

sealed slates; by the laughable ruses of toe-writing and the ingenuities of trick shoes and slippers; by those wonders of clever construction, trick 'spirit-slates'; by the little thimble carrying false key and colored chalks—the latter to write the 'spirit-message' in any one of several (usually three) tints selected in advance by the inquirer; by telescopic rods and tubes that can be comfortably carried in breast-pocket, hip-pocket, or side of boot; by stuffed and damped gloves to fit the ends of telescopic rods; by traps (illusion number 5 above is performed in this way); by 'ghost-whistles,' 'wailers,' luminous paint, and phosphorised oil; by trap-doors, trick-panels, and trick-skirting-boards, and sealed trick-doors (really sliding doors), that admit the 'pals' and accomplices of the medium in the last-mentioned imposture (number 7); and by the numerous other frauds and wiles that we need not enter into here? More than a generation ago Houdin, that prince of wizards, performed feats of 'levitating' a piano and piano-player—a feat that used to mystify exceedingly the audiences that foregathered in Paris to witness the brilliant performances to which he gave the title of *soirées fantastiques*. And every conjurer is acquainted with the pin-and-ring method, the pneumatic method, and numerous other mechanical methods of making chairs, small tables, and such-like articles of furniture dissolve their partnership with the floor and follow the flat, open palm of the performer as it moves upwards towards the ceiling. Even in the open day-time many such curious movements might, as every illusionist knows, be so impressed invisibly, by mechanical means, upon heavy articles of furniture, as to convey at first sight the impression that their performances are purely automatic. The trouble is, that the unskilled and the unwary are too prone to attribute these and such-like performance of modern natural magic to preternatural causes—for no better reason than that they do not know or suspect the methods by which they are brought about.

The devil can, of course, get his sable finger into many a pie. But on the grounds of both philosophy and common sense, and in accordance with a well-known principle of Catholic official practice in regard to events claimed to be miraculous, we must decline to attribute to a preternatural agency, phenomena that not alone may be, but are, constantly produced by natural means. There are current, as we are well aware, numerous grossly exaggerated descriptions (usually second-hand, sometimes the work of excitable or neurotic witnesses) of alleged spiritistic happenings. In all investigation of such stories, you must first catch your hare—you must first be sure of your facts, and sure, moreover, of the full setting of circumstances in which the facts took place. This presents, at times, great and even hopeless difficulties. And herein we find, on the part of the bulk of our Catholic writers, a deplorable prepossession and credulity, and a complete lack of acquaintance with the power of conjuring craft, which render the body of their testimony suspect or useless. We have often expressed our conviction that, back of the wholesale fraud which permeates modern spiritism, there is a thin—very, very thin and very rare—stratum of the preternatural. But we are decidedly of the opinion that this is to be sought for and found only here and there, very occasionally, and in special circumstances, among the ranks of private investigators, and not at all in the professional mediumistic side of this strange cult.

We have been urged to place in book form our views on this whole subject, and the grounds thereof; and we have yet hopes of doing so. But the hope seems at times somewhat elusive; for such a work would, among other things, involve for us the personal preparation of hundreds of photographs and numerous line-drawings to illustrate our letterpress; and for all this and the rest much greater leisure is required than falls to the lot of the editor of a Catholic paper in these countries. Meantime, however, we raise our voice against the credulity, the lack of necessary knowledge and of scientific method, and the exaggeration and sensationalism, of sundry pious and well-meaning Catholic writers and preachers on spiritism, to whom mediumistic sleights and cheats are probably as much 'a Hebrew speech' as they are to the innocent and unsuspecting rustic who witnesses for the first time the mystic

illusions of the Egyptian Hall. We entertain the highest respect for the zeal, the good faith, and the pious motives that actuate these writers. But we deplore their precipitancy, first and chiefly on the score of sane and sober truth; secondly, on the ground of mischief done and of superstition fomented, to our knowledge, among our co-religionists; and, in the third place, on account of the eagerness with which the flamboyant exaggerations and indiscretions of these writers (and preachers) are seized by the spiritistic press and exploited in the interests of this superstition. We cannot get away from the conviction that much unintended harm is being done by the misleading and exaggerated idea which they are giving to Catholic readers, both clerical and lay, as to the source and significance of the typical spiritistic 'manifestations.' The latest and most sensational and most mischievous of all these writings is a series of *Sermons on Modern Spiritualism*, by Father A. V. Millar, O. S. C. The book contains some wise cautions, mingled, however, with storms of fantastical exaggeration and misconception. The author was, no doubt, actuated by a sincere desire to benefit his hearers and readers. But the best service that he could do to them would be to suppress his book, call in all the copies that he can gather together, make a good, wholesome bonfire of them, and preach and write nothing more about spiritistic phenomena till he has been, for at least twelve months the assiduous pupil of some expert in the illusionist side of this curious superstition.

NEW ZEALAND RAILWAYS

CHRISTMAS HOLIDAYS, 1908.

The following ALTERATIONS IN and ADDITIONS TO the Ordinary Time-table will be made in connection with the above:—

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 24.

Holiday Excursion Tickets from Dunedin and stations north thereof to Hampden and intermediate stations will not be available by Up Mail train leaving Dunedin at 8.0 a.m.

Holiday Excursion Tickets from Dunedin and stations north thereof to Hampden and intermediate stations will not be available by Up Express leaving Dunedin at 1.26 p.m.

The Up Mail and Up Express trains leaving Dunedin at 8.0 a.m. and 1.26 p.m. respectively will not take passengers for Waitati.

Holiday Excursion Tickets from Hampden and stations south thereof to Dunedin and intermediate stations will not be available by Down Express train arriving Dunedin at 5.13 p.m.

Holiday Excursion Tickets from Dunedin and stations south thereof to Catlins River and intermediate stations (including Branches) will not be available by Down Mail train leaving Dunedin at 8.20 a.m.

Holiday Excursions Tickets from Dunedin and stations south thereof to Catlins River and intermediate stations (including Branches) will not be available by Down Express train leaving Dunedin at 5.45 p.m.

Holiday Excursion Tickets from Catlins River and stations north thereof (including Branches) to Dunedin and intermediate stations will not be available by the Up Mail train arriving Dunedin at 7.5 p.m.

An extra express train for Oamaru will leave Dunedin at 11.0 a.m., arriving Oamaru 2.50 p.m. Will stop at Waitati, Seadiff, Puketoraki, Waikouaiti, Palmerston, Shag Point, Hillgrove, Hampden, Herbert, and Maheno.

The train usually leaving Dunedin for Palmerston at 4.25 p.m. will not leave until 5.27 p.m.

An extra express train for Balclutha will leave Dunedin at 9.5 a.m., arriving Balclutha 11.25 a.m. This train connects with Lawrence and Catlins River Branch trains, and will stop at Caversham and Mosgiel to pick up passengers, and at Henley, Titiri, Waihola, Milton, and Stirling to pick up or set down passengers.

An extra express train will leave Balclutha at 4.30 p.m., arriving Dunedin 6.56 p.m. This train connects with trains from Catlins River and Lawrence Branches. Will stop at Stirling, Milton, Waihola, Henley; also Mosgiel to Caversham (inclusive) to pick up or set down passengers.

The train usually leaving Dunedin for Clinton at 8.55 a.m. will not leave till 9.40 a.m.

Train for Balclutha will leave Dunedin at 6.15 p.m., arriving Balclutha 8.49 p.m. This train connects with trains for Lawrence and Catlins River Branches. Will take passengers for Owhiro and stations south thereof only.

The Express train leaving Dunedin at 5.45 p.m. will