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Malay Divining Rods: A Note on Dr. Tylor's Paper (Man, 1902. 40).

By E. Westlake, F.G.S.

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My attention has been drawn to an article by Dr. Tylor (MAN, 1902. 40, Pl. D.) on *Malay Divining Rods*, the details of which are essentially those of the so-called "possessed" rods from other parts of the old world. Towards the conclusion of his article Dr. Tylor leaves the folklore point of view to discuss the actual success of the rod, its *modus operandi*, and its reason or lack of reason. With his remark that the rod has no physical relation with the object sought for, and only follows the seeker's state of mind and body, I fully concur; but when he proceeds to characterise these states as abnormal, in the sense of being less than sane, this seems to me to be possibly a misapprehension. In psychology things are not always what they seem, as when Mark Twain thought he must have a great mind because it took him so long to make it up. The water-finder, having to make up his mind about water, gets his rod to make it up for him. This is the practical use of the rod. It can, of course, only make up the mind the dowser has; and what this is, and how the ideas reach him, is what the psychologist has to find out.

In the hands of an experienced water-finder the rod doubtless delivers an expert judgment, which (as the old judge said) will probably be right, whereas the reasons for it would probably be wrong. So while the dowser does not of course gain knowledge by taking hold of a twig, he may conceivably gain guidance, as Socrates said he gained guidance from his inner voice about matters already known to him. If genius is definable as automatism of the higher faculties, an automatic judgment that proves to be correct seems to me more likely to be akin to genius than to insanity.

Other cases, which possibly suggest more than expert knowledge, are those in which the dowser was obviously not an expert and knew nothing about springs, as, *e.g.*, the springs Gabriel de Mortillet describes himself as finding by means of a rod when a youth—for the late eminent professor was himself a successful dowser and published a small book on the subject*—or those, again, wherein the expert could not have judged from surface signs, because there were none to judge from. A few of the latter I have described in an appendix to Prof. Barrett's last paper on the rod (*Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research*, Part 38).

Dr. Tylor remarks that "in the civilised world the magical thief-finder has proved an utter failure." But a thing must be known to have been tried more or less extensively before it can be said to have failed, and in the whole of divining rod literature I know only of two cases of the rod being used in Europe for tracing thieves.† There is also a detailed account of finding a thief in Bengal, which presents no irrational or inexplicable features (*Chambers' Journal* for January, 1856).‡ The Count de Gasparin § would explain Jacques Aymar's case as his unconscious perception of sensible signs; and conversely the feats of the Argentine *Rastreador* described by Sarmiento|| might be facilitated by the use of a rod. The particular purposes for which "magic" is used seem very much a matter of fashion. The rod is not used to predict the weather, but one does not thence infer its failure for the purpose. Automatism only began to be studied in the last century, and of its limits we know next to nothing. The phantasies of magic have arisen from popular misinterpretations of actual psychological phenomena, and to reach their true theory requires not merely their sympathetic record as folklore, but skilled experiment as in the other sciences.

E. WESTLAKE.

* *Histoire de L'Hydrosophie et de la baquette divinatoire*. 88 pp. Chambéry, 1849.

† Accounts of Aymar, 1692 *et seq.* Dufour: *Revue savoisienne*, 1862, avril 15, pp. 34-35. Annecy.

‡ Authenticated by the publishers: see Rev. R. S. Maitland, *False Worship*, p. 330.

§ Gasparin, A. E. de: *Tables Tournantes*, tom. ii, pp. 124-140. Paris, 1855.

|| Sarmiento: *Civilizacion y Barbarie*, pp. 37-41. Santiago, 1851.