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WATER-DIVINING

BEFORE our announcement that the correspondence on water-divining was closed had time to appear in print, we received several more letters on the subject, including one from Professor H. W. Segar, of Auckland. Because of this evidence of continuing interest we are now publishing Professor Segar's letter, and one from the other side. But this is not to be taken to mean that the correspondence has been re-opened.

SIR,—Mr. Ongley's article recently published by you was very valuable. An explanation of the true causes of the movements of the various devices used in supposed water divining would also be of great interest and disillusioning value to many. I propose to deal with the straight rod. This seems completely to dominate the practice of water divining in the Auckland district and probably the position is much the same in many others. A supple straight twig of some 2ft. 6in. to 3ft. in length is chosen. It is first held near the ends by the two hands, with their palms facing upwards. The hands are then brought nearer together so as to make the twig form an arch pointing vertically upwards and with the ends of the twig pointing below the horizontal. This is Position One. Now if the hands are turned each in an inward direction so as to make the ends of the twig point above instead of below the horizon (this is Position Two) down goes the arch and the rod turns in the hands of the operator. This action of the twig exactly resembled what occurs with the water-diviner (W.D.) when the action is supposed to indicate the existence of water directly below.

This action of the twig is in conformity with the mechanical law of minimum potential energy, which is universal, and takes place wherever the said conditions are in operation. If now the hands are turned back to Position One up goes the arch again into its original position and so on.

The reader could amuse himself for a time by carrying out these directions and watching the arch moving up and down as he changes his hands from one of the two positions to the other.

Now when the W.D. advances with his hands and twig in Position One and ultimately the twig collapses, which is the more reasonable hypothesis—that the twig has been pulled down by some mystic force emanating from water, a force which even in this age of brilliant discoveries science has not been able to find a trace of; or that the W.D. has merely changed his hands from the first position to the second? The latter event is likely to happen in any case, for Position One is, after a time, one of discomfort for the hand and fore-arm, and these are bound to seek a position of greater ease. This object it will achieve unless the W.D. is concentrating on keeping his hands in Position One, which of course he never does: the idea is not present in his mind. When the arch falls the W.D.'s job is finished, he has found water. But if he now will only turn his hands back to Position One the arch would rise again and remain up as long as his hands are not allowed to go astray again. Where then is the mystic water influence?

People readily accept the W.D.'s claims because of a general belief in their success. This is favoured by the wide publicity given to their successes

and the oblivion that is allowed quietly, by both W.D. and patron, to bury their failures. The belief is utterly mistaken. Nearly 1,000 cases of well-sinking were investigated by public authorities in U.S. and the proportion of failures was almost exactly the same when the sites had been chosen by W.D.'s and when they had been selected by chance to suit the convenience of the owner, the slight difference there was actually in favour of the latter. The moral is: consider advantage and convenience, and trust to luck.

We can see now why the W.D. never seems to discover water actually at the site where he starts his search. That the chance is rather in favour of getting water at any site selected has been the view of geologists for long past and this was confirmed by the statistics of the U.S. investigation. Thus it would appear that the W.D. is in the majority of cases standing over water before he starts on his peregrination over the paddock. But he has to wander about for some time to give his hands time to slip from Position One to Position Two.

Lastly, let me remark that from my experience I find that though the W.D. does most of the fooling, it is easy to fool the W.D. himself. Get his permission to cover his hands with yours which will involve one walking backwards. You can prevent his hands from turning and so keep the arch of the rod upwards as long as you like. By moving his hands in the necessary way you can make the arch point downwards, then point horizontally at his chest and then away from his chest and in other directions at will. The W.D. will probably then tell you that he has never experienced anything like that before in all his experience, and will explain that the water below must be moving in some strange and most unusual fashion, his awe-stricken countenance being all the time quite a study. And all this time the movements you make are so gradual and so relatively small that the poor man does not suspect you of anything.

H. W. SEGAR (Auckland).

Sir,—In *The Listener* P. A. Ongley has stated that diviners are as "thick as blowflies," but he has only tested 0.004 per cent. of the population of New Zealand. He mentions that science is based on facts, therefore he should quote statistics in support of his statements and denials.

The act of divining for water or mineral does not prove that these actually exist; it is merely an indication. It follows, therefore, that any surface tests Mr. Ongley may suggest are quite useless, unless checked by the use of scientific instruments, and finally by boring or other practical means.

Seeing that the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research has funds

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