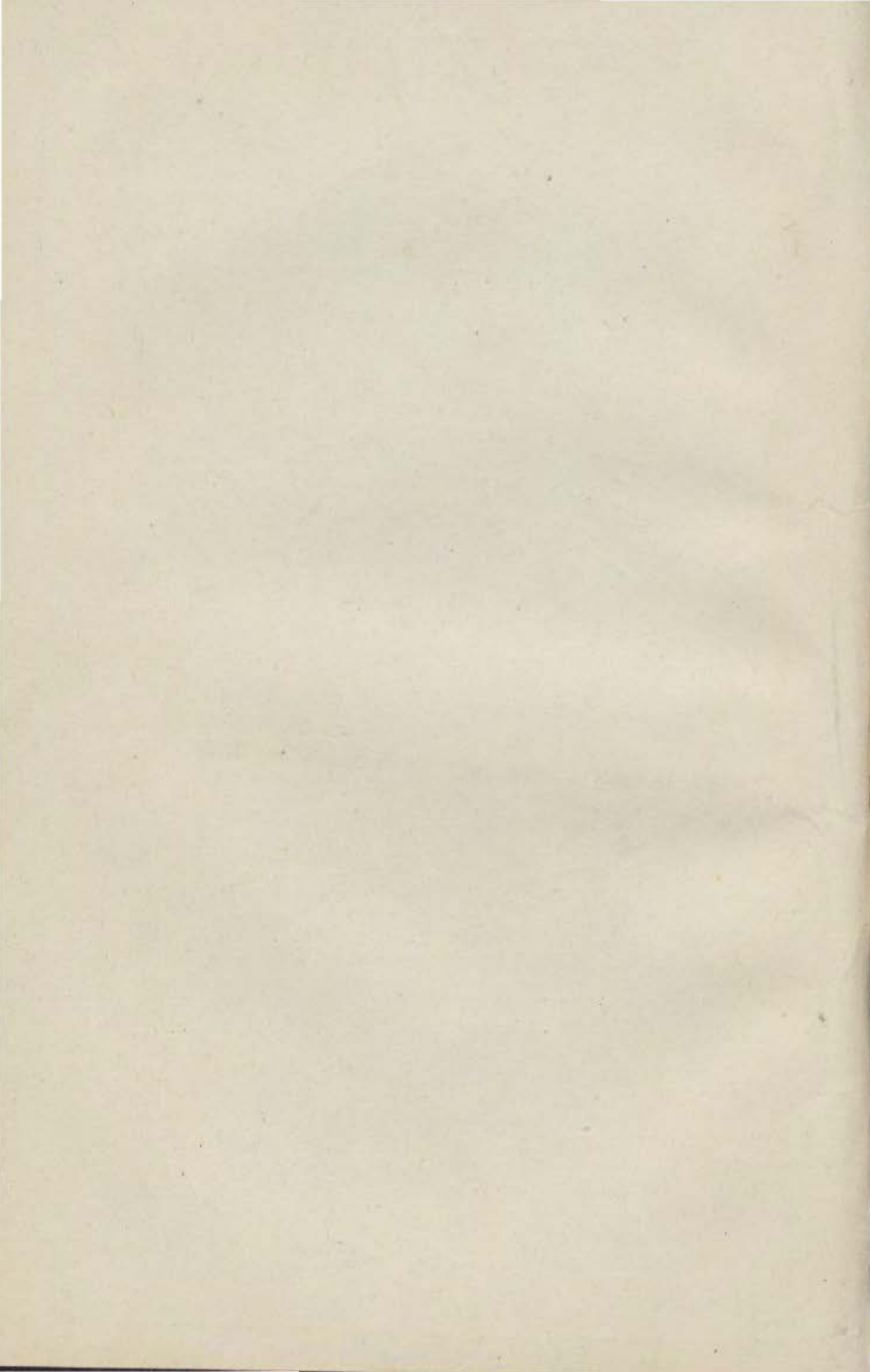
REVELATIONS OF THE GREAT MODERN MYSTERY PLANCHETTE

AND THEORIES RESPECTING IT



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OF THE

GREAT MODERN MYSTERY

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ON
THE ORIGIN OF PLANCHETTE.

The following article was related to the writer substantially as here given by the gentleman referred to : —

THE earliest known of Planchette was in the monasteries of France, soon after the celebrated “ Rochester Knockings,” in the year 1848. A New England gentleman (since a general in the Union service) was in Paris, and one evening, while in company with a social circle of ladies and gentlemen, the conversation turned on the phenomena of table-tipping and knocking, then beginning to be quite famous in this country. The American gentleman, who happened to have the matter brought under his observation before leaving home, was able to entertain the company with his own experience, and what he had heard of it.

In course of the evening, the American guest was accosted privately by a gentleman of the party, who was a nephew to the Bishop of Paris, and also one of the brotherhood of priests. This gentleman, after expressing his gratification at what he had heard from one who had witnessed the phenomena himself, then told the American, that among the brotherhood, in his

monastery, was a select, private circle of twelve persons, who met three evenings of each week to consult with a little board, by means of which they were enabled to get distinct and intelligent communications from what purported to be the spirits of friends, and others who had passed from this life. An invitation was given to the American to be present, on an early occasion, and witness for himself the operation.

The evening being set, the gentleman was present at the time appointed. The circle formed around the table, and opened the entertainment first with a hymn, followed by a prayer. All then taking seats, one of the brothers took the little board, or, as it was called, "TABLET," and commenced operations. In a short time it began to write, and so quickly, that in a few minutes several pages were covered. When the tablet ceased working, the communication was read aloud, and, as the gentleman stated in narrating this occurrence, was not only perfectly intelligible, but also of a very high order.

It becoming known to the Bishop of Paris that the mysterious little board was a thing of general use in the convents, and many of the higher circles of the community, he issued a pastoral letter forbidding its use henceforth, and for which reason the company of twelve kept their sittings a profound secret.

No information could be given as to the origin of

the little board, — that being as much of a mystery as the cause of its operations.

As everybody interested in this wonderful invention is anxious and curious to learn all that is known of its early history, we extract, for further enlightenment, the following, from a letter written by Dr. H. F. Gardner to a Boston paper, dated London, May 5th, 1859, which solves the question of the origin of Planchette in this country.

“In Paris I witnessed a method of communication of which I had not heard in America. The instrument used by them they call a *Planchette*. The method of communication is by writing. In order to give you some idea of the interest taken in the investigation of the subject in Paris, it will only be necessary to state, that I called upon the manufacturer of the above-mentioned instrument to purchase one to take home with me, and he informed Mr. Owen (Hon. Robert Dale Owen), who was with me, that he had made and sold several hundred in Paris alone.

“Not being able to speak the French language, I could not enjoy the society of the household of Faith as I could have done under more favorable circumstances; yet, on visiting in a family where Planchette was used, *there was no difficulty in writing in my own native tongue.*”

Dr. Gardner brought to Boston the Planchette which he purchased in Paris, and some few were made for the use of his friends; reference to which is made in a recent number of a St. Louis paper as *THE BOSTON PLANCHETTE*, which is now to be found in thousands of homes throughout the land.

THE REVELATIONS OF PLANCHETTE.

THE words of the wise king of Israel, that "There is no new thing under the sun," is but partially applicable to our own time. In the realm of moral truths, there is not, nor has there been, for ages, any new discoveries. Truth being one with Nature and with God, changes not, but is perennial and eternal, though its manifestations are infinite throughout all the world of nature and spirit. But new phases, new developments are being constantly evolved through all time, regenerating and leading men on in knowledge and progress. Prominent among the many new facts with which scientific men have been called upon to investigate, are,—1st. The phenomena manifested in the Fox family in 1848; and, 2d. The manifestations and revelations made by and through a new and wonderful little invention called *Planchette*.

The first phenomena has been heard of throughout the world; and from the day of its discovery, "a new

and important phase has offered itself to the attention of the student in pneumatology, and with it a new duty, — that of determining the true character of what is sometimes termed the American Epidemic, — more wonderful in its manifestations, far wider in its range, than any of the mental epidemics, — marvellous in their phenomena as some of them have been, — recorded by physicians and psychologists of continental Europe.” Believers in the phenomena, and in the various theories growing out of it, have multiplied in all parts of the world, and may be counted by millions in the United States alone. The great majority of people either have or are investigating that subject.

The second phenomena is quite recent. It has first become generally known during the present year. What new revelations in mental philosophy it may have for the present age, no one can say at present. All seem to see it from their own stand-point, whatever that may be. To bring together, from various sources, theories and opinions respecting it, “as a guide to the feet and a lamp to the path,” for investigators and inquirers, is the object of the present volume. To this end, the following able articles, selected from various sources, are offered to the public for their consideration; previous to which, however, and as introductory, we will insert an extract from a work on a similar subject, by Hon. ROBERT DALE

OWEN, formerly member of Congress, and late American Minister to Naples:—

“I well know it to be the fashion—and a very reprehensible fashion it is—to pass by with ridicule or contempt the extraordinary results which seem to present themselves in this connection. Be the facts as they may, such a course is impolitic and unwise. It is not by despising error that we correct it. No sensible man, well informed as to the facts, denies that, like every other subject, this has its fanatics, misled by fantasies, dealing in vagaries of the imagination. But we are not justified in summarily setting aside, untested, any class of allegations, because we may have detected among their supporters loose observation and false logic. Rational opinions may be irrationally defended.

“The question as to investigation or no investigation is one of time only. Once mooted and seized upon by popular sympathy, a matter like this *must* be probed to the bottom. There is nothing else for it. We can get rid of it on no other terms. We cannot hush it up if we would; we ought not if we could. Viewed in its scientific aspect, we might as reasonably interdict the study of electricity or the employment of the magnetic wires.”

PLANCHETTE : WHAT IS IT ?

[*From the Boston Journal of Chemistry, Sept. 1, 1868.*]

THE eagerness with which an explanation is sought of what is to many a new mystery, is by no means surprising. Within a few months a little instrument, called *Planchette*, has made its appearance upon this side of the water, and has found its way into thousands of families, where it is generally regarded as a toy or a plaything, which, by its performances, causes much perplexity, as well as entertainment, to the inmates, and furnishes a prolific theme for conversation. The name, "Planchette," is a French word, signifying a little board. The form which the fancy of manufacturers has given to the instrument, is that of a heart, about seven inches long, and five inches wide, made of thin board, and supported at the base of the heart by two short legs of wood, with nicely adjusted casters, and at the apex by a pencil, thrust through a socket lined with rubber, to hold it in place. The instrument may be made round, square, oblong, of any size, of any kind of wood, metal, glass, or rubber, and work equally well. Usually, when two or more persons rest their fingers lightly upon the instrument, after a little while it begins to move ; and, by placing a sheet of paper beneath the pencil, it will write sentences and answer questions, and move about upon the paper. The answers to questions are written out with great

rapidity; and, as dates are given, and incidents and circumstances related, supposed to be entirely independent of the knowledge of those operating the instrument, it has become a puzzle and a wonder to thousands. It should be stated that in many families, and in some groups of persons, it obstinately refuses to move, and all experiments with it are failures. Not often, however, can a dozen persons be found together, but that some one or more can influence Planchette, and set it to work. In many families, small children have a wonderful power over its movements, and are able to keep it in motion when the efforts of three or four adults prove entirely abortive. Its chirographical exploits, and other operations, are capricious, whimsical, often wilful, and seemingly wicked. In other instances, it is all gentleness and goodness, writing its sentences with great willingness, and accomplishing results of a most startling character.

We are requested, by many correspondents and friends, to explain Planchette. They ask, "Is it electricity, animal magnetism, 'odc' force, imagination? Please tell us what it is." We wish we could answer our friends' inquiries in a satisfactory way, but we cannot. We have been a somewhat careful observer of the pranks of Planchette for *twenty-five years*, and no solution of the problem satisfactory to ourselves has been reached. It is much easier to state what it is not, than what it is. We can see no difference in the class of phenomena developed through the little Planchette-board, and that connected with what are known as "table-tippings," and "writing mediums." The persons possessed of the idiosyncrasies of organization

or temperament which enable them to influence Planchette, can as easily move a table of the size used for household purposes; and the pencil, placed in such hands, will write out strange sentences and answers to questions, against the will of the operator. There are many delicate, timid ladies now playing with Planchette, and having wonderful success in influencing its movements, who would be filled with terror if they thought they were "table-tippers," or "mediums." Let them try their powers on the parlor table, and see if the results do not cause a fright which will lead them to throw Planchette, and all its wonderful pencil tracings, into the fire. Some amusing instances of a like nature have come to our knowledge. A class of phenomena may be sought and studied in the most fastidious circles, through fashionable Planchette, while the same would not be tolerated for an instant, coming through the vulgar channels of "mediums," acting upon "meal-chests," or parlor tables.

In our view, Planchette is nothing new, or, rather, it possesses no novelty, as regards what is manifested through it, or by it. In the remark that we have observed its strange performances for twenty-five years, the meaning is not that we have experimented that length of time with a little bit of board, heart-shaped, mounted on wheels, and carrying a pencil, but that the same class of physical phenomena have been observed, as exhibited through cheaper forms of inert matter, and sometimes through the medium of living flesh, not supposed to be quite as refined as some of that now toying with innocent Planchette.

An explanation, or consideration, of Planchette,

necessarily involves the consideration of a class of alleged physical phenomena, regarded by some as not very proper to be seriously discussed in a scientific journal. In one view, this attitude is rather a sensible one. Conductors of scientific journals, and students in the sciences taught in schools, have little or no information to communicate regarding what goes by the name of "rappings," "table-tippings," "animal magnetism," "medium power," etc., and therefore it is very proper that there should be silence where there is nothing to communicate.

A great deal of impatience, or indignation, even, is manifested by a large class, because men distinguished for their acquaintance with the positive physical sciences do not believe in, or publicly engage in, the investigation of this class of phenomena. The position assumed by a majority of scientific men towards it, is that of entire disbelief. They do not separate the physical disturbances, the outward show of force, by unseen agencies, from the "spiritual interpretations," mixed up with, or, as they suppose, inseparably connected with the phenomena. The whole matter is regarded as a sham and a delusion, unworthy of thought or investigation. It does not come within the circle of the sciences, is not in accordance with any known laws of the physical universe, and does not rise to a higher level than any of the ancient or modern superstitions, which are worthy only of contempt. This is, perhaps, a fair exposition of the views held by a majority of the teachers and students of science at the present time. A considerable number, however, have reached a different conclusion.

They only direct attention to a single point, and first clear away all the rubbish with which it is encumbered. The great question is, whether these alleged physical disturbances actually occur or not, independent of direct and palpable human agency. Is it mischief, or is it not? Is it delusion, or is it not? These questions they have settled in their own minds; and the conclusion is, that the phenomena are undeniably real. Not a step further will they go; beyond this, all is misty and dark. Many occupy this position who hesitate to admit it, as there is in scientific circles a peculiar sensitiveness upon the subject; and odium and disgrace are liable to rest upon any one, no matter how high his position may be, who cherishes a belief even in the reality of the physical disturbances. We incline to think the popularity of Planchette may serve to break a link in the chain of prejudice that binds fast honest convictions, and permit a little more freedom in thought and investigation.

But let us return: We are asked to explain Planchette. As already stated, to do this would be to explain a most remarkable and extensive class of physical phenomena, beginning with the antics of the little heart-shaped table, and running up through parlor table-tippings, rappings, writing, etc., to the more astounding physical disturbances, noises, and hubbub, witnessed in so many dwellings in this country and in Europe. The details of a very remarkable instance of "house-disturbance" are given in the August number of the *Atlantic Monthly*. The whole affair appears to have been witnessed by cool and careful observers, and the published narrative, we

presume, will attract considerable attention. But this is by no means a solitary instance of the kind. There are probably a dozen or more families disturbed in this mysterious manner in the United States at the present moment, but every effort is made at concealment; as but few people of respectability feel that they can bear up under the public odium attached to such proceedings. The house of a most respectable gentleman in Newton, Mass., has been for many months, and we believe is at the present time, the scene of even more astounding physical disturbances than those described in the *Atlantic Monthly*. We once, for several hours, listened to the recital of what occurred in the dwelling of Rev. Dr. Phelps, of Stamford, Conn., from the lips of the venerable man himself. We were reduced to the alternative, from listening to his statement, of regarding him, his family, and a wide circle of intelligent friends, as the most egregiously duped, deluded, cheated circle of men and women, the greatest liars and impostors, that ever lived, or of believing in the reality of phenomena, which human reason and human science were incompetent to explain. We felt compelled to adopt the latter alternative. Allusion has been made to the disgrace and odium connected with the class of physical phenomena under consideration. This arises from two reasons: *first*, because the alleged manifestations are so inexplicable, strange, *unreasonable*, so contrary to the laws which govern matter and mind as popularly understood; *second*, because a large class attribute their origin to disembodied spirits, and have built up a new religious faith, based upon that

hypothesis. Thousands, from the strange and unusual character of the observed phenomena, have been driven to a belief in its supernatural origin, and the unfortunate delusion has spread throughout the civilized world. The masses looked to scientific men to explain what was constantly brought under their observation; and when it was fairly understood that from that source not only no explanation would be afforded, but no open belief in the physical manifestations entertained, they drifted easily and naturally into that channel of belief which seemed to lead them out of the surrounding darkness. The deplorable position assumed by so many regarding the phenomena can never be overthrown by contempt and ridicule. It must be met in a spirit entirely different from this, if the delusion is ever dissipated. This result is also unfortunate, as it placed barriers to a field of investigation of a most interesting and important character, and turned away many who otherwise might have employed in its exploration all the resources of science. How much science could have done, or may do, in explanation, we cannot know with certainty.

We incline to think exaggerated views are entertained respecting the competency of scientific men to shed light upon the subject. The *key* to the mystery must be found before any reliable solution is reached. The first impulse of a man, who believes he sees his furniture dancing about his house, and hears strange noises echoing through the halls, and loud rappings on the ceilings and under the floors, is to send for a doctor, — not a doctor of physic, but a doctor of

philosophy. This is a very natural proceeding. He expects him to explain the nature of the alarming state of affairs from his acquaintance with electrical, magnetic, or chemical laws, and looks to him to arrest further proceedings. The first difficulty met with is to secure the attendance of the "doctor," as, from the seeming absurdity of the statements made, he presumes there is no "case." If, however, attendance is secured, the professional man probably finds the occurrences to be of a nature not defined in his philosophy, and is forced to leave the patient without a prescription.

It is not designed to weary the reader with details of what the writer has "seen." Suffice it to say, that enough has been observed to lead to the conclusion that there is one power, impulse, or force, in nature, regarding the character of which mankind *are totally in the dark.*

It has proved, so far as our experiments extend, a most difficult and baffling subject to investigate. The nature of this difficulty is illustrated in "Planchette." Why cannot one cause it to move as well as another? Why does it sometimes utterly and ignominiously fail when those are present who have the strongest desire to witness its movements, and when those who are supposed to influence its movements share in this desire? The attempt, or design, to carefully and methodically investigate and study the phenomenon, appears to arrest it. In some families, a lady, or a child even, stand in such relations to the instrument, as to cause it to move by passing it at a considerable distance. It seems full of impatience to "work"

when such persons are in the house, and it will write, leap, and run about as if impelled by an irresistible impulse. It has occurred when such a family has invited one or more ladies or gentlemen to an investigation of its performances, and they have come in a formal way and proceeded to test the phenomena, as they would any new development in physical science, that its movements ceased at once, or if continued, it was in such a dubious, unsatisfactory way as to cover everything with doubt and suspicion.

The same may be said in general of rappings, table-tippings, and all kinds of house-disturbances of this nature. A calm, philosophical, careful man is not likely to become convinced of the reality of this class of phenomena from such exhibitions. Belief is often forced upon persons through occurrences in their own families, or in one with which they are closely and intimately connected. It must necessarily be a long time before even a belief is entertained of its truthfulness among a large class in the community; and it will be a *very long time* before a satisfactory and philosophical explanation is reached.

Several years ago we invited a friend—a highly distinguished professor in one of our largest Universities—to visit a house where certain extraordinary physical disturbances were alleged to be taking place, apparently in connection with a girl about twelve years of age, belonging to the family. In this instance, the “power” was uncommonly demonstrative, the force being brought to bear upon several articles of furniture, but more particularly upon a parlor table, which danced and tumbled about the room,

entirely regardless of the professor's cool investigations and ingenious tests to discover "the trick." This he entirely failed to accomplish. There were no conducting wires, springs, pullies, or levers to be found; and the little girl and family were manifestly as ignorant of what produced the phenomena as ourselves.

A large number of theories were propounded and discussed, not one of which was in the least satisfactory, and the whole affair remains a mystery. In explanation, we hear it often stated that it is due to "animal magnetism." Of course, such declarations must come from the unlearned or unscientific, as science recognizes no such force or principle in nature as "animal magnetism." Some kinds of fishes possess electrical power, and can impart shocks, but then they carry about with them a little arrangement of cells or batteries, which is the source of the electrical force. Human beings are not supposed to possess any such endowment. It is very convenient to have a term to apply in explanation of the phenomena among the crowd, although it may be entirely unmeaning and empirical. Electricity offers no explanation; neither does magnetism, as at present understood. Chemical laws and principles are appealed to in vain for a solution; and as regards "odc force," we have not the slightest knowledge of what that is. In conclusion, we venture the opinion, that if the phenomena are ever explained, they will be found to be due to a blending of the psychological and physical endowments of the human organization, acting under certain

laws *entirely dissimilar to any now known or understood*. Who will produce the key that will unlock the mystery?

MY ACQUAINTANCE WITH PLANCHETTE.

[*From Lippincott's Magazine, August, 1868.*]

THERE is an innocent little mystery which goes upon three legs, and is called "Planchette." Who invented it nobody can tell, and opinion is divided as to whether it is or is not a humbug. One is very sure that it moves with alarming readiness. The heart-shaped bit of wood sways to every motion; the castors turn with the slightest breath of influence; the pencil-point marks lines and words on the smallest provocation.

It is natural for us to think that motion has always an intelligent cause, and that so light an object as this will be dependent upon something more real than magnetism.

Now, I have had my own experience with Planchette, and have reached my own conclusions, agreeing, doubtless, with those of other observers and experimenters. To me, just at present, there is little mystery in the matter, but in its place has arisen a strong interest; for I verily believe that this curious toy, if rightly handled, will inform us of certain laws which the "turning-tables" were too clumsy to tell. And as all truth is best in the concrete, I have decided

to write down exactly what I think, and how I came to my conclusions, asking no pardon of anybody but myself for the frequent use of the personal pronoun.

So far as I am aware, the earliest mention of Planchette is in an anonymous novel, *Who Breaks, Pays*, republished among the Tauchnitz volumes in 1861, as a standard book. The description is accurate, though short. The little heart-shaped table, with its two pentagraph wheels and its pencil-leg, is just like our own familiar friend. It writes "now" and "Lilian," and adds a cross at the end of the name — a thing, let me say, which shakes my faith in the author's knowledge, since I never knew Planchette to make a cross, for the simple reason that *it cannot take up its pencil-point*, and must always write a running hand.

The later literature of the subject consists of two articles, one entitled "Planchette," and the other "A Three-Legged Impostor," and both republished in *Every Saturday* during the past winter. The first of these two accounts piqued my curiosity, and as it contained an engraving of the proper character to work from, I very soon had possession of ample means for experiment. This original Planchette lies before me as I write, just as it often lies to me and others. It is precisely eight inches long by seven wide, and not quite a third of an inch thick. It has two brass pentagraph wheels, which are an inch and three-quarters in height, and whose rollers are *narrow* and very sensitive. With this I have conducted at one time and another a number of tests, whose results I am about to condense in this paper.

When one sits with his fingers resting lightly on the

wood (in this case seasoned ash, unvarnished), there runs through his arms and those of his partner, if they are proper mediums, a sense of electrical force. The tingling extends from the finger-ends up to the arms, meeting at last through the shoulders, or pricking its way across the forehead; and after such sensations Planchette is usually very active. The hands are drawn hither and thither by the magnetic force; and, although they barely touch the wood, it follows their direction and writes intelligibly.

A lady, who is a fine "medium," but who was then ignorant of the fact, placed her hand on Planchette with me one evening, and without a moment's hesitation it wrote "Ellie," and afterward the name of another friend. When charged with the fact, she admitted that these persons were in her mind. On another occasion, the question was asked, "What is the name of those nuts on the sideboard?" and the answer was most singular. One partner thought "Shell-barks," — the other "Hickory-nuts." For several letters there could be seen the effort to write *both*; but at last, when this was impossible, it followed the stronger will, and wrote "Hickory-nuts." And, until the whole word was written, neither knew how much the thought had affected the language.

A gentleman, a great sceptic, having his hands touching mine, inquired, "Did I settle at the bank to-night?" For my part, I did *not* know, and so remained *passive*; and as he *did*, the answer was correct, much to his astonishment.

By placing my hand above those of two tyros, I have made Planchette scribble off whatever I wished;

and by taking their hands, while their other hands were upon the instrument, I have drawn it to me or sent it from me. It will occasionally do tolerably well for a single person, but I have found that, without any muscular action, I can invariably compel it to write *what* I wish and *as* I wish it — even if I choose to misspell.

Such knowledge destroys the romance, it is true, but it only heightens the charm of the reality; for it is competent, in skilled hands, to draw from an unsophisticated person answers which are the property of that one only. Yet I have still to learn the instance where the stronger will would not control.

My conclusions, then, are these: —

1. That Planchette is dependent upon the same principle as the “turning-table” for its motion — *i. e.*, on the peculiar power of certain persons. Into this subject I cannot at present enter. It has been done fully by Count Agenor de Gasparin, and in Dr. J. Esdaile’s work on *Mesmerism as Applied to Surgery*.

2. That after motion is obtained, the intelligent motion is the result of *thought and will*, either conscious or unconscious.

3. That the stronger will controls in all cases.

4. That Planchette answers nothing which the “mediums” do not *know* or *guess*. This accounts for its wild predictions and laughable blunders.

5. That left to itself it will naturally write nothing until there be a clear thought in the mind.

I reserve my opinions for the present concerning the source of its motion; the characteristics of good “mediums;” the application of this little instrument

to the refutation of certain grave and important errors ; and its use in the investigation of mesmerism, biology, animal magnetism, and matters kindred thereto. These are properly the topics for purely scientific articles ; but if I have, by this plain statement, pointed out the way to such straightforward, intelligent study, I shall be glad.

WHAT IS PLANCHETTE ?

[*From the Scientific American, July 8, 1868.*]

A PECULIAR class of phenomena have manifested themselves within the last quarter of a century, which seem to indicate that the human body may become the medium for the transmission of force to inert and dead matter, either in obedience to the will of others, or by the action of the nervous power upon the muscular system, in such a way that those through whom or from whom it emanates, are totally unconscious of any exercise of volition, or of any muscular movement, as acts of their own wills.

The spirit with which scientific men have looked upon these phenomena, has been unfortunately such as has retarded their solution. Scepticism as to their reality, although corroborated by evidence that would be convincing upon any other subject, refusal to investigate, except upon their own conditions, and ridicule not only of the phenomena themselves, but of those who believe in them, have marked their course ever

since these manifestations have laid claim to public credence. Such a spirit savors of bigotry. The phenomena of table-tipping, spirit-rapping (so called), and the various manifestations which many have claimed to be the effect of other wills acting upon and through the medium of their persons, are exerting an immense influence, good or bad, throughout the civilized world. They should, therefore, be candidly examined, and if they are purely physical phenomena, as has been claimed, they should be referred to their true cause. This is due to truth, and the common duty which all owe to their fellow men.

The following extract from an English journal, relative to the proposition made by Prof. Faraday, in 1861, to investigate the phenomena reported to have occurred in the presence of Mr. Home, a celebrated English medium, and also relative to the controversy which is now in progress between Prof. Tyndall and Mr. Home, in regard to a similar investigation, which Prof. Tyndall expressed himself willing to undertake, under similar conditions to those stipulated by Prof. Faraday, will sufficiently exhibit the manner in which scientific men have been disposed to treat such subjects : —

“He (Mr. Faraday) felt a profound contempt for the whole thing, for which we are by no means inclined to blame him; and he seems to have been a little annoyed at the attempt to draw him again into what he considered ridiculous and futile investigations. It is likely that if Prof. Owen were invited to lecture on and dissect Barnum’s woolly horse, he might reply somewhat tartly; it is not improbable

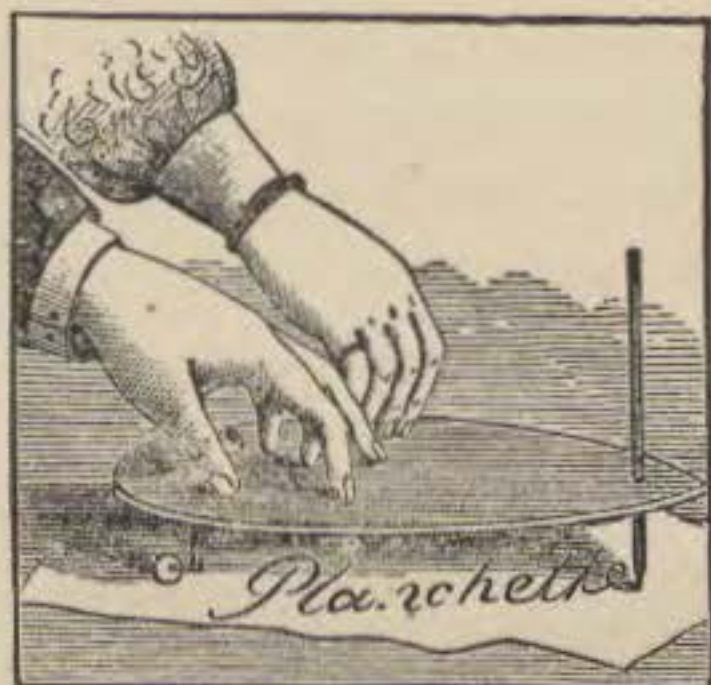
that Sir John Herschel would chafe at being invited gravely to investigate Parallax's theories about the shape of the earth and its relations to the planetary system. Mr. Faraday did reply in language which was not encouraging. He prescribed certain conditions which it would have been utterly impossible for Mr. Home to accept, whether that gentleman be an apostle of a new science, or a mere pretender and humbug. In fact, Mr. Home was invited, as a condition precedent to Faraday's entering on the investigation, to acknowledge that the phenomena, however produced, were ridiculous and contemptible. He was also required to pledge himself to the most entire, open, and complete examination — a condition which, of course, Mr. Faraday knew quite well Mr. Home could never accept. So the gentleman who was apparently acting for Mr. Home — we believe, the late Mr. Robert Bell — declined going any further; and it does not appear that Mr. Home was particularly consulted in the matter at all. At the present moment, Mr. Tyndail offers to investigate the phenomena, but he offers to do so 'in the spirit of Mr. Faraday's letter;' and, of course, Mr. Home replies that 'as such spirit is not that of logic, nor according to the true scientific method,' he declines to lend any aid to the inquiry."

Now we believe that if Barnum's woolly horse was in some way, by virtue of his pretensions, exerting a vast influence upon society, tending to subvert creeds and to introduce new codes of morals, Prof. Owen could not do the world a greater service than to demonstrate to the world by cutting him up, and thereby cutting down the falsity of his pretensions.

Nothing that affects the welfare of mankind should be considered beneath the notice of a true philosopher. What incalculable benefit might have resulted if the same amount of study had been given to the subject of witchcraft, at the time of its occurrence, that has since been bestowed upon it. When such things become matters of history, there are always enough who do not think it derogatory to their dignity to devote their time to speculation upon their causes. How much wiser is it to throw aside prejudice, and to look at the facts themselves in a spirit of candor, and earnest desire for truth.

The latest of the phenomena belonging to the class alluded to above, are those exhibited through the agency of the "Planchette." We purpose in this article to give a brief description of this singular instrument, and also to describe some of the remarkable things which it appears to perform. In thus opening our columns to the discussion of the subject, we say at the outset that we desire any communications that may be called forth upon this matter, — which we know to be attracting great attention in both hemispheres, — to be written with an evident purpose to add to the knowledge already possessed by the public in relation to it, or to give some rational explanation of the cause of the phenomena, which are generally considered so inexplicable. And we further beg correspondents to remember that ridicule is not argument, that it only tends to exasperate; and we assure all who are disposed to deal in that style of discussion, that hard heads, and men of the most materialistic tendencies, have been puzzled and nonplussed by the

manœuvres of Planchette. The name "Planchette" is of French origin, and signifies, literally, "a little board." We have seen several styles, differing from each other only in trivial details, the general form being the same in each.



It will be seen by reference to the cut of the instrument, which we give herewith, that it is a heart-shaped piece of board, mounted upon three supports. It is seven inches from the depression in the base of the heart to its apex, and seven inches measured across its widest part. Two of the supports are legs of wood or brass, terminating in pentagraph wheels or casters, usually of iron, bone, or hard rubber. The third support is a pencil thrust through a socket at the apex of the heart. Makers claim that the wood used in their manufacture is peculiar; whether artificially rendered so or otherwise, we are not informed, but we have been unable to detect any peculiarity in the appearance of the wood in any that we have seen. Those that we have met with look as though they were made of mahogany or black walnut,

lightly varnished, and with little attempt at adornment. In the centre of the board we have occasionally seen a disk of metal, having the appearance of German silver, but whether it was for use or ornament, we are unable to say.

The instrument is usually operated by two persons, or perhaps we should say it generally operates when two persons lay the tips of their fingers gently upon it. Occasionally it operates with less force when only one places his hands upon it; and it has been asserted in some of the English journals, that there have been instances of its working when a string was attached to one of the legs, the remote end being held in the hand of a powerful medium, at some distance from the machine.

The phenomena attributed to the Planchette are various, but they consist essentially in writing and drawing. The latter we have never witnessed, but we state it upon good authority. In fact, the wonders of Planchette are backed by the statements of the most reliable people, — statements which constitute such a mass of evidence that we should feel bound to accept the facts stated, even though we had not witnessed them ourselves.

You may hold a conversation with Planchette, provided your own part in it consists of interrogations. Its replies, so far as we have seen, are sometimes false. So are the replies often given by human respondents. It sometimes refuses to write at all, and plays the most fantastic tricks, in apparently wilful disregard of the feelings of those who are anxious that it should do its best. When, however, it chooses to be good, it

moves gently and steadily over the paper upon which it is placed, the pencil-point tracing letter after letter, until the reply is written, when, with a rapid sweep, it announces its conclusion by rushing swiftly back to the left, and stopping suddenly at the edge of the paper. These motions seem to those whose fingers rest upon the board to be entirely independent of their own wills; their only care being to avoid any resistance to its motions. The fact that it is impossible to suppose that the wills of two persons could be by their own desire mutually coincident, without previously concerted action, forms one of the most puzzling features of the subject, as the nature of the questions asked and answered precludes the possibility of collusion.

We have thus stated the facts relating to this mysterious little machine, carefully avoiding the expression of opinion, *pro* or *con*, in the hope of accumulating more data in regard to it, and because we believe that the key to the solution of the class of phenomena to which we think it undoubtedly belongs, may be discovered in the investigation of the cause of its movements.

PLANCHETTE.

[*From the St. Louis Guardian.*]

THE world is full of mystery to us, the dwellers, on its surface. Wherever we turn our thoughts we find some problem, either of life or nature, which we are unable to solve.

The green leaves on the growing tree, the hum of the insects through the air, the swift flight of birds cleaving the blue ether, man, the beasts of the field, are all continually reminding us of the great, unknown mystery of life.

Even the crust of the earth, and the subterranean fires beneath its surface, give evidence of mysterious forces at work, of whose existence we are indeed cognizant by observation and reason, but of whose nature we can never hope to obtain a knowledge in our present life.

But when we ascend to the soul of man, — the noblest work of them all, — and observe the mysterious workings of that simple and immortal essence, in its relations with the external world, the conclusion forces itself on our minds more strongly yet that many things are in operation on this earth which transcend all the boasted power of our intellects.

Although continual change is going on through nature, — plants and animals dying, decaying, and giving up their elements to form new combinations, and the inorganic materials of the earth interchanging and giving up their component parts to form other and

different compounds, — yet nothing leaves its natural habitation, the earth's surface, or the ocean of air surrounding it. Differing how greatly are all those from that ethereal essence of man — soul — which never resolves itself into parts, since itself is a simple unit, but, after separating from the body, forsakes earth for other regions, whose geography is unknown to man.

Of the other forces of nature we can obtain some knowledge, though imperfect; but in regard to this wanderer into the night of the unknown, — this explorer of the mystic land beyond the grave, — of its movements, of its thoughts after death, we are perfectly ignorant.

Revelation is very reticent on the subject, giving only hints that excite in the soul of man a desire to know more.

He has an indescribable yearning for a knowledge of such things.

A fascination, possessed by none of the numerous branches of human knowledge, appertains to researches into the mysteries of the other life.

Especially in these latter days has the mind of man turned with eagerness to investigations of this kind; else why should animal magnetism, Odyle, table-turning, and the like, possess votaries who may be numbered by thousands?

Some two hundred years ago the spiritual medium and clairvoyant would have been thrown into a horse-pond, to see whether they would sink or swim.

Yet farther back into the mists of the so-called dark ages they might have expiated their fondness for mysteries by a death at the stake.

But our enlightened age does not believe in witches, — that was one of the delusions of the days of ignorance. Such a belief would now insult the humblest intellect of this period of progress.

Instead of giving credence to, and shaking in their shoes from the fear of witches, they have become more familiar with the power of darkness, and very few but have taken them by the hand around some turning or rapping-table.

No people have been more eager in such pursuits than the American. In truth, amongst them the spiritual movements originated, and amongst them have been found its greatest number of votaries.

Many and various are the phases it has taken. With some the primitive table-turning is still in vogue, and any amount of queer noises, rappings, and intelligible answers to questions are elicited.

Others, more advanced in this new science, philosophy, or by whatever name it may be called, discard that slow and tedious method of evoking the powers, and seek an easier communication with the other world. Thus have originated writing mediums.

The latest improvement of all the various instruments of spiritualism, is a small, heart-shaped board, on phantagraphic rollers, admitting of facile movement in every direction, which has received the name of Planchette. At the apex of the instrument is fixed a pencil, and at the other end or base are the two phantagraphic rollers, as we have before remarked.

“Planchette” is simply a French word signifying “a little board,” and is generally addressed as a

female by all of those who have had any experience with her.

It is exactly with Planchette that we have to do at present, and we wish to give here a sketch of its operations, together with the inference drawn from them as to the source of its power. Patents have been taken out by its inventors, and directions for its use attached to each one.

The instrument we made use of was called the "Boston Planchette," and had a card with directions on it, somewhat after this manner:—

"Place Planchette on a sheet of paper (printing or wrapping will answer), then place the hand lightly on the board; in a few minutes it begins to move, and is ready to answer questions, mental or spoken.

"Where a party of three or more come together, it is almost impossible that one or more cannot operate.

"If one be not successful, let two try it together. That Planchette is capable of giving a large amount of amusement, is beyond a doubt; nor is it less likely to afford instruction and a wide field for speculation and experiment to the scientific."

Under the guise of a toy for parlor amusement, this little instrument is introduced to the public by its patentees; and very few heads of families would have any hesitation in spending a dollar or two to procure this novelty in the way of amusement, especially as most other in-door diversions have become somewhat stale.

So with considerable ease is Mademoiselle introduced into the family circle, and made to work its wonders, to the gratification of some, and, I must

say, to the doubt and fear of others. The writer of this paper can say, without boasting, that he has had a great and varied experience with the workings of this little instrument. It has responded wondrously to his touch, and has given answers to questions in a manner to excite a lively curiosity as to the source of its power. He does not presume to give a perfect and unexceptionable explanation in regard to what elicits the curious actions of Planchette; but he will say that he has come to a certain conclusion as to the principal power concerned in their production.

Not to shape or distort facts according to a preconceived theory of his own, he will simply give a record of the facts themselves, and afterwards draw his inference from them, leaving it to the reader to judge whether he does so correctly or not.

Planchette was purchased, and an eager curiosity was excited in us to witness its operations. We were three friends, — Messrs. P., and H., and myself, — all equally disposed to try the merits of this strange little instrument, of whose wonders we heard so much. Serious were we all, and in solemn expectation we laid our hands lightly on the delicately-constructed board. A pause and silence of some minutes ensued, and Planchette began to move slowly over the broad sheet of printing paper on which it was placed.

A feeling of awe was created in our souls, such as one generally has when approaching the boundaries of the other world. After making several gyrations and circles on the paper, preparatory to further operations, it seemed to concentrate all its attention to our wills.

The first sound that broke the silence was the questions proposed, which were mostly known to one or the other of the operators. Answer after answer was given forth with promptness and correctness. The time was night, the lamp burned dimly, and, in the perfect silence that prevailed, the tickings of the clock in the corner struck with painful distinctness on the ear.

The flapping of the curtains against the open window would, at every repetition of their sound, cause some one of the party to start as if he had become cognizant of the presence of a ghost.

We sustained with tolerable equanimity most of the answers given, especially after we had, in a measure, become used to them; but when some one of us, more curious than the rest, asked, What was the true source of its power? it answered, "Magnetism." Was there any other source? The answer came, "Odile" (spelt incorrectly). Any other cause yet? "Yes — Spirit," and then "Bad," we all experienced a creeping sensation, a thrill of awe, as it were, extending itself from head to foot. Here we were in communication, as it seemed, with the mysterious inhabitants of the invisible world, the world of suffering. It would not, at that time, have surprised any of us to have seen tables, chairs, or sofas rising from the floor, and flying about the room at random. We then asked, What was "Odile?" After refusing to answer several times, it wrote out very deliberately and distinctly the word "Nonsense."

Here we had the testimony of the spirits themselves as to the Odylic force, — sheer nonsense. They were

candid enough to admit that the real power moving the board, and causing it to shape out intelligible answers, were "spirits," and they evil, too.

Yet, after all, these sensations were incident only to first trials. After a while we became familiar with Planchette and her various manifestations. We began to perceive that her hand-writing was characteristic, and resembled the hand-writing of none present. She always formed certain letters in the same way; for instance, her R's, S's, and F's were invariably shaped out in the same manner.

Naturally we attempted to explain away these apparently preternatural effects by some material cause. It made no difference to us what it might be—a cause we wanted, and that we must have, and in our own world, too;—not in the world of spirits. It would never do to let our minds be carried away by superstition. My friend H. was a firm believer in natural causes. At first he said it was "magnetism"; then "an unconscious power of the mind," to write these words out, when the ideas existed in the memory previously.

He was rather staggered in his belief when the Demoiselle wrote answers that none of us had in our minds at all. Yet for all he would not give up his theory. Strange to say, in spite of his unbelief he had more power in producing these movements than any of us. P. and myself were more disposed to attribute them to preternatural causes, and them diabolical.

The unexpectedness of some of the answers both startled, and convinced us that we were right in our surmises. For example: it was requested to write

out for us something that we were not expecting, — something that we could not possibly have in our minds. It wrote out with distinctness “30 years ago.” Afterwards, on the question being repeated, it wrote (myself the questioner), “*none remain but you under the influence of Planchette.*”

Neither of these answers were ever dreamed of by any of the party present. The inference might have been drawn from the last answer given, that I had the greatest power over it. This, however, was doubtful, since neither P. nor myself could ever produce any movement with the board unless H. also had his hands on it. In truth, the spirit, if it were spirit, would not unfrequently tell fibs. Moreover, Mademoiselle was as capricious as any other of her sex. She would sometimes purposely answer wrong, and, on being pressed, would then come out with the correct answer.

We imagined that we could hear the mocking, sneering laugh of this weird being near us. At any rate, we felt as if she were laughing at us, as we remarked to one another afterwards.

Some singular efforts were observed in regard to the motions of Planchette. Very frequently the answer would be written backwards, and then it was only after careful deciphering that we could get at Planchette's meaning. When these backward writings were made, it was done with the greatest speed, precluding any supposition that it was made knowingly by any of the operators.

On request, the answer would be given in Latin, Greek, or French, — nay, even in Spanish and Hebrew. But not content with writing words significant

of ideas, she would, when asked, draw the portraits of different individuals, not artistic, by any means, but sufficiently characteristic to distinguish the person it was meant for. Some adventurous spirit in our party asked it to draw out a portrait of "Old Sooty" himself. Line by line, feature by feature, a rude, rough portrait was drawn, horrible to see, with the traditional tail and cloven foot. It caused a very uncomfortable feeling in all of us to witness the minute correctness with which it drew the cloven foot and tail. There was no mistaking these.

The features of the face were uncouth, it was true; but there was an indefinable something underlying them, that suggested the cold, sneering malignity of man's eternal enemy. It was really a horrible portrait, and the writer of this article can say with sincerity, that he wished no repetition of such drawings.

The same bold investigation into the mysteries of the other life, whose rash courage instituted their investigations, asked Planchette to write the real name of the individual it had drawn. But first it was asked if it was Lucifer himself? The answer came, "No." It then wrote a name in hieroglyphics, as it seemed to most of us, but which we were assured by our sceptic, H., who had some acquaintance with the language, was Hebrew.

He did not know enough of that primitive tongue to decipher it out completely. Planchette herself was requested to give the translation into English. Much to the surprise of all, it wrote, "Lost, lost." We could almost fancy we saw the pale, distorted features

of that miserable condemned spirit, hear its wailing, expressing that eternal drone, "Lost, lost."

It was then asked what it desired, and the answer was given, "Rest." "Do you suffer?" "Yes." "What kind of pain did it suffer?" The words were written out more plainly than usual, "An awful fate." One of us persistently plied Planchette with question after question. It signified its impatience by returning in a straight line off the paper, or answering "No," and "I won't," several times, when at last, with a jerking, quick and impatient motion, it wrote out very plainly, "Let me alone." Examples might be given sufficient to satisfy the most incredulous, but such would be inconsistent with the character of this paper, which is simply a sketch of Planchette's doings, made more for the purpose of calling attention to them than to examine them philosophically. Not that we have not philosophized to a certain degree on this subject, for we adopted, before commencing operations at all, the following classification of the questions to be proposed:—

1st. Questions, the answers to which all the operators knew and strongly expected.

2d. Questions, the answers to which were known by only one operator.

3d. Questions whose answers were known by none of the operating parties, but were known by a third party not operating, and were proposed to him vocally.

4th. Mental questions proposed:—

(a) — By one of the operators.

(b) — By one who was not operating.

Almost every question of the first class was answered correctly. As an example, the following question, with its answer, may be cited: I asked the question, What present did I receive from friend C. some months ago, — the only one he had ever made me? Planchette wrote out very promptly the word “stick,” and, on being asked to describe it more particularly, it wrote “gold,” and afterwards, on the rest of the epithet being required, it added “headed.” The present received by me was a gold-headed cane. It was then asked where P.’s dog was at the present time? P. himself did not have his hand on the little board at all. After drawing a few lines up and down on the paper, and then circles, it wrote the startling word “Hell,” then “Ellen” (the Christian name of the lady who then had the dog).

On the question being repeated, it did not seem inclined to answer. It was then asked to tell anything it knew of the dog. It answered “Jem” (the name of the animal). This it repeated three times, and finally, after making several unintelligible marks, it wrote the lady’s surname correctly, which was H.

These are two instances, only, of a dozen or more of the first class of questions.

Not unfrequently Planchette refuses to answer at all, and will run in a straight line completely off the paper, or write the word “Ellen,” both of which are significant of a refusal to respond at all.

At other times, the answer will be something, or some name, connected with the one expected, but not the correct answer itself.

In the second class of cases, answers are given for

the most part, but sometimes there is a failure. H. and myself, placing our hands on Planchette, the name of my youngest brother, dead for fifteen years or more, was asked. H. did not know the name at all. It was written out correctly. It was William.

H. demanded of it the name of the town he had been residing in this month two years ago. It answered, "Suncroft," a name perfectly unknown to me. On being asked to tell what country this town was in, it first wrote "Ellen," then "Europe," and lastly "Ireland." The name of the town asked for by H., was Suncroft, in Ireland.

It failed, however, in answering a question of the same kind proposed immediately afterwards.

In the next class of questions, in which the answers were unknown to either operating party, it failed entirely.

Finally, in the fourth class, the mental questions, whenever the proposer of such was one of the operators, it generally answered correctly; but when a third party, not having his hands on the table, asked the question, it failed in every instance but one or two.

Many examples might be adduced in illustration of the foregoing questions, but a sufficient number has been cited to prove our main points, viz.: that the efficient power in most of those powers was preternatural and bad.

If the reader will observe, it will be found that the facts may be divided into classes, viz.:—

(a) — Facts that may be explained by natural causes.

(b) — Those which admit of no such explanations.

All of those may possibly be referred to the first

class of facts, except those answers which were entirely unexpected, not only by the operators, but by every one present. We have already given two examples of that kind of facts.

They were not the only ones furnished by Planchette. On its name being asked, it answered, "Ellen." "Were you ever a mortal being?" "Yes." "Did you know any of us when in life?" "Yes, it knew me" (the interrogator). It wrote out the word "you." "Where?" "In St. Louis." "What year?" In figures, "1856." "Did I know her?" "No." "Had it any affection for me?" "Yes, 'love.'" It moreover said I did not love her.

This was becoming quite exciting to myself. Here was an unknown female declaring that she had been in love with me, and that her affection had not been reciprocated. Visions of unrequited love, sinking into an early grave, flitted through my imagination.

The spirit said that she was nineteen years of age when she died.

Worse and worse. But for my life I could not recall to my memory any such name as "Ellen Morgan," which was finally deciphered out to be the name by which she called herself.

Thinking, that as Planchette had already told lies, she might be doing the same now, I asked very solemnly if she were not deceiving me? The answer was given very promptly, "Yes." "Why?" "For fun."

This last answer indeed startled us exceedingly. We were expecting nothing of the kind, — indeed, all

the chain of answers, from beginning to end, was as equally unexpected by us.

We have given this case as an example of those unexpected answers that proved to us that this class of cases could not be explained by natural causes.

Those who *do* maintain that they were natural phenomena, assert that the hand involuntarily and unconsciously writes the answers when they are known to one or all of the operators.

We admit that, when all of the operators know and strongly expect a certain answer, this may *possibly* be written without their being conscious of the motive-power exerted on their part, assuming that each one is in good faith, and exerts the same pressure on Planchette at all times; or rather we believe that each one may contribute to the instrument — sensitive to the most delicate touch — a slight and almost imperceptible movement, none of whom singly could move the board; but that their portions of power, taken together, *in toto*, might produce a certain movement, which, when each one's thoughts were concentrated on one thing or name, might eventuate in producing such a result. But when only one person of the party present knows the expected answer, the one ignorant of it must at least have his inertia overcome by the other to produce the wished-for results, inasmuch as not knowing this answer, nor exerting any will to write it out, he will make no motion at all, and simply remains passive, and expectant of something unknown.

The person knowing the looked-for answer is supposed to be in good faith, and evidently makes no voluntary effort to overcome the other's inertia.

The result of all this will necessarily be no movement at all.

We cannot admit that the mind can express its thoughts in any manner in the waking state, without being conscious of it.

The operators are not supposed to be dreaming, somnambulizing, or even in a reverie, but in a state of steady, sober wakefulness, all the senses being on the alert.

Yet in that class of cases, where the mind of each operator is intent on a certain answer, and contrary to all expectation, a strange and wholly unlooked-for response is written down, how can "this power behind the throne," this unconscious exertion of the mind, be brought into play?

Again, a question is asked, the answer to which is perfectly unknown to any of the operators; they do not form any expectations or guesses as to what it may be, and a word is written which certainly never existed at that time in the thoughts of any of them.

For example, on being requested to write anything it chose to do, the word "adore" was written out.

Could any of the operators fashion out the word "adore" unconsciously, and having no expectation of it?

This seems to us impossible.

It was not an awakening of the memory, for none of the party present had this word concealed in the recesses of their memory, connected with the circumstances present at the time it was made.

We shall cursorily pass over mental questions propounded by a non-operator, as the results were too

uncertain to form a basis for reasoning from the facts, but we can say that questions have been propounded mentally by any one of the non-operating parties, and have been answered correctly in more than one instance.

We have now finished with Planchette, and it only remains for us to come to conclusions as regards the power that produces these strange movements. Of course we pre-supposed good faith in all of our experiments, and were convinced that it was really present. Many men of science, materialists at the core, who do not admit of the existence of preternatural or supernatural causes, might exclaim that this was all humbug.

Or, perhaps, they might endeavor to explain it by material principles. They cannot do so. We flatter ourselves that we have some acquaintance with the natural sciences; yet in all of these operations we find nothing analogous to the natural.

If it be a natural power, it is something different from every power of which we have cognizance. Magnetism, electricity, and galvanism are blind powers obeying certain laws. They have not the characteristics of an intelligent being.

The power we have been treating of answers intelligibly to all questions.

Even when responding incorrectly; nay, even telling lies, yet the fact of its answering at all is a strange fact.

At the same time we do not believe that every manifestation made by Planchette on tables is preter-

natural. The inference we form from all these experiments, are, —

1st. That in a certain number of cases, viz.: where both operators know the questions, and strongly expect a certain answer, it is not impossible that the hand may be unconsciously influenced to write out the expected answer. Such may possibly be deemed under the influence of a natural cause, viz.: an unconscious power of the mind to express anything on which it is strongly concentrated. Yet even in such cases there is doubt. Still less a probability will remain for considering it a natural cause, where only one of the operators know the expected answer.

2d. That in the remaining class of cases, where answers unexpected to any of the operators are given, even when unknown to them, or answers utterly unknown and propounded by a third party, are produced, the powers educing such must be foreign, not only to the instrument used, but to the persons using it — in other words, a preternatural force.

As this preternatural power gives evidence from the results that it is intelligent, it must be either God or creature.

It certainly, from very evident reasons, cannot be God.

If creature, it must be either angels, disembodied souls, good or bad, or demons.

Angels and the souls of the just cannot lend their aid to gratify the vain curiosity of man.

They only interfere with natural laws for some good and important purpose. They work miracles.

These, however, are not miracles. They are sim-

ply preternatural. But the end of all these operations of Planchette, as well as its congeners, table-turnings, and the like, is to gratify man's curiosity in regard to hidden things, either in the past, present, or future.

Moreover, the results on the moral and physical state of man are bad in the extreme.

The votaries of this new religion, science, or whatever they choose to call it, forsake all religions that are founded on Christ's incarnation.

They ignore him and the grand truths of the gospel. It is true, they can never get over the fact of *God*, but they look on Him from a materialistic point of view, as a cold, immovable being, who has formed certain laws for the government of the human race, together with all nature, from which there can be no deviation whatever. They ignore grace and all its wondrous operations.

They substitute a literal worship of demons, for the worship of the true God.

The inference we cannot fail to draw in all such cases is, that the motive power is bad — otherwise, evil spirits.

SOME THOUGHTS AS TO THE ORIGIN OF PLANCHETTE.

[From the Newark, N. J., Advertiser.]

THE fact that the last number of the Boston *Watchman and Reflector*, a well-known religious paper, in regular, orthodox standing, contained an article, over a column in length, on Planchette, written without any sprinkling of vinegar or brimstone, is a sign of the times. One reason that the phenomena of so-called spiritualism — table-turning, message-writing, and the like — have been so seldom satisfactorily investigated, is, that scientific men have generally pooh-poohed the whole thing, and religious men have frequently fled these demonstrations, as they would the devil himself. But the *Watchman* article (written by E. Stuart Phelps) is marked by no excess of credulity or incredulity, and no fear of his Satanic majesty. The writer acknowledges that one thing seems to be certain, — that the power which possesses Planchette, is identical with the power of table-tipping. We quote : —

“Mrs. Smith, clairvoyant, anywhere on Washington Street, — an absolute stranger to you and yours, — will, for the sum of one dollar, write for you with the finger of one hand upon the palm of another, your own name, business, age, past history, and future prospects, the names of your dead friends, the disease of which they died, together with as many aimless, un-

characteristic messages from them as you choose to sit and listen to. Does she, under a law of physical condition which we have not fathomed, read your mind? Does Planchette, under the same law, interpret your thought, or your neighbor's? Have we not here the hints of a problem which belongs not to superstition, but to science? Is not the time coming, and now at hand, when this whole series of phenomena will awaken no more surprise than the transmission of this sentence from my brain to the *Watchman and Reflector*? Then the devil has nothing to do with it. He would be a bold theorizer who should assert that. The devil has to do with most things in this world. How far he is allowed to wrench any simple law from its system, we cannot tell. Whether Planchette and Mrs. Smith are peculiarly open to his influence, remains to be seen."

As to the origin of Planchette, it is said, that fifteen years ago, somebody in Germany happened to hold a pencil at arm's length, in a pair of scissors, and observed that, owing either to the tremulousness of the hand, or to the vividness of the imagination, or to causes unknown, intelligent words traced themselves upon paper. At the beginning of the present decade, a novel was published in England, with the title of "Who Breaks, Pays," in which a young lady beguiles her "weary hours" with a Planchette, very much the same as the curious machine with which we are familiar. Those acquainted with the various phases of the spiritualistic developments, describe similar contrivances, in use by certain mediums, long before some

enterprising Yankee, in the winter of 1867-68, concluded to coin the idea into money, and succeeded. To-day, Planchette is an institution, and, as has been said, a counter, without it is a fossil. "Planchettes trundle in the windows of the tract-house and tobacco stores, dance among opera scores and Sunday-school books, — heart-shaped Planchettes, square Planchettes, Planchettes for eight dollars, and Planchettes for fifty cents, Planchettes of walnut, ash, mahogany, gutta percha, tin, glass, — Planchettes on pegs, coils, and pentagraph wheels. Planchette confronts you at the dancing parties and in the minister's study, in the drawing-room and the 'settin'-room,' — is a substitute for the weather and Charles Dickens in the 'social circle,' — and the end thereof, who can foretell?" But, in reality, there is probably nothing in the board itself, except its convenience as an instrument. A genuine Planchetter should be able to write without its assistance. We have seen most astonishing answers traced, merely with the pencil, by one who does not adopt the spiritual hypothesis thereanent, nor any other, in fact, save that the whole affair is something altogether unexplained, and "uncanny."

There is something which shows a keen appreciation of the situation in the "directions" concerning the use of this wonderful machine, and who can doubt that, in the accidental touch of fingers on the board, there is often a gentle thrill, which is not accounted for wholly by the electric nor magnetic, nor even the spiritual hypothesis, — a subtle something which may elude the eye of science, but is very human after all,

and has quite as much to do with the heart of flesh as with the little mahogany heart.

It is to be hoped that somebody is looking into this matter of Planchette a shade more seriously than most of us, who make it an evening's pastime. But it is a difficult field for genuine investigation, as the laws against lying seem to be totally suspended, and, by general consent, in all matters which relate to this uncanny little three-legged mystery. In the kingdom of Planchette, the philosopher is decreed a bore.

[*Extract from "Who Breaks, Pays."*]

LILL found Mrs. Townsend in her own room, lying on a sofa in a *peignoir*, her long fair hair escaping from the comb with which it had been hastily caught up. On a table before her was something like a toy, — a piece of wood in the shape of a heart, mounted on three tiny wheels; in her hands a book with a yellow paper cover. As Lill entered, she pushed the book under the sofa-pillow, and said, "Sit down by me, Lill. I have something serious to say to you."

Lill remembered Giuliani's words, and was sure that she was going to be cross-examined.

"I have been consulting Planchette about you," went on Mrs. Townsend.

"Who is Planchette?" asked Lill, doing all she could to seem at her ease under the scrutiny of the little lady.

"There she is," said Mrs. Townsend, pointing to

the apparent toy. "Seeing is believing." So saying, she drew towards her a blank sheet of folio paper, and upon it placed what she called Planchette. In the broadest end of the heart was a hole, in which was already fixed a black-lead pencil, with the point downwards. Mrs. Townsend put her hand on the wood exactly as she would have done on the keys of a piano-forte.

"Now, Planchette," she exclaimed, "let us see what you can do."

In a second or two, Planchette wildly scoured across the paper, first one way, then another, Mrs. Townsend's hands obeying every capricious turn of its wheels. At last they came to a stand-still.

"Now then, Lill, see what she has written. There's no trick in it, I assure you."

"I can see nothing but a set of unmeaning strokes."

"Give it to me, child."

Lill handed the paper to her friend.

"What is the meaning of this, Planchette?" cried Mrs. Townsend. "Why do you persist in writing 'river?' Every time I have tried her this morning," continued she, quite gravely, "she has written the same word, 'river.' Don't smile; it means a warning to you, for I told Planchette that it was for you I consulted her. Come, Planchette, dear Planchette, do be a little more clear," and Mrs. Townsend, with great seriousness, put another sheet of paper beneath the wood.

"You don't mean to say you are in earnest?" said Lill.

"Of course you won't believe me," answered Mrs.

Townsend. "A truth is always condemned at first. Galileo said the world moved, and it was called a heresy. Well, you may believe I move Planchette. I can only reply, *E pure si muove.*" A bright red spot of excitement was on each of the speaker's cheeks. "It was one of your favorite Italians who gave me Planchette; and if I had always attended to Planchette's counsel, I should be wiser and better than I am. Many a beautiful letter of advice she has written me, alluding to events no one knew but myself. And prayers, — O Lill, I could show you such sublime prayers she has written me!"

"My dear Mrs. Townsend, dear Honora!" exclaimed Lill, quite shocked.

"I believed as little as you do once. But, as I said before, seeing is believing; and one day I was dining out, and people were talking of spirit-rapping and table-turning. I laughed, and said I would believe if the dinner-table rose up and slapped my hand. I held my hand high above the table. You do not think I would tell you a fib, Lill? I give you my word of honor. Suddenly everything in the room seemed to move before my eyes, and the table — a great, heavy dining-table — jumped up and slapped my hand. It was the same evening I first saw Planchette, and found out I was a medium. O, the comfort I have had in Planchette! She has been a friend to me in my loneliness."

Lill began now seriously to fear that Mrs. Townsend was mad.

"No, my dear girl," said she, "I am as sane as you. Poor Lill! I can read your face easier than

this warning of Planchette's. — 'River! river!'" she repeated. "Come, you put your hands on it with mine."

It was quite droll to see the two ladies sitting, silent and expectant, with their hands on the wooden heart; which, however, coaxed by her devotee, remained stubbornly immovable.

"Take your hands off; she knows you are an unbeliever." Away ran Planchette, freed from Lill's pressure. "Ah, she has written 'Lillian,' and put a great cross after it."

"Lillian is my Christian name," said Lill.

"There now, do you believe? I swear to you I did not know you were called Lillian, though I must say I have often wondered what your real name was."

Lill did not choose to contradict her friend, or even to say that the word she declared was "Lillian" might have served as well as any other in the dictionary.

"'Lillian' and a cross, and 'river.' I can't make it out," — and Mrs. Townsend pushed away Planchette, — "except that she means you are likely to be crossed in love."

"She ought, then, to have written 'willow,' instead of 'river,'" said Lill, with a faint attempt at a laugh; "or, perhaps, I am to drown myself, as poor Ophelia did."

"Who can tell?" said Mrs. Townsend.

The following interesting description of Planchette is reprinted from "EVERY SATURDAY." It originally appeared in "ONCE A WEEK," from which periodical the proprietors of "EVERY SATURDAY" republished it.

LAST autumn I was enjoying the hospitality of an old friend in the north of Scotland. The weather was charming; game plentiful, — grouse, black game, partridges, hares; the moors blooming with heather; the fields dotted with corn-stocks; the river, flowing just below the old baronial hall, was full of salmon; and so lovely in itself, that to fail to catch them there was better than good sport in many tamer waters. There were croquet parties, pleasant companions, excellent fare, and all, in short, that could conduce to make a visit delightful. But there was still another source of amusement, mysterious and novel, at least in this country, which is, I believe, well known across the Atlantic. Perhaps some trans-Atlantic contributor may be induced to give a fuller and more satisfactory account of it than the following imperfect sketch.

When I reached my friend's house, I found among the guests my old friend, Mr. B., who had lately returned from a tour in the States, and was full of all he had seen there. After dinner, when we "joined the ladies," the piano-forte was open, and my friend B. was apparently persuading a young lady to sing. I heard him say, imploringly, "Planchette!" which I assumed to be some favorite song of his, though unknown to me. Miss A. gave a gesture of dissent, and then proceeded to "Call the cattle home across the sands o' Dee," a song much more familiar to us all, —

certainly to me, — than the mysterious “Planchette.” The song over, the fair songstress and Mr. B. betook themselves to a retired part of the drawing-room, and soon were intent over what appeared to me some game. They leant over the little table which separated them, and, whatever their occupation was, it appeared to be very engrossing.

The evening terminated in the usual gathering of male guests in the servants’ hall, where, over toddy and cigars, we shot our grouse and caught our salmon over again. B. left us early, having to pack up, as he was to take his departure next day; and as, some time after, I went along the corridor leading to the bachelors’ quarters, I found his door open, and him, standing in the midst of open portmanteaus, engaged in the pleasing occupation of planning how to put into them again all the things that had been taken out of them some weeks before.

Of these possessions, one attracted my especial attention.

“What’s this, B.?” I asked.

“O, that’s ‘Planchette’!”

“‘Planchette’! I thought ‘Planchette’ was a song!”

“Have n’t you seen it? O, I forgot, you only came to-day. ‘Planchette’ is not a song,” he said laughing, as I explained the origin of my blunder. “This is ‘Planchette.’” And I saw a board seven and seven-eighths inches long by seven inches in its widest part, and one-fourth of an inch thick. It is made of any wood, — oak in this instance, — and is shaped like a heart. There is a hole at one and one-half inches

from the point of the board, into which is fixed a soft pencil, which is so adjusted as to form, as it were, the third leg. Two pentagraph wheels are affixed to the under side, at an inch from the upper edge of the board.

"Well, but what is it?"

"What you see."

"And its use?"

"Well, it will write down the answer to any question you like to ask it."

"Of course it will," I replied; "as would any pencil in your hand or mine."

"No. I mean that, without any voluntary action on any one's part, it will write down on paper an answer to any question,—I don't necessarily say a *proper* answer, but an answer."

I looked naturally incredulous; and my friend then proceeded to tell me that he had brought "Planchette" from America, where, he said, it was not only common, but was by many implicitly believed in as something preternatural.

"No canny, eh?" I remarked, as I held it in my hand. "Why, you have had this made specially for your visit to Scotland; for anticipating that *here* it would be called *the Deil*, you have met the charge by having it made of *oak*."

"Ah," said B., "you don't believe it."

"Believe what? That it will write without the direction of human hands? Certainly not."

"Nor did I till I had tried it. Now you give it a fair trial. I have left one with our friends here. I don't think they quite like it, but it will write for Miss A., and you try it with her to-morrow."

I examined the machine, as he explained the mode of using it.

The "little plank or board" is placed upon a sheet of paper, — common white cartridge paper is the best, — and two persons lay their hands very lightly upon it, not in any way influencing its motion. Then one of them, or a third person, asks a question, and the wheels move. "Planchette" traverses the paper, and the pencil, of course, following the motion of the wheels, writes the reply.

"Do you mean," I asked, "that it always does so with any one?"

"No, it rarely writes, at first, for any one, but generally runs about the paper, round and round, or up and down; but it will almost always write in the end, if the operators persevere. But for some people it won't move at all. I must say," he continued, "that the answers are generally wrong, and that its prophecies, — it's fond of prophecy, — are generally false; but is it not strange that it should write at all?"

"Very," I remarked, dryly.

"Ah! you don't believe it, and I don't wonder."

And then he told me his experience of it in the States, far too numerous to mention, and dwelt particularly on the first specimen he had of its powers.

"Two ladies," he said, "had their hands on it, and I was asked to question it. I was as incredulous as you are; so I resolved to ask a puzzler. I had been to hear Spurgeon preach shortly before leaving England. I was struck with his text, the words of which I distinctly remembered, though I had forgotten where they came from. So I asked Planchette. It instantly

wrote '2d Cor.' and mentioned chapter and verse. We looked it up, and it was right! Now that was extraordinary, was it not?"

"No. I suppose you repeated the words of the text, and the young ladies recognized it, and wrote the reply."

"Not at all; I asked where the text came from, without repeating it."

I could not deny that the circumstances as stated were extraordinary; but I contented myself with making the very original remark, "I should like to have witnessed it myself."

He continued that it was not necessary to ask the question aloud; a mental question was quite sufficient; and that all languages were alike to it.

"Now," he said, "don't suppose I am such a fool as to believe that there is anything 'spiritual' or supernatural about it. I merely tell you what I have seen; judge for yourself. But, as it is getting into the small hours, I must go on packing."

"Planchette" was restored to its usual place,—B.'s hat-box,—and I went to bed.

It was impossible not to feel some interest in this curious and altogether novel subject. Here was a man whom I had known intimately for nearly twenty years,—a man of scrupulous truth,—his perfect straightforward truthfulness was proverbial among his friends; a man of great ability, but without one particle of imagination,—in short, the very last man to take up a question like this with enthusiasm or credulity. What was I to think? He gave me his word, which I knew I could trust, that there was no trick in

it, — that what he told me he had seen ; and he challenged me to give the matter a fair trial, and judge for myself. Now, there are hundreds of men, and more hundreds of women, from whom one would receive a statement of this sort with many grains of salt, not because they are unworthy of credit, but because their temperaments would incline them to be “led captive” by the wonderful and the mysterious, — “*omne ignotum pro magnifico.*” But my friend, as I have said, was not one of them, — not one to be carried away by any speculative or imaginative question. He is essentially clear-headed and hard-headed, and it would be a very poor compliment to his common sense to suppose that he believed in the spirituality of “a little board.” My curiosity was piqued — and I fell asleep.

Next morning, at breakfast, I referred to “Planchette.” Miss A. was evidently a convert. My host said nothing. My hostess confessed that she did not “quite like it.” Others ridiculed it, and the subject dropped.

Most of the guests left that day to make way for a new batch ; and, when evening came, Miss A. and I sat down to “Planchette” with two, at least, of our lookers-on, who had never heard of the “critter” before.

We placed our hands on “Planchette,” and asked some question. For a while, it was stationary ; then it began to move under our hands, and to run about the paper, scoring lines up and down, sometimes fast, sometimes slow ; our hands scarcely touched it. “It is merely the effect of pulsation,” I said. But we persevered, and presently it began to form letters.

Our first question was, "What letters are engraved in this locket?" The locket was mine, and I, of course, knew the letters, though I had not opened the locket for a long time. Miss A. was ignorant of them. There were four letters, of which K and B were the last two. Planchette wrote "K. B." I observed that the K was formed differently from the manner in which I write the letter, and I asked Miss A. to write it in her ordinary way. She did so, and this was unlike the K written by Planchette, — which was thus *K* — and on examining the letter in the locket, it exactly corresponded with it.

Now, as I knew the letters, and Miss A. did not, the influence which produced them must, I presume, have been mine, not hers, yet mine involuntarily, for I certainly did not consciously direct the pencil. Indeed, had I been dishonest, and intentionally influenced it, I should, I imagine, have written all the letters, and not two only.

I gave my hostess five letters, which I had received that day, and begged her to select one without our knowledge, and question "Planchette." She did so, asking the initials of the writer. The reply was again "K. B." It proved that the letter selected was not written by K. B., but by one of our most distinguished general officers; but it was placed in an envelope (not seen by us) directed by the owner of these initials.

That the action of the pencil is generally influenced by those whose hands are on the board, I have no doubt; but assuming these persons to be honest, and to abstain from any voluntary movement, it is equally

beyond doubt that this influence, whatever it may be, is involuntary. It is, of course, perfectly easy to make the pencil write; pentagraph wheels being, as every one knows, most sensitive. Let us suppose that A. and B. *intend* to make it write; one of two things is necessary, — either they must be confederates, and agree to write the same word, or one must be passive, and must *allow* the other to write it.

Assume, for the sake of argument, this to be the way in which answers are produced, how will the following admit of explanation?

One of the guests, who had just arrived, on the occasion referred to, asked, “At what town did I purchase these sleeve-links?” Neither Miss A. nor I knew.

“Planchette” instantly, in a great hurry, wrote “Aberness.”

“Wrong,” exclaimed the inquirer, triumphantly; “I bought them in Paris.”

But wrong as the answer was, it was, in my judgment, an exceedingly curious answer, showing, as I think, that the influence of those whose hands are on the board, is unconscious and involuntary. I certainly was not thinking of any place in particular, nor was Miss A.; but we both *knew* that the gentleman who put the question was an *Aberdeenshire* man, and that he had just come from *Inverness*. Here, then, was a conglomeration of two places with which he was connected, and this, I think, proves that Miss A. and I were perfectly *honest* in the matter. Had we either of us *intended* to write Aberdeen or Inver-

ness, we should scarcely have produced such a quaint combination of the two.

We put many more questions that evening, the answers to which were, some right and some wrong; but I am bound to say, that all the answers were wrong when the questions related to subjects unknown to us, and put by a third person. And in almost all cases, this has been the result of my experience; but not in all, as I will show afterwards.

I was sufficiently interested in this curious little machine to make every kind of experiment afterwards that I could think of, my friend B. having presented me with one, which a London instrument-maker had made for him from his American pattern.

I found it most amusing in replying to answers relating to the future, all the answers proving wrong, of course; but some were so unexpected, and so absurd, that they caused the greatest possible fun. It replied equally willingly in French or Latin, and in Oriental languages. In all cases where the experiment was honestly made, the operators did not consciously influence the pencil.

The following is a curious, and, supposing me to be incapable of falsehood in the matter, a conclusive instance of this:—

A bracelet was lying on the table. On the clasp was a word in Oriental characters; on the back of the clasp were initials in English. I had my hands on “Planchette,” a friend joining me. I knew the language to which the word belonged; my friend did not. The question was, “What are the *English* initials on the back of the clasp?” “Planchette,”

instead of writing the English letters at the back, wrote the initial letter, in the Oriental character, of the word on the front of the clasp. Now here was a reply certainly contrary to any expectations which I might have been supposed to have formed. I knew what was written on either side of the clasp; my friend did not. If I had formed any expectation, it would have been that "Planchette" would have written what I asked. I certainly should not, had I wished to astonish my friend by making it appear that "Planchette" would answer the questions put to it, have written a reply so inappropriate. What produced the answer? At least, there was no collusion.

Often "Planchette" misspells. Once it insisted on spelling "commander" with one "m"; again and again, we *wished* it to spell it right; but no. We tried it letter by letter, pausing between each letter; but only one "m" would it write.

Had we intentionally influenced its action, we surely should have made it write two, which we fully expected it would do.

Generally, its blunders in orthography are the blunders of those whose hands are on it. For example, it wrote a French word for me, and put an accent on it, which should not be there, because I believed it should be there; and in writing a Latin word for a lady, it spelt it as the lady thought it should be spelt, — wrong.

To sum up, then: my experience of "Planchette" is, that generally "its utterances are unmistakable emanations from ourselves," without any conscious effort of will on our parts, as a friend to whom I introduced "Planchette" excellently puts it. But,

believing, as I of course do, that the influence, whatever it be, is a purely natural one, — for I need say that I should deem it an insult to my intellect were it supposed that I believed it a supernatural influence, — the fact that its utterance is a mere reflex of the mind of the operator, does not detract from the interest it is impossible not to feel in it.

Is it any natural power not yet fully understood?

Why does the pencil move? and, if it moves, why does it form letters? Why does it put these letters into intelligible words, whatever sense these words may have? Why will it move for one, write for another, and do neither for a third?

Another peculiarity is, that if it writes a word you can't read, it rewrites it, — manifestly the same word, — the same in up and down strokes, in every twist and turn, — over and over again, if you will that it should do so. It will even repeat the scribbles which it makes when it declines to write; and if the pencil is taken up in the middle of a word, and put down again at the same spot, it will resume its writing and finish the word. When in its course it arrives at the edge of the paper, it will often continue its writing, turning round and writing upside down, so that you must reverse the paper to read its writing.

Generally "Planchette" will not write for one person, two being apparently required in most cases. But in two instances I have seen it write for a single pair of hands. The K. B. before referred to, is one who has this power, whatever it may be; a cousin of mine another, — in both cases ladies; and I may

here note, that for women "Planchette" writes more readily than for men.

I have heard, on the authority of persons impossible to discredit, that "Planchette" will occasionally give correct answers to questions put by a third person, the answers to such questions being known to the third person, but not known to those whose hands are on the board. I have tried this often, and only in two instances have I seen the experiment succeed. I will detail them.

I was staying with some friends, and, speaking of "Planchette," I said I fancied electricity must have a good deal to do with its performances. My hostess said, "Let me try, for I have always been told that I possess a great deal of electric power." "Planchette" was produced. The lady and I placed our hands on it, and I begged her husband to put some question the answer to which was known to him, but not to us.

He asked, "To whom did I write this morning?"

"Planchette" instantly commenced writing.

"Stop!" said Colonel G., who was watching it. "It has answered my question."

I removed the board; but, seeing that after the name it had continued as if going to write more, I replaced it, so that the point of the pencil was exactly on the spot from which I had removed it, and requested it to be so good as to proceed. It went on, and then gave its usual sign of having finished, by describing a sort of circular flourish round its writing.

On examining its work, we found "Thomson William."

Thomson was not the name; but I adopt it because,

like the real name, it admits of two modes of spelling, and in this case it spelt the name correctly, in the least common form.

“Well,” said Colonel G., “that’s odd! The surname is right; but I don’t know, or have forgotten, if I ever did know, the Christian name.”

On looking in the “Army List,” he found it was William.

Mrs. G. neither knew that her husband had written to the person named, nor did she know him even by name, — nor did I.

The next case occurred among the same people, and was even more curious.

Colonel G. asked: “From whom did I hear this morning?”

Planchette. — “James.”

Colonel G. — “No, wrong there; try again.”

Planchette. — “James.”

“Are you sure,” said we, “you have *not* heard from any one named James?”

“Quite sure,” he replied, deep in the *Times*.

“Planchette” was requested to say where “James” lived, and replied “London.”

“What was his surname?”

“Planchette” wrote it, — “G——.”

“Are you *quite* sure,” we again asked, “that your brother James did not write to you?”

“By Jove!” exclaimed the Colonel; “he *did*, — to tell me not to go up to dinner to-day, because my father had just discharged the butler. I quite forgot.”

I said that my friend B. told me that “Planchette” would sometimes answer mental questions correctly.

In every experiment I made, but one, it was a failure. One was correct.

There was a dinner party at Colonel G.'s. I produced "Planchette," and Mrs. G., one of the ladies for whom I said "Planchette" would write alone, of course, was present. I begged her husband to arrange with any of the guests a question which they should address, mentally, to the lady. He selected a clergyman, and, after conferring together in a whisper at the side of the room opposite to "Planchette," Colonel G. announced that he had put the question mentally.

"Planchette" wrote, "Town."

The question was then communicated to the party. It was, "Where is —— (myself) going to-morrow?"

I was going to town.

Now there could be no collusion here. The lady who had her hands on "Planchette" did not hear the question, and there was the corroborative testimony of the clergyman as to what that question was.

I do not profess to understand this, and can only assume that the husband possessed some magnetic power over his wife, for, in the three cases cited, "Planchette" replied correctly, when Mrs. G.'s hands were on it, to questions, the answers to which she was ignorant of.

Can the utterances of "Planchette" be explained by natural electricity and animal magnetism? I commend the matter to the attention of Dr. Radcliffe, who has so closely studied these subjects.

I am too ignorant to know whether it is possible that the nerves, having their seat in the brain, could thus act, as it were, in concert with the brain, and

without any conscious effort of the mind or will, produce the formation of letters and words, such as are formed when the hands are laid, as I have described, on "Planchette."

This I do know, — that the hands will, under certain circumstances, write without any conscious effort on the part of their owners; for I have more than once, when oppressed with fatigue, heat, and overwork, fallen into a doze with my pen in my hand, and when I have recovered consciousness, I have found that, in the temporary unconsciousness of sleep, I have still been writing, although I am bound to say, that my writing, under these circumstances, was never as coherent as the performances of "Planchette."

If the cause of the motion and of the formation of letters, words, and sentences be explained, the words themselves need not, I think, be deemed mysterious. None but savages consider dreams preternatural; yet there is no conscious effort of the will. No one considers sleep-walking or sleep-talking "spiritual," yet it is involuntary. Once establish the motion, and the connection, if it exist, in the sense I have referred to, between the nerves and the brain, — once, in short, explain the *act* of "Planchette's" writing, and the *matter* of it need excite no surprise. What is more unexpected or more sudden than a change in the current of our thoughts? What more wonderful than the human mind?

But I am getting out of my depth. I have given a plain and thoroughly truthful account of my own experience of "Planchette." There are, doubtless, many others equally trustworthy, who could cite expe-

riences even more interesting. My object in recording mine is to draw the attention of scientific men to a very curious subject, — to what may be a new natural power, or rather a new development of a natural power. It is worthy of careful examination by unprejudiced men of science, and I hope my slight sketch may induce some of them to give “Planchette” “a fair field, and no favor.”

THE MODERN PROPHET.

CAPACITY OF PLANCHETTE AS A MATRIMONIAL AGENT.

[*From the New Albany Ledger.*]

A FEW evenings since, a young gentleman made a purchase of one of those curious tell-tale machines, and repaired to the residence of a young lady to whom he was paying his addresses, with the hope that Planchette would reveal to him what he had failed, for want of courage, to obtain from his fair dulcinea. After arriving at the house with the little joker concealed, and spending a few moments in the parlor in ordinary commonplaces with the young lady who had so drawn upon his warm affections, he managed to introduce Planchette, and stated that he had one with him, and if the young lady had no objections, they would while away a short time in testing the powers of the invisible. Accordingly they arranged themselves at the table, and, after some length of time in serious efforts, they succeeded in receiving answers

that satisfied their minds that Planchette was but too well acquainted with the affairs of the world, and what lies in the future. Emboldened by success, the lady propounded, mentally, sundry questions, and prompt answers were returned.

The sequel to this interview we give to our readers, as related to us by a female friend to whom it has been confided, giving the questions and responses in the order in which they occurred. As a matter of course, the manipulator being a young lady, her first inquiry was, "Shall I ever marry?" "Yes," promptly came from Planchette. "When?" "Two years." "To whom?" "S — B —." This was entirely satisfactory, as it included both the parties present, and was the consummation both devoutly wished, except as to time, which appeared to be unreasonably delayed. "Shall we be happy?" "Perfectly." Now followed a question to which the young lady desired a faithful solution, as it appeared to her the consummation of earthly bliss. "Shall we have children?" "Yes." "Girls and boys?" "Certainly." "How many?" The answer to this the young lady was anxious to note carefully, as much depended on the result. Planchette was deliberate, evincing no haste, desirous of making no mistake in her figures, but wrote with considerable distinctness, "S-e-v-e-n-t," when the young lady shoved the instrument from her, with such force that it fell to the floor, and it was divided in halves by the fall. Whether Planchette intended "seventeen" or "seventy," was not determined, and we presume that time alone can discover the entire answer.

The CLEVELAND PLAINDEALER tells of two men on Kelley's Island, who, having been informed by "Planchette" that an Indian chief lies buried under the primeval limestone of the island, having on his person \$18,000 worth of jewelry, are digging with might and main to find the treasure. They are not permitted by "Planchette" to use powder, so they pick a few inches per day. They work from two o'clock, A. M., till seven, and again from two o'clock, P. M., till seven, P. M.

It is reported that a neighboring "Planchette" was consulted as to the probable success of the diggers, and it profanely said the men were d——d fools.

A DESCRIPTION OF PLANCHETTE.

[From the Albany Evening Journal.]

Do you want to be astonished, perplexed, mystified? Then purchase a "Planchette" board, and see what will come of it.

What, you ask, is a "Planchette?" Well, we don't exactly know. It may be called a toy; perhaps it is a revelation; certainly it opens up some new and most interesting questions in natural philosophy, and furnishes in the simplest possible manner an illustration of old truths, familiar to scientific minds, but which the incredulous and uninformed have been very much in the habit of ridiculing.

A thin piece of board, about eight inches long, cut into nearly the same resemblance to a heart as the pictorial effort made by a school-boy on the fly-leaf of his spelling-book; two simple brass standards set upon composition rollers, which are hung pivotally, so as to give freedom and ease of motion; a pencil driven through the board at its apex, and resting lightly upon a sheet of paper placed underneath it. And that, so far as appears to the outward eye, is all of "Planchette."

Do you wish to know the design of this instrument? Sit down at the table in company with some other person who has equal patience and curiosity. Let your fingers rest lightly, — all of them, — upon the board, and content yourself for a few minutes, — how many will depend upon how much magnetism you have in you, — with feeling considerably like a goose fastened in a turnstile. You grow nervous; your fingers are tired; your arms ache up to the elbow-joint; you inwardly conclude that an unwarrantable "sell" has been perpetrated upon you, and in disgust you are about to remove your fingers.

Wait a minute. The board begins to move, in a slow, gentle, oscillatory way, — very like the wag a satisfied dog gives to his narrative while contemplating a liberal bone. You are quite sure your fingers did not move it. You are not so certain about your companion; but careful scrutiny satisfies you upon that point also. The thing is evidently becoming "possessed." Its motions increase in number and force. First it dashes ahead an inch or so. Then it recedes. Next it describes a series of small circles. And anon

it records upon the paper a number of acute triangles. This is in itself a sufficiently remarkable demonstration to excite your great surprise; but it is only the beginning of mysteries.

Suppose, now, you ask "Planchette" a question. For instance: "Will it rain to-day?" Slowly and deliberately the board begins to move upon a series of irregular lines; then stops,—and you discover that it has written on the paper the word "Yes." Its chirography is about as bad as that of a newspaper editor, or a Supreme Court lawyer,—but you can read it, and it will do. Again you ask: "Will the President be removed?" and in the same way receive the answer, "No!" Physically, yourself and your companion are entirely passive. Not the slightest muscular action upon the part of either contributes to the movements of the wonderful recorder. And so through a series of experiments. Ask the name of a person in the room,—and it is written. Let another party whisper a name or a word in your ear,—and it is written. "Planchette" is always ready, and — so far as responses to immediate suggestions are concerned — always correct.

But we have even gone beyond this point. For instance, when the genial Doctor McMurdy brought "Planchette" into our sanctum, we introduced our friends, the "Colonel" and the "Professor," to galvanize it,—or her, as the case may be,—for our delectation. The patience with which these two devoted individuals kept their digits in position and awaited the advent of "spirits from the vasty deep," was something remarkable; though as the slow min-

utes wore on, and the invisible visitors delayed their coming, we fancied that the Professor was exploring his reserved stock of Greek roots, for some phrase sufficiently forcible to express his detestation of the whole proceeding. The trouble, you see, was, that the Colonel and the Professor are both "positives," and good-looking fellows; whereas, one should have been a "negative," or a girl; which don't imply the same thing, by any means, except in this matter of electricity and spirit manifestation. Two men do not operate very successfully together. A man and his wife get along only indifferently well. A man and somebody else's wife make a decided improvement. But a blushing young maiden caps the climax. "Planchette" never resists such appeals.

To return: After a prolonged delay, and in a dilatory manner, the movement at length began. Then "Planchette" told the Colonel who was to be nominated for Vice-President at Chicago; named the Democratic candidate for the Presidency; predicted that Johnson would not be deposed, and did sundry other wonderful things of like character, decidedly too numerous for mention in a newspaper article. This accomplished, it was suggested that some third person should exercise his will, to make the instrument record a thought not uttered. We being selected, chose the word, brought the powerful battery of our mind to play upon "Planchette," and, to our great surprise, the pencil traced upon the paper the word desired. So of four other names, chosen because of singularity; they were recorded with instant and perfect accuracy. This part of the show was

attempted by other performers ; but lacking the ability of “ stars,” they miserably failed, — save in the case of a sentimental young man, who rejoices in the faint suggestion of a possible future moustache. He asked of whom he was thinking, and blushed like a very red beet when “ Planchette ” replied, “ Elizabeth.” We instantly arranged to publish his marriage notice, with four lines of poetry appended, for nothing, as a memorial of this special revelation from heaven, where matches are presumed to be made.

Nothing more is claimed for this instrument than that it is a very remarkable scientific toy ; but it is easy to see, from what we have said, that it opens the door to infinite speculation, and to a great deal of profitable philosophic research. We are, undoubtedly, only upon the threshold of knowledge concerning the principles of animal magnetism, and their relations to the mental and physical life of man. Hundreds of thousands of persons have given themselves up to the wild vagaries and fantastic delusions of so-called “ Spiritualism,” upon no more substantial basis in reason than is furnished by this little instrument. A hundred and fifty years ago, “ Planchette” would have enabled its inventor to found a church or a government, and to make the world believe him more than mortal, if he were not burned for witchcraft or hung for treason. But the researches and discoveries of two generations have disposed of such fallacies about demonology and sorcery in the minds of all save the very ignorant or very superstitious, though it must be confessed that the positive knowledge substituted for it is incomplete and undefined, — while the pre-

valence of such delusions as that of Spiritualism, shows that the olden credulity which made learned men burn women as witches, who rode through the air on broomsticks, has not wholly died out.

Disregarding, however, all idea of spirit mystery or prescience, there is still something very wonderful about "Planchette." Of course, the movement of the board is caused by the galvanic fluid with which it is charged by the persons who have their hands upon it. The power thus communicated is the same that speeds a message from continent to continent, or rends an oak, or upheaves a volcano, as in the Sandwich Islands, pulling down mountains, deluging the land with fire, and building new hills in the midst of the sea. That is all plain enough. Why is it, though, that the board is not only moved, but moved in a certain direction, and that this direction is such as to make it the register of ideas, which are recorded in a clear and definable form? The person whose fingers are upon it, controls it, to be sure, even though he does not make the slightest voluntary muscular motion in doing so. But does he charge it with his thought, as well as with his animalism? Does it become, for the time being, a part of himself, sentient and capable of volition? You say it is simply matter which acts. Not so. Mind must act also, for its impressions are produced before you in a shape too clear for disputation. Is it mind, then, that charges the board, and moves the pencil, and writes the word? If so, where do you mark the nice dividing line between mind and matter,—between the brain that conceived the thought and the galvanized board that transmits the

thought? The speculation becomes even more puzzling when, — as in the case we stated, — a third person stands by, and, without uttering a word, is able so to control the manifestations that an idea which is held prominently in his mind at the instant, is recorded upon the sheet; of course without his physical interposition, and without communication of the thought to the manipulator. Yet we have not only done this in our own case, but have seen it done repeatedly, where collusion was impossible. How is the material fluid transmitted from one person to another, and thence to the instrument? and what does either lose or receive during the process? These very questions suggest that we are living in an atmosphere of mystery, the profound secrets of which, science and philosophy have barely touched upon. What wonderful resources in physics and in morals will be opened up to future generations who shall be admitted within this charmed arcanum of the now unknown!

We think “Planchette” will do much to disabuse the minds of credulous persons who have been deluded by the humbug of table-tipping, spirit-rapping, and writing. It will furnish many hours of sensible amusement to those who look upon its singular demonstrations simply in the light of a pastime. But it will put studious men and women to thinking, inquiring, and possibly to discovering, many things with reference to electricity and animal magnetism, that are now by no means understood.

PLANCHETTE.

BY E. STUART PHELPS.

[*From the Boston Watchman and Reflector, Sept. 3, 1868.*]

FIFTEEN years ago, somebody in Germany happened to hold a pencil at arm's length, in a pair of scissors, and observed that, owing either to the tremulousness of the hand, or to the vividness of the imagination, or to causes unknown, intelligent words traced themselves upon paper.

This was a crude Planchette. In 1860 or '61, a novel was published in England, with the title of "*Who Breaks, Pays.*" On searching this volume, the curious reader will meet with a young lady, who beguiles her "weary hours" with a very well described Planchette.

In the winter of '67-8, the uncanny looking word sprang into very black advertisements in our American cities; and to-day a counter without Planchette is a fossil. They trundle in the windows of the tract-house and tobacco-stores, dance among opera-scores and Sunday-school books, — heart-shaped Planchettes, square Planchettes; Planchettes for eight dollars and Planchettes for fifty cents; Planchettes of walnut, ash, mahogany, gutta-percha, tin, glass, — Planchettes on pegs, coils, and pentagraph wheels. Planchette confronts you at the dancing-parties and in the minister's study; in the drawing-room and the "settin'-room," is a substitute for the weather and Charles Dickens in the "social circle," — and the end thereof who can foretell?

Like most discoveries, it is eminently simple. Why did nobody ever think to stick a pencil through a little board before?

It is said that the patentee, whose claim dates back to 1861, has not dared hitherto to bring the thing to light; fearing that the public would label it "Spiritualism," and run away with it.

A word for the benefit of the uninitiated as to the use of the toy. Old "mediums" may skip to the next paragraph.

The tips of your fingers are placed very lightly upon it, — the elbows raised from the table. Two pairs of hands are better than one. Few people can act fluently alone. It has been noticed that when the hands are very heavy, either from natural weight or from weariness, each operator may use one with better effect. About five persons in eight are able to control Planchette. It may move for you at once, or it may stand, like Atlas, before your patient eyes for half an hour. When the board is thoroughly charged it trembles, clicks a little, slides away under your hands, hesitates, stops, tries again, warms with the subject, darts to and fro across the paper rapidly, traces embroidery patterns and crows'-feet, and whirls about in great circles, which seriously threaten the equilibrium of your elbow-joints. In this mood ply Planchette with questions. Your experience will not be unlike this: —

"Will it rain to-morrow?"

Planchette. — "Yes." (Distinctly written, with no muscular action of your own.)

To-morrow dawns without a cloud, but you do not know that yet, and trustfully proceed.

“Of whom am I thinking?”

Planchette. — “Bevelina Bangs.”

You are thinking of Miss Bangs, and you know it, and so does everybody else, when, blushing up to your hair and down to your neck-tie, you hastily resign your position, and content yourself with interrogating Planchette through another operator.

You ask in silence, “Who will preach in King’s Chapel the first Sabbath in next December?”

Planchette scribbles over half a sheet of paper with copy-book *ms*, has fits of reflection, has spasms of hope, struggles to write, but writes nothing.

Aloud. — “Who will preach in King’s Chapel next winter?”

Planchette (promptly). — “Beelzebub.”

In view of this novel prospect, question the operators closely. The chances are that one or both of them had the word in mind.

Try once more. “What is the number of my watch?” (Silently.)

Planchette falls to dancing a polka, but deigns no reply.

“Planchette” (aloud), “what is the number of my watch?”

Planchette. — “17,861.”

The number of your watch is 4,580, but across the room, in the corner, sits a lady whose watch numbers 17,861.

Again. “Planchette, draw a picture of the next President of the United States.”

Planchette immediately draws a man with a cigar in his mouth, — not so artistically as might be, but still it is a man with a cigar.

A pretty young author in the company ventures timidly : —

“How many copies of my book, ‘The Creaking Hinge,’ will sell this autumn?”

Planchette. — “Twenty.”

“Planchette” (this from the incredulous man of a philosophical turn of mind), “how long shall I live?”

Planchette (confidently). — “Yes.”

Incredulous Philosopher, with decision. — “When shall I die?”

Planchette. — “Never!”

Four Planchette parties out of five would not accomplish anything more important or more mysterious than this. The fifth will make prophecies, some of which will verify themselves, — write the signatures of absent men in their own hand, tell the most secret thoughts of persons whose touch is not upon the board, write in any language known to the operator, and witness the board dancing to a whistled tune.

Occasionally, after becoming *au fait* at Planchette, an operator will find that a simple pencil answers his purpose as well. He holds it out with upraised arm, — it writes easily, and at once. He may rest his entire arm and hand heavily upon the table, to convince himself that he is not cheating, — but the arm slides, the hand moves, the pencil intelligently follows his spoken or unspoken thought. Nervous or superstitious people, however, are hereby advised to let this experiment alone. It is not in all respects desirable

to be in the condition of the young lady whose needle-book deliberately walked out of her work-basket one evening, after she had been devoting herself to Planchette. That story, by the way, comes on "very good authority." I did not see the needle-book; I never saw King Theodore. Do I believe it? Ask Planchette.

What is this mysterious plaything? Ask it. It will tell you, — Lucifer. But, waiving that pleasant hypothesis for the present, what is the power which makes a piece of wood fly under your passive hands, and carry on intelligent conversations without your voluntary influence?

"Animal magnetism," says the gentleman who knows. "Electricity," pronounces the Professor in spectacles. "Humbug!" sneers the D. D., who is too busy to test the matter. "Spirits," falters the young lady with the needle-book.

Magnetism it may be; but who is the wiser for that? What do we know of magnetism that should explain a lead pencil's reading the mind of a person at room's width? Electricity it may be; but how can electricity move a solid and very heavy glass machine? What has electricity to do with the insulated Planchette on non-conducting glass pegs? Humbug it may be, but what then of the "value of testimony," reverend sir? Spirits it may be, but we lack "the evidence on't."

Theories fail before this simple toy, opinions balk, experience defies itself. One expert never controls Planchette till he is weary. Another loses his power with his freshness. An amateur likes wet weather for

Planchette. The next is powerless in a storm. "Children operate most successfully," says one dealer; "the power does not lie in the soul or nerves." "The best mediums," you hear across the street, "are highly nervous people." Watch the next party which you meet around Planchette. A man without a fancy, stout, strong, well, calm, and his sick, nervous, emaciated, morbid wife are equally successful.

One thing, however, seems to be certain. The power which possesses Planchette is identical with the power of table-tipping. Another thing is probable, that it is akin to the power of the spiritualistic medium.

Mrs. Smith, clairvoyant, anywhere on Washington street — an absolute stranger to you and yours — will, for the sum of one dollar, write for you with the finger of one hand upon the palm of another, your own name, business, age, past history, and future prospects, the names of your dead friends, the disease of which they died, together with as many aimless, uncharacteristic messages from them as you choose to sit and listen to.

Does she, under a law of physical condition, which we have not fathomed, read your mind? Does Planchette, under the same law, interpret your thought or your neighbor's? Have we not here the hints of a problem which belongs not to superstition, but to science? Is not the time coming, and now at hand, when this whole series of phenomena will awaken no more surprise than the transmission of this sentence from my brain to the *Watchman and Reflector*?

Then the devil has nothing to do with it? He

would be a bold theorizer who should assert that. The devil has to do with most things in this world. How far he is allowed to wrench any simple law from its system we cannot tell. Whether Planchette and Mrs. Smith are peculiarly open to his influence, remains to be proved.

The following extracts from a Pastoral Letter of the Bishop of Viviers (France), in 1853, are taken from the letter in full in the *Boston Pilot*, October 17th, 1868.

It is a coincidence, that for the same reason a like letter has recently been written by the Bishop of St. Louis; and though it is well known among the Catholic community that the use of Planchette is forbidden by the clergy, yet it does not restrict the use of it by either the educated or uneducated portions of the persuasion.

How conclusive the evidence, that appeals to the *feelings* of mankind, avail but little where REASON or *curiosity* require demonstration; and while others of a more liberal faith, believing in a God of infinite love, mercy, and goodness, will reasonably ask, Why a Being of such attributes will let loose all conceivable evils for the destruction of His creatures, who He knows to be "only dust and ashes."

Where the teachings of *creeds* fail to reconcile such vital differences, REASON and RELIGION, the gift of God, without respect of sect, will fill up the gap: —

“ ‘Sufficiently long, dear co-laborers in the vineyard of the Lord, the world has been much taken up with certain strange phenomena, which have been attributed to some mysterious and unknown agent, and are believed to be produced by the imposition of hands upon tables or other articles of furniture. These tables move, are apparently agitated without sufficient impulsive cause, and answer, by means of signs agreed on beforehand, the various questions addressed to them. These experiences had their origin in America. We are assured that people gave themselves up to these practices with a madness before unheard of; nay, that even a new sect, to be added to the thousand which already divide that country, has arisen as the result of these phenomena.’ ”

“ Thence this fever rapidly spread over France, especially in the cities, where there was hardly any family that did not avail themselves of these spiritual ‘*seances*’ to pass a pleasant evening. As long as these operations have seemed to be simply an exercise of recreation, or curiosity has sought in them only the effects of a fluid pervading all nature, our solicitude had not been alarmed concerning them. We believed that this fashion would soon pass away from amongst our people, whose fickle spirit gathers and rejects, with equal facility, all the novelties that are appearing in the world.

* * * * *

“ It is not surprising that frivolous men, not profoundly penetrated by a religious sentiment, allow themselves to be led away into these dark ways by the love of the marvellous; but what is astonishing, is

that Christians, enlightened by the pure light of the faith, are not sufficiently forewarned against these strange aberrations by the instinct, in most cases so sure, of true piety.

* * * * *

“What shall we now say to them who fear not to address hell itself, in order to call from it the spirit of Satan? For it is that cunning spirit which most ordinarily plays the principal parts in these manifestations. Certainly, we ourselves do not doubt the fatal intervention of the fallen angels in human affairs. We know too well that they, the wicked counsellors of man, sow in his paths seductive snares, that they arouse the passions by working on the imagination, and that they kindle the impure fires of the triple concupiscence.

* * * * *

“What can be more innocent than all these up to this time? The first success obtained, he avails himself of that natural disposition in man for all that is wonderful, to lead him further on; and tables, which at first only turn, soon *knock*, and then *speak*, animated by spirits of every kind. It is thus that he who is a homicide from the beginning, abuses the feebleness and simplicity of man, to engage him, step by step, in these gloomy ways of darkness, until the moment comes when he may precipitate him into the abyss. He followed these perverse tactics in deceiving our first parents; he used them to introduce among the nations errors and superstitions most culpable; in fine, this is the *ruse* he makes use of at the present time to lead the mind off into fatal wander-

ings. Obligated, dear co-laborers, by the duties of our charge, to forewarn the faithful against the snares of the Father of Lies, to watch over the purity of the faith and the honor of the Christian name, we have judged it to the purpose to address you these reflections. You will employ all the efforts of your sacerdotal zeal, and, above all, the authority of your example, to influence such of your parishioners, as may be so imprudent as to give themselves up to these things, to avoid these damnable practices altogether."

IN concluding the Revelations of Planchette for the present, it is to be regretted that no solution of its operating force has yet been given to satisfy the minds of all. That its operations are kindred to table-tipping there seems to be but little room for doubt. But that it is a phenomena, and one worthy the attention of thinking minds to find a solution for, all will agree. It is too late in the day for the scientific to shirk the responsibility of investigation; and, until a more satisfactory solution be found, the man of science must be content to see tens of thousands, including many enlightened and intelligent minds, attribute the wonder-workings of Planchette to the influence of disembodied spirits.

With each new edition shall be given any further developments and matters of interest which may be brought forward, and we shall be gratified to receive any information from parties which may tend to throw additional light on the subject.

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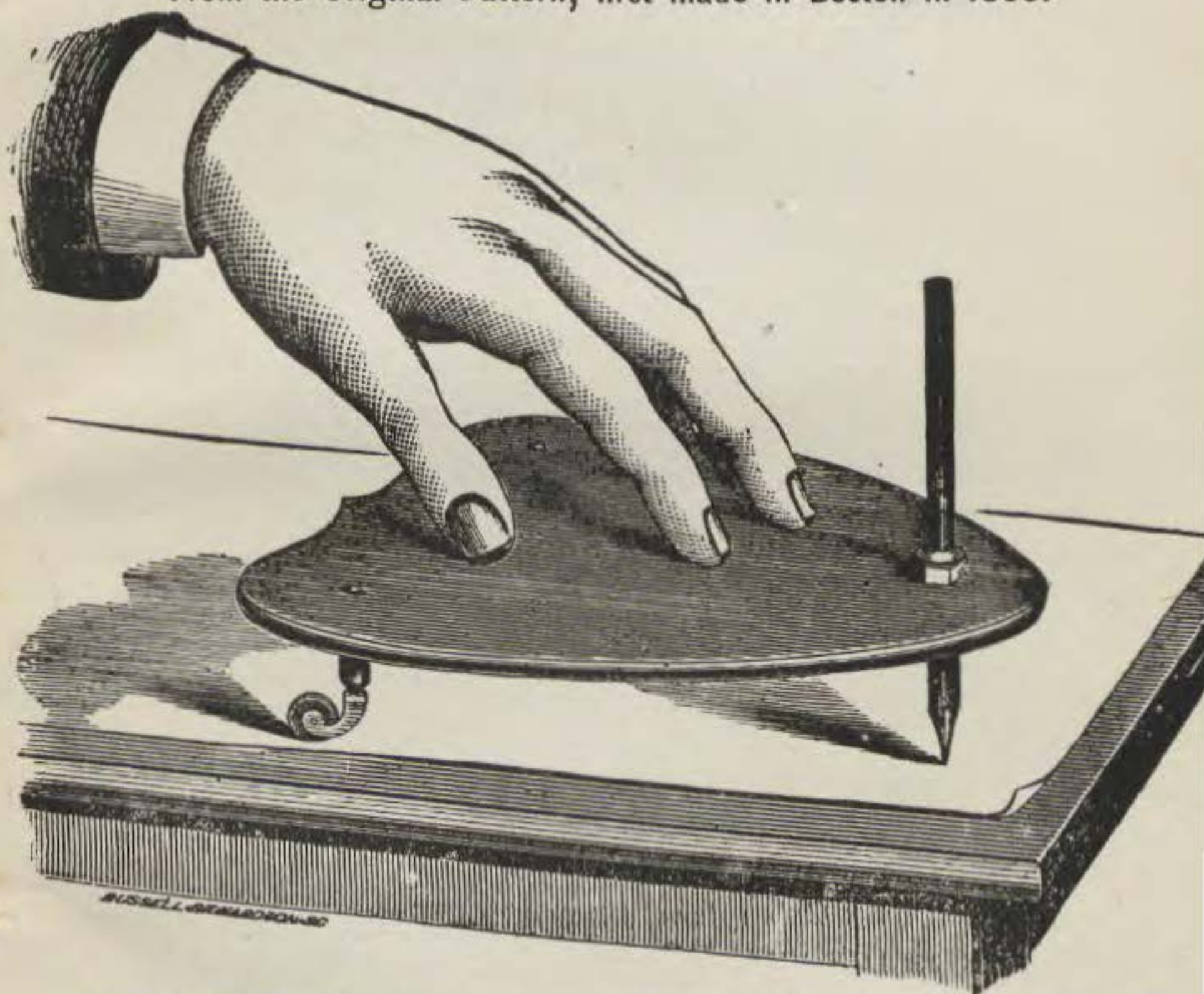
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