

Crimean war (till about 1866). An old copy of the *Illustrated London News* of the Crimean days, in our possession, is a curious comment on the vagaries of fashion, with its numerous engravings of vast crinolines that are said to have measured up to fifteen feet in circumference—which gives a diameter of about five feet. Billings wrote of the crinolines in their day that, however absurd, they held their own 'and grew nicely.' He commended them for a hot day, and wished that he could sit in one of them all through the sizzling glow of an American July and August. Enclosed in one of them (said he) 'a feller wud be as cool as a dog's nose in a wire muzzle.' Even follies may have their uses. But we rather think the tramway people will have to revise their rates if the crinoline 'comes in' again.

### Mending the Lords

The British House of Lords still serves, to some extent, the useful purpose of a brake upon hasty, ill-advised, and panic legislation. But it has long since abdicated one of the chief functions of a revising Chamber—that of the cool, judicious, and independent arbiter between conflicting parties in the elective House; it has become a frankly and thorough-going partisan assembly, in the Tory interest, and a clog upon democratic and progressive legislation. Attempts to reform the Lords from outside have thus far been as idle as the game of dropping buckets into empty wells and drawing them up again. There lies more promise in the efforts to reorganise the Gilded Chamber from within. Some time ago Lord Newton introduced a Bill reducing the right of a seat in the Upper House to Peers unless elected as representative Peers by the hereditary members of their Order, or unless they had held high office under the Crown in the army, navy, civil service, or in the diplomatic career. Lord Rosebery's Bill follows, to a great extent, the same general lines—so far as one may judge of its purport from the brief cabled summaries that appear in the daily papers. Such a reform would prevent the repetition of the gruesome spectacle, the libel upon legislative methods, that shocked the public eye on September 8, 1893, when great bodies of habitually absentee hereditary legislators—including the halt, the blind, the lame, the decrepit, and (it is said) even the imbecile and the insane—were raked into the House of Lords to wreck the Home Rule Bill which had been carried in the House of Commons by a majority of thirty-four. The London correspondent of the *New York Sun* of September 10, 1893, described the 'august' assembly as he saw it on that occasion in the Gilded Chamber: 'I have seen assemblies that compared with it, but nowhere outside of gaols, almshouses, or hospitals for the insane. No one studied the four hundred figures upon the plush benches without suffering almost a deathblow to his faith in human nature. It was not the feebleness of age that stood out, it was the senility of youth, the wreck of middle life, the tottering imbecility of dissipated years. The presence of such intellectual giants as Salisbury, Rosebery, and Playfair served but to furnish the contrast. Readers are familiar with caricatures of the average British peer as a repulsive creature, with sloping forehead and retreating chin. The indictment must stand. A composite photograph of the Lords who hold their seats by inheritance would be the personification of weakness—mental, moral, and physical—self-indulgence, bigotry, and intolerance. . . . If their faces and forms should once be depicted before the English people, their political doom would be sealed.'

### A Spiritistic Fraud

It was, we believe, an eighty-year-old Portland man who was induced, after a half century of steady absenteeism, to attend a local church a few years ago. 'You are never too old to learn,' said he confidentially to a friend on his return. 'Now, I always thought that Sodom and Gomorrah were husband and wife, and I find they were nothing but cities.' Catholic writers on the phenomena of spiritism are likewise none too old to learn. And, from personal knowledge, we feel sure that the old Portlander's revision of his notions about Sodom and Gomorrah would be a mere bagatelle compared with their altered views on the subject of mediumistic spiritism if they could only be induced to go to school for even six months to a smart conjuror, well versed in the earlier and later and latest

developments of 'spook' production, 'spirit' photography, and the manipulation of the marvellously skilful frauds, of 'spirit' writing and 'spirit' drawing. We write with knowledge of our subject. We write, too, with a feeling of the deepest regret that authors of such widely accepted authority (among Catholics) on this thome as Mr. Raupert and the late Dr. Lapponi should, for lack of even an elementary practical knowledge of the thousand-and-one prestiges of 'spook' conjuring frauds, have packed into their books so many erroneous and misleading and mischievous notions as to the real facts and the true significance of mediumistic spiritist 'manifestations.'

We have been led to pen these preliminary reflections by the perusal of an article by a non-Catholic writer, Mr. John Townsend Trowbridge, in the October *North American Review*, on 'Early Investigations in Spiritualism.' The article makes sad reading, in so far as it is a revelation of the extent to which earnest and well-meaning persons may be misled by even the most clumsy and inartistic frauds of interested adventurers. We mention here the only piece of really skilful mediumistic manipulation that is recorded in the article in question, and we mention it just because it was, in Mr. Trowbridge's estimation, the crowning evidence of the reality of the phenomena which made him a convinced spiritist. Briefly stated, the 'manifestation' which, of all others, got him down, was the following: (1) Mr. Trowbridge wrote, on a piece of paper, the name of a deceased friend with whom he wished to communicate. Other names of persons were also written, but merely to baffle or test the medium, and with no intention of communicating with them. (2) The paper or papers were folded. (3) The intervening stages of the performance are not described. But (4) after some time, Mr. Trowbridge received a message, written in red letters on the medium's (bare) arm, and purporting to have come from the former's deceased friend, whose name (it appears) was correctly chosen from among the others that had been written on the folded paper. The same performance, we may add, made a profound impression upon a Catholic writer who has for some time past been writing inexpertly on mediumistic spiritism. As a conjuring illusion, this 'manifestation' is a rather pretty one. As a spiritistic 'manifestation,' it is, through and through, a fraud. To the present writer's personal knowledge, this particular illusion has been in the possession of the conjuring fraternity for at least over twenty-one years. In private circles we have gone many and many a time through the whole performance described by Mr. Trowbridge, and exposed in full detail the gross fraud and trickery with which it is packed from beginning to end. Our esteemed friends, the Provincial of the Marist Fathers in New Zealand, and Father O'Connell, S.M., were, we believe, the last to whom we demonstrated or described the various stages of this cruel deception that has been practised—sometimes for a very valuable consideration—on many loving and too trusting souls.

A written description and exposure of the various stages of this piece of trickery would be too long and (as to some of its movements) too technical for the average reader. But, briefly, we may state that this fraud is worked by a combination of 'hanky-panky' and of conjuring. In the first place, the writer of the names unconsciously—but practically invariably—furnishes the medium with the means of accurately determining, among a number of names submitted, the name of the person with whom communication is desired. This the victim does on a method akin to that which enables the so-called 'thought reader' (really a muscle-reader) to find a pin or button or sewing-needle hidden under (say) the seat of a chair in the next room. A demonstration of this bit of 'hanky-panky' would make perfectly clear almost at a glance what could be explained only by an engraving, accompanied by extended explanation. For the rest, the medium gets possession of the folded paper or papers by one or other of some dozen of well-known conjuring sleights. A rapid glance at the names is sufficient for the skilled eye to pick out the name desired—the knowledge of which is obligingly, but quite unconsciously, supplied by the earnest and trusting inquirer. A very brief alleged 'spirit message' is then

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