

MISCELLANEOUS.

HOCUS-POCUS.

THE word "hocus-pocus" is now a common designation (at least in the English language) for "a cheat or impostor" and refers originally to the conjurer who by legerdemain deceives the people and pretends to work miracles. In German the word is used mainly in the sense of "sleight-of-hand," designating not the performer, but the deception by which a trick is done, and this seems to be the more original meaning of the term.

The word is probably a corruption of the Latin words *Hoc est corpus meum*, which is the formula spoken by the priest over the sacramental bread and wine, which thereby is claimed to be transubstantiated into the body and blood of Christ.

In its modern sense the word can be traced back to the seventeenth century, but the use of the formula *hoc est corpus meum* in the sense of jugglery is mentioned as early as 1579 in Fischart's *Beehive*.

Johann Fischart, the famous satirist and reformer who lived in the middle of the sixteenth century and died about 1590, speaks of the sacramental transubstantiation as "bread jugglery" (*brotvergauckelung*),* and compares the power of the five words † to the magic word which Satan uttered when creating monks ‡ and adds:

"Be steadfast in it (the faith) that these five words do the work and transubstantiate the bread." §

R. L'Estrange (1616-1704) is familiar with the Latin derivation of the word saying (in *Ansiv. Diss.*, 18, published in 1687):

"I never lov'd the Hocus-Pocussing of *Hoc est corpus meum*."

Tillotson (1630-1694) in one of his sermons (XXVI) accepts the etymology of the word, saying:

"In all probability those common juggling words of *hocus pocus* are nothing else but a corruption of *hoc est corpus*, by way of ridiculous imitation of the priests of the Church of Rome in their trick of Transubstantiation."

We need not assume with Tillotson that jugglers actually intended to ridicule the sacrament. When pretending to transform anything, they simply imitated the process of transformation and naturally used the same words as the priests did, merely because the people believed them to be potent charms, and since the

* *Beehive*, 87.

† He reads: *Hoc enim est corpus meam*.

‡ "Die fünf wort haben ein kraft wie dz wort *ffuat* dasz der teufel sprach da er mönch machte."—*Beehive*, 82.

§ "... pleibt fest darbei dasz die fünf wort das spil verrichten, und das brot transsubstantiiiren."—*Beehive*, 85.

audience did not consist of Latin scholars, they naturally corrupted the words into a formula that was easier pronounced.

The verb "to hocus-pocus" thus acquires the meaning "to transform, to metamorphose," or "to disguise a change."

That the formula itself became the name of the man who pronounced it, is a change in the meaning of words that occurs frequently. Even as early as 1655 Ady in his *Candle in Dark* (29) speaks of a man

"That went about in King James his time. . . who called himself, The Kings Majesties most excellent Hocus Pocus, and so was called, because that at the playing of every Trick, he used to say, '*Hocus focus, tontus talontus, vade celiter jubeo,*' a dark composure of words, to blinde the eyes of the beholders, to make his Trick pass the more currantly without discovery."

ELECTRICITY AND THE BODY OF RESURRECTION.

Mr. Charles Hallock's proposition made in the November number of *The Open Court* has produced quite a stir in certain circles. Letters on the subject were received both at the editorial office of *The Open Court*, and by the author, and we publish here some of the correspondence that has reference to the subject, together with a few editorial comments.

A LETTER FROM A COLLEGE PROFESSOR.

To the Editor of The Open Court:

I have read with great interest the article by Mr. Hallock, on "The Body of the Future: Is It Electrical?" and also the editorial comments, in the November issue of *The Open Court*. Permit me to ask why Mr. Hallock's theory in its main features may not be eminently reasonable, if the new view of the electrical nature of matter be true?

Authorities in physics like Sir Oliver Lodge, and Professor Fison, and others equally as eminent, have said within a few months that the "so-called atom," which has played such an important part in modern science, "is now displaced from its fundamental place of indivisibility." It has been divided and shown to be composed of electricity. Very recent investigations point to the conclusion, which these scientists are announcing as true, that "the fundamental ingredient of which . . . the whole of matter is made up, is nothing more nor less than electricity, in the form of an equal number of positive and negative charges." This is the doctrine toward which the best modern scientific research surely points. It will be at once seen that it secures that "unification of matter such as has through all the ages been sought; it goes much farther than had been hoped, for the substratum is not an unknown and hypothetical protyle, but the familiar electric charge."

If, as these authorities in physics, are beginning to say, the essence of matter is electricity, why may not Mr. Hallock's main position that there will be a future body and that it will be electrical be reasonable? The electrical nature of matter is likely to lead to a radical change in some modern scientific views, and among them the conception of death and the existence of the body after death.

My main point is this: on the supposition that the New Testament statements about a body after death, or the resurrection body, are true, why may not the electrical theory of the nature of matter give us some idea of the nature of that body and make credible some passages in the New Testament that have hitherto been regarded as inconsistent with what has been supposed to be true of matter?