

alysis. The chief interest in this case is the one to which reference has been made, viz., the youth of the patient.

Dr. MACLEOD read a paper on "Chorea in Advanced Life" (see Clinical Notes and Cases.)

The CHAIRMAN—In general paralysis there is often observed a development of arachnoid cysts, with no other symptoms than those of advancing dementia.

Dr. PHILIP—I have seen what was primarily an effusion of blood into the cavity of the arachnoid become a regular cyst.

Dr. MACLEOD—It seemed to me that there had been arachnitis and an effusion into the skull cavity, and that this had got encapsuled.

Dr. PHILIP—I remember once in a post-mortem the brain was so atrophied that it presented the appearance of a sharp cone, and the skull cavity was filled with fluid. There was, however, no cyst in this case.

Dr. DODDS read a paper on "Myxœdema."

Dr. YELLOWEES—I have a case corresponding very much to that of Dr. Dodds'. There is the reddish flush on the cheek, but the swelling does not attack the throat and tonsils.

Dr. IRELAND then read a paper on "Mirror Writing."

Correspondence.

ILLUSIONARY AND FRAUDULENT ASPECTS OF SPIRITUALISM.

Letter from Mr. STUART C. CUMBERLAND.

To the Editors of the "Journal of Mental Science."

GENTLEMEN,—The trial of Mrs. Fletcher for obtaining valuable property by alleged spiritualistic communications having attracted fresh attention to the subject of modern Spiritualism in general, I think it may not be uninteresting to your readers to know by what methods its professors, so far as my experience goes, produce their most striking manifestations. Were the explanation to resolve itself only into fraud, I should not have asked you to publish this communication in your Journal, but as either this fraud rests in great measure on mental illusion, or, when there is no fraud at all (as in private experiments), unintentional muscular and mental illusions are developed, scientifically interesting, I hope you will deem my letter suited to your pages.

A great deal has already been written about Spiritualism, both for and against, but owing to prejudice or want of experience, the so-called explanations of "spirit manifestations" furnished by some of these writers have been as absolutely incorrect as the accounts given by writers, incapable of proper discrimination, in favour of the manifestations, have been false and fraudulent. I intend treating the matter from a different standpoint than that touched upon by others; and in showing that those manifestations claimed by the spiritualists to be due to the agency of the spirits of the dead, and by others to be the outcome of some unknown physical or mental force, are accounted for on the basis of illusion or trickery, I am speaking from actual personal experience of my subject.

I shall confine myself to giving an exposition of those exhibitions of "spirit power" upon which the spiritualist principally bases his belief in communion with the dead:—

The Dark Circle is a particular form of Spiritualism, in which illusion and trickery play about equal parts. *Dark sances*—for there are two kinds, the

one differing from the other in point of conditions, though similar in respect of their manifestations—have long been popular amongst spiritualists, as well as being highly remunerative to those “physical mediums” who have presided over them.

We will first take the one introduced by those notorious mediums, Bastian and Taylor, and copied by the Fays.

The sitters are asked to form a circle round the medium, who takes a seat in the midst of the *séance* room, musical instruments, fans, paper tubes, and all the paraphernalia peculiar to such exhibitions being placed by his side. Previous to the lights being turned out the medium informs the sitters that they must join hands in order to further the process of getting up the “power,” the chain thus formed to remain unbroken during the manifestations that may take place.* For his part he will clap the palms of his hands together during the whole of the *séance*, in order to show that he, at least, does not aid in the production of the manifestations. The preliminaries being thus arranged, the lights are turned out. From this point the medium commences to clap his hands, whilst the sitters sing some spiritual air calculated to propitiate the “visitors from the other world.” We are repeatedly told that music materially aids the “conditions.” Be this as it may, there can be no doubt about its distinctly assisting the medium to cheat as well as to falsify the evidence of the sitters’ senses. But confiding spiritualists never seem to think of this. All the time the singing is going on one can hear the monotonous pat, pat, pat of the medium’s hands, and, even when the musical-box is wound up by some invisible agency, there is no perceptible difference in the sound. Perhaps this instrument may take an aerial flight, but still the medium’s hand-patting can be heard.

“Spirit voices” may even speak through paper tubes, and the sitters be touched by “spirit hands,” whilst some will declare they have seen “spirit lights” floating about the room or a “spirit face” hovering over the circle. All this time the rhythmical beat of the medium’s hands has been heard, convincing even to those sitters who may be sceptical as to spirit manifestations, that, no matter how otherwise they may be produced, he takes no part in them. Yet how easy it is for the most perfect judgment to be misled in the dark. In the first instance the medium deceives the sitters, and they, instead of discovering the deception, add to it by deceiving themselves. When the attention is concentrated upon any particular thing, altogether erroneous sensorial impressions are frequently created; so when the medium tells the sitters that he is going to beat his two hands together, they not only think he does so, but, on hearing *something* being patted, imagine that he is actually doing so, whereas he is doing nothing of the kind. Did the medium beat his two hands together, as he states, there would for a certainty be no manifestations, for it is he, and he alone, who produces them. Instead of the patting sound which is heard in the dark arising from the medium’s palms coming in contact with each other, as the sitters falsely think, the ingenious operator, under the cloak of darkness, coolly proceeds to beat his cheek or bared leg, or arm with one hand, and to “manifest” with the other. It will thus be readily seen that with a little practice any person, without even a spiritual gift, could manage to produce similar effects. The teeth also play an active part; with them a fan may be shook or a bell rung. Material assistance in touching the sitters and in touching the ladies’ dresses is also given by the feet. As to spirit lights, the mediums use both luminous paint and phosphorous oil; the former is not only the safest, but, being free from smell, is consequently most preferred. But it as often happens that those who claim to have seen lights are the victims of illusion. An expectant watcher seldom fails to see those phosphorescent lights so dear to his spiritualistic heart, even though the darkness

* No medium guarantees any manifestations; everything he says entirely depends upon “conditions.”

during the whole of the *séance* has not been illumined by the faintest ray of artificial or spiritual light. Let the reader, anxious to judge how readily the sense of sight or hearing may be perverted by the concentration of attention go to a dark *séance*, and, whilst there, declare that he sees a light to the left of the room, and immediately he will find several of the sitters declaring that they see it too. Let him say it now moves to the right, diminishing in size as it passes along, and forthwith he will have them agreeing with him, though all the time their sense of vision is being deceived by an unreal image. I have repeatedly by these means convinced myself of the utter unreliability of the sight of most of the sitters who attend spirit *séances*. Their sense of hearing, moreover, is not any more acute. It is almost impossible for any one to tell in the dark where sound comes from and who causes it. Let the attention of the sitters be concentrated upon the table, and let the medium knock on the floor, and I question if you would find one amongst them who would not aver that the table, instead of the floor, had been rapped. I on one occasion purposely rapped the table leg during a dark *séance*, and immediately some one declared it was "Peter" (a notorious spirit) who had rapped, whilst another averred it was "Ebenezer," a third being equally certain it was "Irresistible;" but the medium, who knew the merits of his "spirits" far too well, not having produced the raps himself, was, of course, convinced that the sound had been produced intentionally or otherwise by one of the sitters, so he declared that it must have been an "evil spirit," who had fought his way into the circle. Immediately the champion of "Peter" began to waver, and sitter No. 2 thought it could hardly have been "Ebenezer," though he had been confident about it; and sitter No. 3 at once came to the conclusion that "Irresistible" never rapped like that, and that it must have been an "evil spirit." The alien spirit theory was therefore accepted without a dissentient voice.

The other Dark Circle, as I have already said, differs only in the matter of its conditions. Instead of the medium sitting inside a circle formed by the sitters, he takes a seat with them at a large round table. The hands of all are laid flat on the surface of the table, each sitter linking the little finger of each hand with those of his neighbours. In the same manner the medium may be placed between two sceptics determined to detect, as far as possible, his *modus operandi*. On no account are the sitters to let go of hands, as the power would in such case, says the medium, be considerably affected, if not altogether destroyed. This being understood, the lights are blown out. Perhaps in the midst of the singing, which has been resorted to in order to get up the power, a "spirit" will proclaim his presence by loudly rapping on the table. It may be "Peter," "Ebenezer," or "John King," or some other controlling spirit, but which it is is soon ascertained by the "spirit" speaking for himself. A sepulchral voice would denote the presence of "Ebenezer" or "Irresistible," whilst a voice, pitched in a squeaky, unmusical key, would do duty for "Peter," as a gruff, full tone would proclaim the visit of "John King." Perhaps it turns out to be Peter—for he is generally the "spirit" first to manifest—and he immediately sets to work to wind up the musical-box. A bell may now be rung, and some one may be fanned or have his head beaten with a paper tube. By-and-bye a scattering sound is heard, and the odour of flowers fills the room, and at the same time the musical-box makes a circuit of the room. All this time the circle is supposed to be unbroken, and the sceptics who are holding the medium, and who really should be able to judge, emphatically declare that he is being held by them. These manifestations puerile though the majority of them are, and altogether unlike what one might expect from a genuine spirit who took the trouble to return to this earth, are calculated to awaken feelings of nervousness and alarm amongst the more timid of the sitters. During this emotional excitement they not only feel and hear spirits, but actually see them, though, of course, their senses are being deceived the whole of the time. Let a sitter in the dark touch another who

believes that the spirit of his mother visits him in *séances*, and he will perceive how readily the understandings of this person can be imposed upon. With every touch the man will be found to exclaim, "Thank you, dear mother," or speak in some such tone of endearment. It is a familiar fact that those who attend *séances* with the belief that manifestations from the spirit world are possible are, when under the influence of concentrated attention, liable to have not only their senses deceived, but their understandings imposed upon. Nervous and susceptible people are readily impressed by the nonsense talked by the mediums, and should they be told that "John King" would carry the musical box round the room and pass it through the wall, they would recognise in the box swung in the medium's hand a positive proof of its aerial flight; and in the muffled sounds, caused by the medium *sitting upon the box*, there would be an undeniable instance of the musical instrument having passed out of the room to play there.

A medium knows very well the great advantage to be gained by darkness or uncertain light, and at orthodox dark *séances* he can cheat, provided all sitters abide by the conditions imposed, with perfect impunity. That the medium, though apparently firmly held, does get his hands loose, must, in order for there to be any manifestations at all, be patent to any one who disbelieves in spiritualism; but the manner in which he effects this so as to create a false sensorial impression with the sitters who hold him is to them completely puzzling. Yet it is all managed in the following simple manner:—

The medium, as I have said, takes his seat at the table between two persons who claim to be sceptics. He, however, when he can, takes care to select those most calculated to be imposed upon, and in no case, for obvious reasons, are those selected who wear rings. The lights, we will say, have been turned out, the medium's little fingers being linked in with those of his neighbours. The first step this individual takes towards accomplishing his object is to indulge in a fit of shivering, said by him to be indicative of spirit presence, by which means all four hands are brought close together. He now very gently raises the *little finger of his right hand*, but, instead of replacing it, he puts in its place the *fore finger of his left hand*. The change is altogether imperceptible to the sitter, and his surprise is as great as the rest in the circle when his right hand, thus free, proceeds to manifest. With it bells may be rung, the musical-box wound up, the sitters fanned, touched, or otherwise bewildered. He may even take out of his pocket the mask of a spirit face nicely coated with luminous paint and float it in the air by means of lazy tongs, and with the said lazy tongs twitch the ladies' dresses or purloin their handkerchiefs. There are no end of manifestations to be done with one hand; but in order to get at a cupboard for the flowers, or any other part of the room for some other spiritual purpose, he must get both his hands free, and this he manages in this way:—Further nervous twitchings of his left arm bring the three hands still closer together, the little fingers of the sitters being on the verge of touching. Now is the time, and a violent lurch of the table breaks the chain of hands, and in that moment he has snatched away his left hand, whilst the sceptics, feeling each other's little fingers, settle down with the firm conviction that they are retaining hold of the medium, who is really free to, in case no one strikes a light to stop his little game, manifest after the peculiar fashion of "visitors from the other world." Having "manifested," he returns to his seat, and, after jolting the table with sufficient force to once more break the chain, he quietly replaces his own hands and regains his original position. The lights may then be struck, and the *séance* declared over.

Mediums are seldom, if ever, searched at dark *séances*, and, as will be seen, they have only to free their hands in the manner described, and to take from their person any spiritualistic trappings that may have been secreted there.

We hear much about flowers brought straight from spirit-land, and wet with heavenly dew, being introduced at such circles. There are numerous ways of

hiding such flowers, which are generally introduced by lady mediums. They may, if the medium is not searched, be secreted in her dress; if, however, she be searched, a confederate may introduce them, or they may, as has often been the case, be contained in the lining of an opera cloak thrown over the "dear medium's" shoulders to keep her warm. A friendly water bottle supplies the "heaven-born dew." By a very simple chemical experiment, Mrs. Guppy-Volckman, it will be remembered, was convicted of having obtained the so-called heavenly dew from a bottle containing not the purest pump water. A famous test introduced at dark *séances* is that of passing a ring over a sitter's arm, in proof of the de-materialisation theory. As the sitter is holding the medium's hand when the manifestation takes place, the spiritualists declare that either the ring, on getting on to his arm, must have been de-materialised, or that a passage must have been made in the arm to allow of the ring passing through. I have seen a great deal of this de-materialisation nonsense, and can only wonder that sane people should be so easily gulled into accepting as evidence of spirit power what is either a simple trick or the result of false sensorial impressions.

We will take the case of the ring. All that the medium has to do is, having got his hand free in the manner described, to take up the ring, passing it over his own arm, and having regained his hold of the sitter's hand, asks him to grasp his hand firmly, in order, he adds, to avoid trickery, and, as a natural consequence, the ring comes sliding down to the sitter's arm, who is confident that he never for one moment let go his grasp.

There are other manifestations produced at dark circles, but for the most part they are even more trivial than those I have enumerated, which are the principal ones to be witnessed, and those upon which the thorough-going spiritualist would appear to chiefly base his belief in the existence of spirit power.

The Power of Attraction has ever been a very important feature at spirit *séances*. Before the Dialectical Society much evidence was adduced in support of the theory, the Earl of Crawford and Balcarres (then the Master of Lindsay) being amongst those who claimed to have witnessed the phenomenon. By the "power of attraction" is meant the power possessed by "mediums" of causing, without material contact, inanimate objects, such as books, chairs, tables, and other articles of furniture to move towards them or to otherwise displace themselves. This peculiar gift would appear to have been possessed by Mr. Home and Dr. Monck in a degree of perfection higher than that attained by other famous physical mediums; that is to say, the phenomena in connection with it were oftener produced through their mediumship than that of others. All of us who have given the subject of spiritualism any study are acquainted with the particulars of the *séance* Sir David Brewster had with Mr. Home at Cox's Hotel, Jermyn Street, in which the alleged "power of attraction" played so important a part. Sir David denounced the pretensions of this medium in the most emphatic manner; but beyond stating that the bell, accordeon, &c., which had been put *under* the table were not conveyed into his or Lord Brougham's hands (his lordship was present at this sitting) by spiritual agency, but simply *placed* there, he offered no practical explanation of the mode adopted by Mr. Home in placing them there. That the medium did place them there himself, and that spirit power had nothing whatever to do with the matter, I have not the slightest doubt. Mr. Home in all probability adopted on this particular occasion the same means for performing the trick as employed by him on other occasions. His *modus operandi* was simplicity itself.

It is, we will say, a light *séance*, and the company is seated round a table, underneath which a bell has been placed. One of the "circle" is requested to hold his hand beneath the heavy hanging table-cloth and under the table in case a spirit should desire to manifest. In the meantime a conversation upon

some indifferent topic is struck up among the sitters, in the course of which the sitter, who has been holding out his hand, suddenly cries out that the bell has been conveyed to him. Now, the whole of the time the hands of the medium have been full in sight of all, and this naturally puzzles the sceptics, who hastily look underneath the table, thinking, perhaps, to find there an explanation of the curious affair.

The medium may afterwards suggest that the sitter hold the bell under the table to see if there is spirit power enough to attract it from the grasp. In the midst of a further conversation—or, may be, music—which now engages the attention of the “circle,” the sitter who has been holding the bell cries out that it has left his hand, and a moment later it is seen hurled across the room behind the medium. Once more the sceptics make an examination, only to be baffled. Of course, they say the medium could not have done the trick, for his hands were in sight the whole of the time, and the sitter is himself above the suspicion of confederacy.

True it is that the medium’s hands are in sight during the sitting, and that the “manifestation,” no matter how otherwise brought about, is not produced by them, but the sitters somehow never think of the operator’s feet; yet it is with them, and them alone, that he performs the trick. A medium, when giving *séances* of this kind, invariably wears very loose shoes, which can be readily slipped on and off. His socks are minus half the foot, which enables him to have full play with his toes in manipulating musical and other instruments. It will thus be seen that all that the medium has to do when the attention of the “circle” is otherwise attracted is to slip off his shoe and lift the bell up into the sitter’s hand, hastily slipping his foot back into his shoe so soon as this is done. In a like manner he regains the bell, and to throw it from him with considerable force is a very easy task. Perhaps not only will the sitter declare he has been touched by a “spirit hand,” but some of those near him will aver that they actually caught a glimpse of one. Expectant attention will readily explain how easily persons, having faith in spirits, would recognise in the top of a naked foot a spirit hand. More than half the so-called spirit hands are neither more nor less than naked feet, whilst the remainder are stuffed gloves or dexterously manipulated models. But of this more anon.

In other instances the “power of attraction” is brought about by the use of thread or fine wire. It was a very favourite practice with both Home and Monck, and not infrequently with Slade, to cause books, albums, small musical boxes, and so forth to move across the table, in full view of the sitters, towards them. In a dim light, and whilst you are holding the medium’s hands to prove that he does not assist in the production of the manifestation, to see a musical-box gliding in slow, ghostly fashion over the surface of the table is productive of curiosity, if not alarm. But, like all good tricks, its chief merit is in its simplicity. All that is required to work the manifestation is a piece of silk thread, and it is worked in the following way:—

Previous to taking his seat at the table the medium has secreted about his person a thread of fine black silk, to each end of which is fixed a small hook. One end is hooked into the boot or sock of, we will say, his left leg, and the other in his trousers towards the fork. Thus armed, he is quite ready for action. Whilst at the table the left leg is thrown across his knee, and under the pretence of winding up the small musical-box he fastens the hook which had been attached to his trousers to that instrument. The light is too dim for any one to discern the thread, and as the manifestation, when it comes, comes quite unexpectedly, little or no opportunity is afforded those who abide by the conditions to discover the working of the trick. Perhaps in the midst of a hymn chanted by the sitters the table manipulated by the medium or a confederate is felt to tip violently—a sure sign of spirit presence. On the vibration ceasing the medium, who is firmly held by the sitters on

each side of him, commences to shiver under the possession of the spirit, and a moment later the musical-box commences to glide towards him, finally disappearing in his lap. As will be readily seen, all that he has done has been to slide his leg, to which is attached one end of the thread, off his knee, and with it, as a matter of course, bring the musical-box after him.

When "Dr." Monck made his hasty flight from Huddersfield a large quantity of thread and fine wire was discovered amongst his spiritualistic properties left behind him.

Chairs are further "attracted" to tables, to which we so often hear that they "come up with a sudden rush," by the use of the medium's legs. Several mediums are in possession of remarkably elastic frames, which enable them to produce physical manifestations beyond the power of more ordinary individuals, who may even know how these manifestations are produced. This was particularly noticeable in the case of Home and Slade, the former owing his extraordinary contractions and elongations, of which we hear so much, to this elasticity of frame instead of to supernatural power.

It is well known that by an imperceptible flexion of the joints and curving of the back, and an equally inappreciable extension, a man may very readily vary his height several inches.

With "Dr." Slade the elasticity of his frame was employed for the purpose of attracting chairs or otherwise agitating articles of furniture at a distance. Whilst engaged in conversation with this medium a chair, some two or three feet from the table, and directly opposite to him, would be thrown violently on the ground, to the consternation of the sitter or sitters.*

In order to accomplish this, "Dr." Slade, having made his *temps*, after the manner of an expert conjuror, by attracting the sitters' attention away from the object he had in view, would imperceptibly stretch out one of his legs—which were of extraordinary length—and so reach the chair, which is either overthrown or drawn up suddenly to the table with that spiritual "rush" already referred to.

I once knew a gifted individual who claimed to have established with a table a connection of the most extraordinary character. This table, he stated, would at his will follow him round the room like a dog, waltz amongst the chairs and sofa, or indulge in other eccentricities little to be expected of so undemonstrative a piece of furniture. I must confess to have been from the first very sceptical about the matter, and was anxious to test the reality of this person's claims to supernatural power. In due course I was granted a *séance*. I was allowed to examine the table, which, with the exception of being very slightly built, differed in no way from ordinary small tables. Certainly I could discover no trick in it. I was asked to take a seat at one end of the room whilst the "medium" went to the table to get up the "power." The "power" was speedily raised, and the table commenced to wobble, and on the medium walking about the room it began to follow him at a respectful distance, stopping and nodding when he stopped, recommencing to walk when he did. In such an exhibition a great many confiding spiritualists, unversed in the tricks of the trade, would doubtless have recognised a glorious proof of spirit power instead of seeing, as I did, and as I think any common-sense man would have done, that the thing was a trick, and a very simple one in the bargain.

The gifted being who performed the experiment, and whose surprise and chagrin at my discovering his *modus operandi* was intense, simply used a fine silk thread, with a bent pin at each end, for the purpose. Whilst under the pretence of getting up the "power" he connected one end of the thread to the table, and the other was hooked into the sleeve of his coat. As a natural consequence the table, which was on castors, followed him at every step.

* It was a rule with Slade never to have more than two or three sitters at a time; the reason for this is obvious.

I have never yet—and I altogether question whether any one else has—seen any substantial object attracted towards the medium otherwise than by material means, of which those I have cited are the principal ones employed.

Sometimes, however, it is alleged that the attraction is upwards, and we have, amongst very many others, men of position and undoubted intelligence, like Dr. Lockhart Robertson and Mr. S. C. Hall, solemnly attesting the reality of such phenomena. In the course of a very simple experiment I conclusively proved, in the presence of many witnesses, how easily the evidence of Mr. Hall's senses could be falsified. I am, therefore, from the liability which this gentleman's senses are to falsification, not inclined to place much reliance on his testimony in matters appertaining to spiritualism. With Dr. Robertson, however, all this may be different, and I should be only too happy to have an opportunity of knowing from himself the phenomena he witnessed, the tests he employed, and of ascertaining whether the explanations I am able to offer do or do not explain everything.

Undoubtedly tables have gone upwards, but never, so far as my experience and that of my friends, who are best calculated to judge of such matters, without material contact.

There are various other points to which I should like to refer, but will, with your permission, postpone them to a future letter.

Yours, &c.,

STUART C. CUMBERLAND.

A PATIENT'S REFLECTIONS ON AN ASYLUM MURDER.

Govan Poorhouse, Glasgow.—Murder.

Royal Asylum, Edinburgh,

May 7th, 1881.

DR. CLOUSTON: DEAR SIR,—With your permission I shall make some observations and reflections upon the above. A murder was committed in the lunatic department of the poorhouse at Govan, in the suburbs of Glasgow, some time about the close of the last and the beginning of the present year, a murder which I venture to characterise as one of the most heinous and aggravated nature.

A poor young man, in a low condition of bodily health, and at the same time suffering from mental disorder assuming the form of acute mania or delirium, was then and there brutally murdered.

From the nature of the affliction under which he laboured the patient was entirely irresponsible for anything he might think, say, or do; indeed, was for the time being in a world of spectres and unrealities, his dearest friends becoming, then, strange to his eyes and objects of suspicion, aversion, or terror. What is the course usually adopted in institutions for the insane in the case of a patient suffering from this species of malady? He is put into a warm bedroom, having its walls and floor padded with a strong but soft elastic material, so that in the paroxysms of the malady, should he fall, he will not be injured, or should he aim a blow at some dread foe of his feverish and morbid imagination, the stroke will fall as harmlessly as that of a snowball when impinged against a wall.

The Lunatic Department at Govan Poorhouse seems to have been possessed of no such indispensable requisite of asylum treatment, and if so, why so? Surely here is a matter requiring the urgent attention of the Lunacy Board. It is not too late, in view of another possible murder there or elsewhere. Where there is such a padded room there is no need for attendants, whose presence in such a case as the one referred to is more likely rather to have a disturbing than a soothing influence on the patient. The operations of the healing Mother