

Plutarch, which is so impressive even to this day on the Christian imagination—the story we mean, of Epitherses, who, having embarked for Italy in the reign of Tiberius Cæsar, suddenly heard a voice from the shore, while becalmed one evening before the Paxe—two small islands in the Ionian sea, which lie between Corcyra and Leucadia; such voice addressing Thamus, a pilot, and an Egyptian by birth, who refused to answer till he received the third summons, whereupon it said, “When thou art come to the Palodes, proclaim aloud that the great Pan is dead!” It is added, that “the passengers were all amazed; but their amazement gave place to the most alarming emotions, when, on arriving at the specified place, Thamus stood in the stern of the vessel, and proclaimed what he had been commanded to announce.” St. Chrysostom and the early fathers mention divination by a familiar spirit as practiced in their day; and the practice is still common in the East; as it is also among the Esquimaux. As to the treatise of Eustathius, the good bishop’s notion was that the Witch of Endor was really possessed of a demon; whose deception the vision was, being produced by supernatural agency, not, as cited in the Septuagint, by Engastrimism, or Ventriloquy.

In the nineteenth century, we are told by Sir David Brewster, that ventriloquists made great additions to their art. The performances, he says, of Fitzjames and Alexandré were far superior to those of their predecessors. “Besides the art of speaking by the muscles of the throat and the abdomen, without moving those of the face, these artists had not only studied, with great diligence and success, the modifications which sounds of all kinds undergo from distance, obstructions, and other causes, but had acquired the art of imitating them in the highest perfection. The ventriloquist was therefore able to carry on a dialogue in which the *dramatis voces*, as they may be called, were numerous; and, when on the outside of an apartment, could personate a mob with its infinite variety of noise and vociferation. Their influence over the minds of an audience was still further extended by a singular power which they had obtained over the muscles of the body. Fitzjames actually succeeded in making the opposite or corresponding muscles act differently from each other; and while one side of his face was merry and laughing, the other side was full of sorrow and tears. At one time, he was tall, and thin, and melancholy, and after passing behind a screen, he came out bloated with obesity and staggering with fullness. M. Alexandré possessed the same power over his face and figure, and so striking was the contrast between two of these forms, that an excellent sculptor (M. Joseph) has perpetuated them in marble. This new acquirement of the ventriloquist of the nineteenth century, enabled him in his own single person, and with his own single voice, to represent a dramatic composition which would formerly have required the assistance of several actors. Although

only one character in the piece could be seen at the same time, yet they all appeared during its performance; and the change of face and figure on the part of the ventriloquist was so perfect that his personal identity could not be recognized in the *dramatis personæ*. This deception was rendered still more complete by a particular construction of the costumes, which enabled the performer to appear in a new character, after an interval so short that the audience necessarily believed that it was another person.”

Some amusing anecdotes may be gathered, illustrative of ventriloquism.

One M. St. Gille, a ventriloquist of France, had once occasion to shelter himself from a sudden storm in a monastery in the neighborhood of Avranche. The monks were at the time in deep sorrow for the loss of an esteemed member of their fraternity, whom they had recently buried. While lamenting over the tomb of their departed brother the slight honors which had been paid to his memory, a mysterious voice was heard to issue from the vaults of the church, bewailing the condition of the deceased in purgatory, and reproving the monks in melancholy tones for their want of zeal and reverence for departed worth. Tidings of the event flew abroad; and quickly brought the inhabitants to the spot. The miraculous speaker still renewed his lamentations and reproaches; whereupon the monks fell on their faces, and vowed to repair their neglect. They then chanted a *De profundis*, and at intervals the ghostly voice of the deceased friar expressed his satisfaction.

One Louis Brabant turned his ventriloquial talent to profitable account. Rejected by the parents of an heiress as an unsuitable match for their daughter, Louis, on the death of the father, paid a visit to the widow, during which the voice of her deceased husband was all at once heard thus to address her: “Give my daughter in marriage to Louis Brabant:—he is a man of fortune and character, and I endure the pains of purgatory for having refused her to him. Obey this admonition, and give repose to the soul of your departed husband.” Of course, the widow complied; but Brabant’s difficulties were not yet all overcome. He wanted money to defray the wedding expenses, and resolved to work on the fears of an old usurer, a M. Cornu, of Lyons. Having obtained an evening interview, he contrived to turn the conversation on departed spirits and ghosts. During an interval of silence, the voice of the miser’s deceased father was heard, complaining of his situation in purgatory, and calling loudly upon his son to rescue him from his sufferings, by enabling Brabant to redeem the Christians at that time enslaved by the Turks. Not succeeding on the first occasion, Brabant was compelled to make a second visit to the miser, when he took care to enlist not only his father but all his deceased relations in the appeal; and in this way he obtained a thousand crowns.

There have been few female ventriloquists. Effects produced by the female organs of speech

have always manifested a deficiency of power. The artificial voices have been few in number, and those imperfectly defined. A woman at Amsterdam possessed considerable powers in this way. Conrad Amman, a Dutch doctor in medicine, who published a Latin treatise at Amsterdam in 1700, observes of her, that the effects she exhibited were produced by a sort of swallowing of the words, or forcing them to retrograde, as it were, by the trachea, by speaking during the inspiration of the breath, and not, as in ordinary speech, during expiration. The same writer notices also the performances of the famous Casimir Schreckenstein.

Different professors of ventriloquism have given different accounts of the manner in which they succeeded in producing their illusions. Baron Mengen, one of the household of Prince Lichtenstein, at Vienna, said that it consisted in a passion for counterfeiting the cries of animals and the voices of different persons. M. St. Gille referred his art to mimicry; and the French Academy, combining these views, defines the art as consisting in an accurate imitation of any given sound as it reaches the ear. Scientific solutions are various. Mr. Nicholson thought that artists in this line, by continual practice from childhood, acquire the power of speaking during inspiration with the same articulation as the ordinary voice, which is formed by expiration. M. Richerand declares that every time a professor exhibits his vocal peculiarities, he suffers distension in the epigastric region; and supposes that the mechanism of the art consists in a slow, gradual expiration, drawn in such a way, that the artist either makes use of the influence exerted by volition over the parietes of the thorax, or that he keeps the epiglottis down by the base of the tongue, the apex of which is not carried beyond the dental arches. He observes, that ventriloquists possess the power of making an exceedingly strong inspiration just before the long expiration, and thus convey into the lungs an immense quantity of air, by the artistical management of the egress of which they produce such astonishing effects upon the hearing and imagination of their auditors.

The theory propounded by Mr. Gough in the "Manchester Memoir," on the principle of reverberated sound, is untenable, because ventriloquism on that theory would be impossible in a crowded theatre, which admits not of the predicated echoes. Mr. Love, in his account of himself, asserts a natural aptitude, a physical predisposition of the vocal organs; which, in his case, discovered itself as early as the age of ten, and gradually improved with practice, without any artistic study whatever. He states that not only his pure ventriloquisms, but nearly all his lighter vocal imitations of miscellaneous sounds, were executed in the first instance on the spur of the moment, and without any premeditation. The artist must evidently possess great flexibility of larynx and tongue. Polyphony, according to our modern professor, is

produced by compression of the muscles of the chest, and is an act entirely different from any species of vocal deception or modulation. There is no method, he tells us, of manufacturing true ventriloquists. Nature must have commenced the operation, by placing at the artist's disposal a certain quality of voice adapted for the purpose, as the raw material to work upon. It is like a fine ear or voice for singing—the gift of Nature. It follows, therefore, that an expert polyphonist must be as rare a personage as any other man of genius in any particular art.

### THE INCENDIARY.

FROM THE REMINISCENCES OF AN ATTORNEY.

I KNEW James Dutton, as I shall call him, at an early period of life, when my present scanty locks of iron-gray were thick and dark, my now pale and furrowed cheeks were fresh and ruddy, like his own. Time, circumstance, and natural bent of mind, have done their work on both of us; and if his course of life has been less equable than mine, it has been chiefly so because the original impulse, the first start on the great journey, upon which so much depends, was directed by wiser heads in my case than in his. We were school-fellows for a considerable time; and if I acquired—as I certainly did—a larger stock of knowledge than he, it was by no means from any superior capacity on my part, but that his mind was bent on other pursuits. He was a born Nimrod, and his father encouraged this propensity from the earliest moment that his darling and only son could sit a pony or handle a light fowling-piece. Dutton, senior, was one of a then large class of persons, whom Cobbett used to call bull-frog farmers; men who, finding themselves daily increasing in wealth by the operation of circumstances, they neither created nor could insure or control—namely, a rapidly increasing manufacturing population, and tremendous war-prices for their produce—acted as if the chance-blown prosperity they enjoyed was the result of their own forethought, skill, and energy, and therefore, humanly speaking, indestructible. James Dutton was, consequently, denied nothing—not even the luxury of neglecting his own education; and he availed himself of the lamentable privilege to a great extent. It was, however, a remarkable feature in the lad's character, that whatever he himself deemed essential should be done, no amount of indulgence, no love of sport or dissipation, could divert him from thoroughly accomplishing. Thus he saw clearly, that even in the life—that of a sportsman-farmer he had chalked out for himself, it was indispensably necessary that a certain quantum of educational power should be attained; and so he really acquired a knowledge of reading, writing, and spelling, and then withdrew from school to more congenial avocations.

I frequently met James Dutton in after-years; but some nine or ten months had passed since I had last seen him, when I was directed by the chief partner in the firm to which Flint and I