

AN EVENING WITH C. C. FOSTER.

BY A SKEPTIC.

THE article in the February *Open Court* containing a reminiscence of C. C. Foster's work as a medium, with a marvelous instance of his clairvoyant power, interested me very much because I had an experience with him, not quite so tragical, but of the same order, which was followed by an explanation and a demonstration so complete that I think it worth recording.

About thirty years ago, when Foster was at the height of his popularity and power as a trance medium, and as a master of the various arts of communication between the spirits and those who sat at his table, I was one of a party of five who paid ten dollars for the privilege of spending an evening with him. We were all what are called educated men with literary tastes and habits, and were all greatly interested in the phenomena of spiritualism and clairvoyance then so ably set forth and illustrated by many skilful advocates.

The evening was filled with interesting exhibitions of Foster's power as a medium; but I will select only two or three which illustrate his methods. After we were seated at a long table, which was apparently an extension dining table of the ordinary type, the door opened and Mr. Foster appeared in one corner of the room advancing toward us with a sinuous motion of his head and body which reminded me of the progress of a serpent. He sat down, a little away from the table, quite at ease, and began to converse with us. Meanwhile the table began to undulate, the various parts rising and falling with a regular motion. I asked, "Is this part of the demonstration?" He said, "What do you mean?" I said, "This motion of the table, what is it?" "I don't know," he said, "I have nothing to do with it." The exercises began, and after some time Mr. Foster suddenly turned to me and said, "Here's something peculiar. A cloud appeared in the upper corner of the room yonder and

floated down like a cloud of cigar smoke till it came to your side and gradually assumed the form of a little child who wishes to speak to you. Have you ever lost a child?" I said, "No. But I lost a little brother many years ago." "Well, he is here and wishes to speak to you." Then he told me to take a card containing the alphabet and a pencil and touch every letter in the alphabet, and when I came to the first letter of the name he would tap three times with his pencil on the table and then my next neighbor, without Foster's seeing the letter, was to write it down at a table by his side. In this way he quickly spelled the name Joseph, telling me of what he died and various other particulars which were very surprising and unknown to any in the room but myself. After that I carefully watched his methods, as he applied the same tests to my companions. I saw that he watched them as they went over the alphabet, and I did the same. Very soon I saw that I was able to tell as well as he when the right letter was reached, because instinctively the person who held the pencil paused a moment, looked up, or did something which indicated expectation on his part, at which Foster promptly rapped. When he came around to me again he asked me to think of some friend who had recently died. He then asked me to use the alphabet as before. I did so, but this time I carefully beat time on the letters and he went through the alphabet and found nothing. He said, "That is strange." He went through again and rapped on the wrong letter. Then he said, "Well, let's try something else. I will make the initials of the name appear in red letters on my arm." He made some very lively motions in the air with his two hands flying around each other, and then pulled up his sleeve and exhibited some red marks which only faintly resembled D. P., the letters I wanted. I asked him what the letters were. He said he did not know. I declined to exercise my imagination, and he said, "Let's try something else." He then told me to write the proper name among a dozen fictitious names. Whereupon he took a pencil and with a rolling motion went through every name on the list excepting the one I had in mind. I said, "Very well, that would be more satisfactory if you had never seen the name." He said, "I do not know the man." I said, "That is impossible. You have passed his sign on the street hundreds of times and must have seen it." "Well, let that stand for what it is worth," he said, "The man is here and wishes you to ask him three questions which he will answer." The first question I asked was, "Where did we ride last together?" Foster gave a wrong answer, saying we rode on the seashore when, in fact, I went to Boston with the man to consult a medium about his illness.

I then asked him to repeat the conversation he had long before with the honorable C. W. W., a well-known member of Congress. His reply was, "He says he will tell you this if you will have a private sitting with me." The next day I went with a friend well-known to Mr. Foster from his boyhood and he refused to admit us on the ground that every moment was pledged so long as he was to be in town.

The main incident which I wish to relate came late in the evening. While there was a lull in the proceedings, Foster suddenly threw himself back, grabbed the arms of the chair in which he was sitting, and seemed to be resisting some physical force applied against him. He exclaimed, "I won't, I won't say that, it is too disagreeable." We asked the meaning of this explosion and he said there was a spirit trying to make him say things which were unpleasant. We urged him to report and he turned to Mr. H., one of the circle, and said, "He says he is a friend of yours, and he says he was hung." The man said, "No friend of mine was ever hung that I know of. What was his name?" Foster immediately seized a pencil and wrote on a pad W. C. Mr. H. said, "That means nothing to me." Then Foster, as he often did, spoke in his own person for the spirit behind him, and said, "It's me, Bill Carter." Mr. H. said, "I never knew any Bill Carter." "It's Julia's brother Bill," Mr. Foster said. "I did not know that Julia had any brother Bill," Mr. H. said, "but my wife will know." Then he asked, "Where was he hung?" Foster said, "No more, he's gone."

The next day I met Mr. H. in the street and sung out, "Well, what about Bill Carter?" "Oh, my wife says that Julia Carter did have a brother William who went to Cuba, was there in the rebellion, and may have been hung, for he has not been heard of for two years."

After this it became a customary thing for me as a joke, when I met Mr. H., to ask him about Bill Carter. One day he answered, "I have been to P——, where the Carters live, and found that Foster was an intimate friend of the family, that he had spent as much as a week at a time at their house, and that he of course knew all about him and played off Bill Carter on me knowing that I should be able to find out who he was, if I did not know already." After about six months one morning I asked the usual question, "How about Bill Carter?" "Oh," he said, "He's come home all right."

The two incidents that I have related, at first seemed inexplicable by us on any theory except the possession of supernatural or superhuman power by the medium. He told us about things that

in my case no one know but myself, and in the other case about a person of whom no one in the circle had any knowledge. Very early in the evening Mr. Foster discovered that I was not only skeptical but that I was catching on to his methods and became very wary of me. The next day one of the party discussing the exciting evening which we had passed together and admitting that Foster cheated said, "There was so much skepticism in the circle that he could not succeed with us, and so he took to playing tricks."