

AMATEUR WATER-DIVINING.

BY G. P. MACKENZIE.

IT is curious to notice that, despite the matter-of-fact, common-sense element that practically rules the beginning of this new century, now and again superstition startles us in the most unlooked-for places. Some old myth displays an unexpected vitality; a so-called fable turns out to be unquestionably possessed with an element of truth; until, at last, we find Science fairly driven into shifting her ground, and at best but covering her retreat by stipulating for a change in the terms of expression.

be felt in the account of a few slight experiments made, in moments of leisure, by a complete amateur.

A doubt had arisen as to the impeccability of the town water. The burgesses were divided into two hostile camps—almost unto the separating of life-long friends. A London expert had been called down. Personal inspection of the reservoir was part of the programme. A body of some nine or ten representative townsmen had been mustered as escort; and, with a local farmer trudging at its side, the little party was tramping steadily forward over a breezy Devonshire moor.



ON THE WATER-TRAIL (OVER DARTMOOR).

Take, for example, the Oriental belief in the Evil Eye. At the present moment, doctors—most sceptical of classes—in Paris—most doubting of cities—are carrying on experiments in public hospitals as to a certain strange natural power or force—animal magnetism, electro-biology, hypnotism, call it what you will.

Again, we find recurrent paragraphs in our daily papers concerning thirsty corporations who officially summon professional water-diviners to their aid, and—*pace* Mr. Labouchere and his scientific tests in *Truth*—with results conclusive and satisfactory beyond question.

Various magazine articles have lately dealt with the ways and manners of professional water-diviners. Perhaps some interest may

at any rate, been his own—the power had waned.

Water was the one subject in everyone's mind, but, since both sides of the question were represented on the escort, a delicate subject. Divergence to water-divining was obvious and safe, and came in naturally from the fact that the speaker, an elderly member of the party, himself possessed the gift: or, rather—with a touch of ruefulness—had possessed it. As a young man he had been quite an adept; as years crept on—he did not know whether this was a common experience: it had, been his own—the power had waned.

Yes, it ought to be a hazel-bough—like a capital Y. A capital Y turned upside down, with its stem nearly straight up, pointing to the sky, and the extremities of the two branches slightly bent outwards and grasped in either hand; the hands held palm upward, and the upright position of the stem maintained by the firmness of the grasp.

“And then you walk straight on, and when you come above underground water, the stem turns right over and points straight down.”

As to the gift itself, he had an idea of his own that it was by no means so rare as was supposed. People had it without being aware of the fact. No one could possibly tell till

he tried. His own impression was that a safe average would be—well, say one in a hundred.

The remark, coupled with the coincidence of a hazel-wood copse, was suggestive. A minute later nearly a dozen experiments were going on together; with, as immediate result, demonstration that a higher average might have been struck. One in every hundred? The present experiment-makers were under a dozen; and out of that dozen two emerged triumphant, both well known townsmen. Two out of twelve; with no one more surprised at the result than the experimentisers themselves.

Let us follow here the experience of one. Interested, but not by any means expectant, he had provided himself with his Y-shaped bough, had turned it upside down, and slightly bending outwards the ends of the two branches, so as to admit of the firm grasp with the two hands held palm upward, had marched composedly forwards.

Suddenly, and without himself experiencing the smallest preliminary sensation, the bough in his hand apparently developed a distinct personality of its own. A slight momentary quiver,



"NO WATER HERE."



and then the upright stem bent over, lowering itself from its erect position with composed precision; bent over steadily—the astonished holder could feel the two ends pressing hard against the sides of his closed hands—and finally brought itself up with the point absolutely reversed, pointing now straight down to the ground. And then, as, astonished and bewildered, the exper-

"HALLO! WHAT'S THIS?"

periment-maker moved a step or two forward, with a quick jerk the stem righted itself sharply.

And at this moment the local farmer found breath to speak—and to speak with authority. For miles round he knew the land; and knew, as a matter of fact, of running water flowing under that very spot.

An eliminating process followed. With boughs on high, the rest of the party advanced over the same track. At the critical moment, one stem—the town mayor's—bent perceptibly; the others stood inflexibly upright.

A general demand followed for a repetition of the first experiment. Interested, surprised, puzzled, the experimentiser—let us call him Mr. X.—complied. Once more grasping his bough, and with his trained legal mind keenly



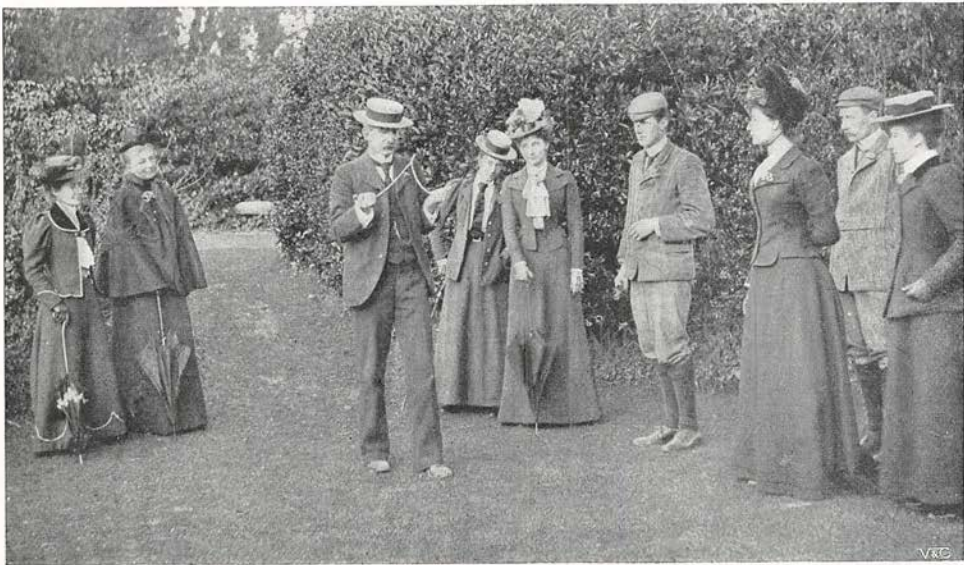
"EUREKA!"

on the alert against chance, imagination, delusion, mistake, he crossed and recrossed the critical point. With each time the same result. Each time at the same spot the bough became instinct with a separate personality and worked its own will.

This effect was so curiously vivid that Mr. X. found himself involuntarily developing an attitude of almost angry antagonism. He would cross the spot once more, and this time he would not *let* the stick go down. A moment later and he was standing the amazed centre of an astounded group; all looking down in bewilderment on bruised marks at the edges of the man's palm, on half rubbed off patches at the sides of the stick's

the light next day of a tap in the wall, revealing the fact that at that very spot water had been laid on for the watering supply of a garden on the other side of the road.

An arranged testing experiment in a friend's garden, with a large party assembled to watch the performance. A challenge to discover at what precise point in a given space a small stream ran underground. The obstinate resolve of the stick to turn down at one special spot, repeated again and again, despite the vexation of the operator, for the first time experiencing the disconcerting effect of laughter and of exclamations as to complete failure; and the sudden recollection of the host that at that very place



THE CONFUSION OF THE SCEPTICS.

bark. It had come to a fight, and the stick had won.

During the next few weeks Mr. X. tested his newly discovered power in a variety of experiments. A couple of these may, perhaps, be given as a sample of the whole.

A walk, hazel-fork in hand, late one moonless night down a long road, with houses at intervals on either side: and the stem turning down persistently at each point—accuracy verified by daylight inspection the following morning—where water was laid on across the road for each house in succession.

The dogged determination of the stick to lower itself at one point where there was no house on either side; and the discovery in

was an old underground tank, covered up so long ago that its very existence had been half forgotten, but with the pipe connecting it with the drain from the house roof still unsevered.

During the experiments of these few weeks sundry distinct points of interest were noted. First, that the phenomena observed did take place over water, and only over water. This was determined beyond a doubt; as also the fact that ignorance or knowledge on the part of the operator as to the locality of the water had absolutely nothing to do with the matter. Moreover, that the manner of the process never varied. The instant the operator stood above the water, the stick turned over and pointed down. So long as the operator so stood, the stick continued so



"THERE ARE MORE THINGS IN HEAVEN AND EARTH——"

to point. The instant he stepped out beyond the water, that moment the stick righted itself. Moreover, the process repeated itself exactly, though with more rapidity in the several stages, if the operator walked straight across without a pause.

The swift dip down and up again of the stick in such a case had always a very curious effect.

Another point was this—the power varies. It is undoubtedly much stronger some days than others; a fact possibly due to atmospheric changes, possibly to some variation in the operator's own state. One curious little touch seems to point to the latter. Mr. X. repeatedly noticed that immediately after a meal the power was at its minimum—even when not quite non-existent.

This, too, was ob-

served. Apparently a hazel-bough, though undoubtedly a singularly good medium, is not an absolute *sine qua non*. One or two other kinds of trees gave partially successful results. One in particular, a forked bough



THE TEAPOT TESTS.

from the smooth young shoots of a may-tree, answered exceptionally well; so much so, that for a moment Mr. X. imagined himself on the verge of a discovery—that the special virtue of the hazel lay simply in the fact of its exceptionally smooth, knotless bark. But the theory collapsed wholly before the cruel irresponsiveness of a sycamore.

Another doubtful point was decided by careful experiment. Does the stem turn down when the hazel-bough, held necessarily a little in advance of the operator, is over the water, or when the operator is over the water?

This is, of course, more than a simple point to solve, precise knowledge of the exact boundaries of underground water at any given spot being not always easy to obtain. But the truly scientific spirit will not shrink from the homeliest of experiments. A big teapot, full of water, was placed on the ground. The operator advanced tentatively, hazel-bough

in outstretched hands well in front. At the moment when the upright stem arrived exactly above the teapot, the operator paused and awaited developments. None followed. A long step forward, and the operator himself stood over the teapot. The stick instantly dipped.

Taken as a whole, the amateur experiments answered as conclusively as the professional. But on one point to this day Mr. X. respectfully admires the professional water-diviner a long way off, and that is for the power by which the latter not only knows that water is there, but tells you at what precise depth beneath the surface it is to be found.

One word as to the kind of stick. The more perfect the fork the better. Each branch should be about ten inches long, and the two branches should be of the same thickness—speaking roughly, about half the thickness of a man's little finger.



“TO THE DEATH.” FROM THE PICTURE BY DOMINGO Y MARQUES.

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