

RANDOM THOUGHTS.

I OBSERVE by the newspapers that the "Brothers," as that bright luminary, Professor Fay, styles the "Davenport's," are here. It is believed by a good number of people that this celebrated trio can converse at will with the spirits of our departed ancestors. Some of these so-called mediums will call you up a "Bill Sykes" or a "Napoleon" just as you wish. We all know what a feather it is in the cap of any ordinary person to have it in his power to say that he knew such and such a celebrated character. Many a reputation as being a leader of *ton* has been founded on no more grounds than being seen, perhaps, speaking once to My Lord Tom Noddy. Human nature is such that it dearly loves and worships a lord. To have merely seen a great man, has often given to a villager a decided pull over his neighbors. But in these days of enlightenment and progress, you have only to pay your half-crown and you can have a friendly chat with any hero of antiquity you are anyways curious about. You pays your money and you has your choice" of centuries of departed celebrities. There is no difficulty at all in the matter. The medium has simply to ask (as I saw once related in an American spiritualistic paper), "Air you thar, Julius?" "Yaas, I'm here, stranger. What do you require?" and immediately a most interesting conversation ensued between "Julius Cæsar" and the stranger, in which "Julius" gave his opinions in an easy, off-hand manner, and in the choicest American phraseology, about things in general, and the immediate relatives of his interrogator in particular. It seems that this "Julius," who was certainly engaged in a few important matters when here below, is occupied now all day long in answering questions, rapped out on tables, concerning the health, comforts, and age of the relations of Tom, Dick, or Harry, whoever may first get hold of him. His time, on the occasion I allude to, was very precious, because he had to break off a conversation in America about some Job Sankey's old umbrella, to keep an appointment in China, where he had to give some important information concerning a member of the Flowery Land, who had fallen and broken his neck in an attempt to rob an Australian hen-roost. The consequence of this demand on his time was, that the tidings concerning the lost umbrella had to be deferred to another occasion, much to the owner's annoyance. The medium, however, did not seem to be vexed at "Julius" skeddaddling in such an abrupt manner, because so anxious was the deluded victim about his "Sairey Gamp," that the medium put him down as good for another half-crown on a future occasion.

It is a curious fact that on these interesting occasions, it is a Wellington, or a Napoleon, or a Washington, or some other equally well-known historical personage that is brought on the table. Only fancy two sensible men talking together about their last night's séance, and one telling the other, in as serious a tone as if were quoting the last price in the stocks, that Napoleon was at the planchette last night, and that he told them some very interesting news about spirit land. It sounds so strange and absurd in one's ears to hear a conversation like this between two men whom you have always regarded as sensible and steady persons. "Well, how did you get on last night?" "Oh, pretty well; the circle did not seem to work satisfactorily. William Pitt came and told us he was very happy; that he had met Fox lately in the second sphere, and they had become very friendly; the conditions then failed and we could get nothing more from him."

I was once seduced into attending a séance by some friends who were very anxious to convince me of the truth of spiritualism. We were five in number, and we all knew each other most intimately. The result of this attempt was, that I was very near being sent to join the spirits myself. The planchette was produced, and we all sat round a table in solemn silence. I was directed to place my hand on the planchette with one of the party, and we waited during a long five minutes for some spirits to come and write; but the spirits were sulky on this particular occasion, for they persisted in maintaining an obstinate silence. I tried in succession with the others, for they all thought they could "call spirits from the vasty deep," but still they would not come. They tried amongst themselves; but the spirits were either asleep, or lazy, or from home, for there was not the slightest response to all their efforts. It was then observed, quite seriously by one gentleman, that the door was shut, and, "Of course," said he, "the spirits can't come in." The door was then opened, notwithstanding the remark I ventured to throw out, viz., that the spirits, if so inclined, might come through the key-hole or down the chimney. However, it was no use, the spirits failed to put in an appearance. We were on the point of breaking up, when I thought, as they had been so kind as to endeavor to introduce me to the spirits, the least I could do in return would be to perform a little spiriting for them. I, therefore, asked one of them to put his hand on the planchette with me again. He did so, and, strange to say, after a few minutes the planchette commenced making a few erratic movements. It then gradually steadied itself, and wrote down the name of a gentleman who had died a short time previously, and who had been well known to all present. Whilst it was writing, the heads of all present were eagerly bent over it, deciphering the letters as the mysterious heart-shaped piece of wood, called the planchette, slowly traced them on the paper. When all the letters appeared, the planchette ceased, and they all, with bated breath, pronounced the words, and the faces of some assumed a tragic expression. The planchette then descended as if it were a living thing and commenced on a second line. This time it wrote the awful words, "I am here." We all looked at each other, and some of my companions had a scared expression as if they were looking on a veritable ghost. One man's face—a German who wore spectacles—I shall never forget. I thought his eyes would shoot out through his glasses. No more writing took place that day, for I, the writer, could contain myself no longer, but broke out into a loud fit of laughter. The fact was that I had discovered that the faintest

movement on the part of one of the persons whose hands were on the planchette, sent it moving. I wrote the above words myself, although a spiritualist had his hand on the planchette with me, and although three other spiritualists were looking on. And so easily is it done, and without any apparent effort, that if I had not revealed the secret myself these four gentlemen would have left that séance, as they had and have since left many others, under the firm belief that they had been conversing with the spirits of dead persons. The German never forgave me, and it was with difficulty he kept his hands off me at the time.

The Davenport's do not expressly allege that it is spirits who assist them in mystifying the public. They have learned by experience to be too wise for that. If the spirits assisted them, of course, they should always succeed. It would never do to allow the spirits to be foiled by ordinary mortals. When they started in their glorious career it was spirits and nothing but spirits; but after being bowled out a few times by sundry nautical gentlemen, they changed their tactics, and they are kind enough now to leave it to the audience to put down their highly elevating and intellectual performance to what each person fancies. "We don't say it is spiritualism, or what it is," they will tell you, but at the same time they lead you to infer that they, at least, believe it is by the aid of spirits they act. This is a very convenient arrangement, because, in the event of the spirits not coming up to the scratch, or their little game being discovered, they can turn round and tell the audience that the discoverer is so "tarnation smart that he ought to go into the show business himself;" and as it is so very seldom indeed that they are discovered, being extremely clever conjurers, they find that it pays better (the world being so fond of anything mysterious) to induce a belief that there is something supernatural about them.

The rope business is, however, a very simple affair. Hundreds of travelling conjurers and showmen now do it, and many of them explain to their audiences how it is done. Of course, in tying-up a man so that he shall be unable to move hand or foot, the parts to which particular attention should be paid are the fore-arms. If these are loosely bound, then, no matter how securely his body or legs may be corded, the hands of the tied man will soon be at play. In order to render his hands powerless, he must be bound close to the wrists. Now, at first sight, it would seem impossible to get a ligature tightly bound round the wrist over the hand, but if you push the thumb far in under the palm of the hand, it will seem easier of accomplishment, and we can readily conceive to what a small compass the hand can be reduced by years of practice. So much smaller, indeed, than the wrist can conjurers, who have devoted years to the practice, compress their hands, that in a twinkling they can free them from the tightest knot. The Davenport's have been many years at this work, and, of course, they have reached a high degree of skill; but there are no other spirits at work than there are in the trick of the inexhaustible bottle or the plum-pudding, which we have all seen made in a marvellous manner from bits of paper in the bran new hat borrowed for the occasion from one of the audience.

X.Y.Z

A TEST OF IRISH PROSPERITY.

THE 'Financier' says that bankers could, if they chose, tell a good deal about the growing prosperity of Ireland. Bankers, it is true, do not actually see, by any means, all the savings of the people, but they come across some portion of them. Bankers in Ireland occasionally, and indeed frequently, have their attention much struck by the magnitude of the deposits which are lodged with them by persons of apparently very humble means. This feature is satisfactory in more senses than one. In the first place, such deposits prove that the people are doing well and saving money. In the next place, they show that a desire to hoard, and to hold money back from remunerative employment, is dying out, or, rather is being superseded by a more enlightened perception of the uses to which money may be put, and of the advantages to be derived from it. Again, it is satisfactory to find that confidence in the banks is growing, for one of the first effects of this will be to cause not only present savings, but also the past accumulation of hoarded money in Ireland to be more extensively utilised. In a word, money is coming out of the "stocking," and being put to its proper employment. The extension of the branches of banks in Ireland tells a tale of the same sort. Such branches would not be established were it not that they either actually pay or hold out a good promise of doing so. We have in our eye more than one Irish town of only about 5,000 inhabitants, in which there are already established three branches of as many different banks. It is likewise satisfactory to notice the way in which the Irish people are beginning to support native undertakings. Even in cases where Irish concerns are "brought out" in the first instance in England, the shares are being gradually bought up on Irish account, and absorbed locally. Many instances of this may be cited, such, for example, as the Dublin Tramways company (Limited), the shares of which, with £10 paid, are now quoted at 16½ to 16¾. This concern is doing well, and is paying 8 per cent. dividends.

From the Dublin 'Freeman' we clip the following item, which shows that the movement for Home Rule has spread and is spreading in England. Their correspondent writes, under date of Nov. 16:—"I understand that at a meeting of the Executive of the Home Rule Confederation yesterday a resolution was passed congratulating the Home Rule Associations in the boroughs of England and Scotland as having procured the election of twenty members of municipal councillors pledged to the principle of Home Rule for Ireland. I may add that in the pending School Board elections a great number of candidates have declared for Home Rule."