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DOWSING AND UNCONSCIOUS MUSCULAE ACTION.
BY Sm WILLIAM F. BARRETT, F.K.S.

THE accompanying interesting letter to me from Professor Hyslop, the Secretary and Editor of the American Society for Psychical Kesearch, illustrates the need of further investigation on the question of the involuntary and unconscious muscular action which, I have assumed in my papers, gives rise to the sudden twisting of the dowsing rod. It is true,—as will be seen from my Report in *Proceedings,* Vol. XV., pp. 276 *et seq.,* and in subsequent papers in the *Journal,* —that the hypothesis of unconscious muscular action needs to be stretched to almost incredible limits in some cases, and amongst dowsers themselves it is universally discredited. But what other hypothesis can take its place ?

NEW YORK, *November 9th,* 1912.

I had occasion to visit a gentleman whose, daughter did automatic writing, for an experiment with her. I learned from him that, owing to scarcity of water in his well, he had been doing some dowsing to find more water. He suggested that I should try it. I had tried it many times in my life, without success. In my youth I had tried it, and the rod turned occasionally, as it did with a regular dowser whom I knew. But I could never satisfy myself that unconscious muscular action, combined with gravity and the peculiar strain on the arms of the rod, were excluded from the cause. But this turning of the rod was so rare (in my case) that the failures loomed high in the estimate of the cases. I had not tried it for years, when this gentleman asked me to see what I could do.

He gave me a maple rod, forked as usual, not witch hazel or peach, and pointed out the ground over which I should go. He carefully concealed from me where he had found water. This, however, I did not learn until after my experiment, because the directions he gave me led me to infer that he had found water near a certain tree. I was firmly convinced that he had given himself away, and that my experiment would be worthless. But I tried it. There was no evidence of water about. The Merrimac Eiver was about six hundred feet away, and his house and yard were on a bluff or slope about thirty feet high. There were no hollows on the ground over which I was to go, and no one would suspect water in one place more than another. . . .

But with a certain tree and its locality firmly in mind as the

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spot at which the rod had supposedly indicated the possibility of finding water, this spot being about one hundred feet from where I started, I went to work. I held the rod with the point or apex directly in the upright position. I did not expect it to turn at all, but also did expect that, if it did turn, it would move forward from me, as it had always done with the dowsers I had observed, and as it had done in the few cases in which I seemed to be successful. I assumed, too, that my belief that the spot was near the tree would influence its action, if influenced at all, as I approached the tree. But to my astonishment, it began to turn backward toward me, and actually pushed on my breast till I had to stretch my hands out to let it pass, when I had gone to about thirty-five feet from the tree. The gentleman then suggested that I should try it over again, and hold the rod as he did, which was in a horizontal position, so that when it turned down it would pass over 90 degrees of an arc. But I held the rod at an angle of about 45 degrees, expecting that gravity would prevent it from going any other way than downward. To my surprise, it rose to the vertical position, and then over against my breast as before, and at the same spot as before. ... I went back and tried it again with the arms at 45 degrees from the perpendicular, and resolved to hold the arms as tightly as I could to prevent their turning. But the rod again rose to the vertical and over against my breast, though I strove with all my might to prevent it by squeezing my hands on the rod as tightly as its size would permit. The gentleman then told me that this was the place where he had found the water, or rather where the rod had indicated it would be found. I had been firmly convinced that it had been indicated at a spot thirty-five feet farther on.

It is not necessary to explain the facts. The primary point is that neither expectation nor unconscious muscular action is the most natural explanation. From the point of view of expectation the rod should not have turned until I was near the tree, but it turned where I had not even surmised the spot, this having been concealed from me. As to the second point, the most natural direction for-the stick to take, when it was held at an angle of 45 degrees from the perpendicular, was forward and downward. Gravity would most naturally predetermine that direction, and this was aided by expectation,, under the condition that any motion at all should occur. So we have here action directly the opposite of expectation and what would be most natural where gravity has any influence. All this is strengthened by my determined effort to hold the rod and prevent its turning. . . .

The primary interest of the experiment is not whether -we were

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| DEC., 1912. *Cases.* 337 really successful in locating water. It is in the facts that we coincided in the locality involved, and that the rod behaved peculiarly, against expectation and gravity. The gentleman was far behind me, and did not precede me in movement. He remained stationary thirty feet away and behind me. Hence, no suggestion came from his position. It would be of interest to ascertain whether water could be found there, but that does not affect the problem with which we are here concerned. · JAMES H. HYSLOP.  |  |
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|  | CASES. L. 1191. Dream. IN the following case a friend of Miss Yerrall's had a dream, apparently relating to a script produced by the latter two or three weeks earlier, which had been seen by no one except herself and her mother. Miss Verrall gives the first account of it, as follows : 5 SELWYN GARDENS, CAMBRIDGE, *Nov.* 17, 1912. On Saturday, Nov. 9, 1912, I went to Cambridge for the week-end with a friend here called Miss Jones, arriving at about lunch time. Miss Jones had never stayed in our house before. On Sunday, Nov. 10th, when we first met at breakfast and before I had spoken at all, Miss Jones said: "I want to tell you about my dream. I dreamt that I was writing script, and that there was an important message in it for you or Mrs. Verrall. I woke up and remembered part of the message. I thought of making a note at once, but was too sleepy to get out of bed. As I remember the message now it was : ' Tell her she is looking in the wrong place. She ought to look in Verona.' The message was somehow connected with Dante. In my dream I saw the bust of Dante, which we saw at Newnham yesterday." On Saturday, Nov. 9, 1912, Miss Jones and I had visited the library at Newnham College, where there is a bust of Dante. No allusion had been made to this bust at the time nor had our attention been specially attracted to it in any way. HELEN DE G. VERRALL. Mrs. Verrall writes : 5 SELWYN GARDENS, CAMBRIDGE, *Nov. 12th,* 1912. On Saturday, Nov. 9th, 1912, the lady here called Miss Jones, came  |  |