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**The young man's book of amusement**

**Halifax, 1848**

Ventriloquism

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*Speaking Automata.*

The Egyptian idols are of this class. Memnon, the head of Friar Bacon, and the statue of Albert Magnus. Darwin, in his Temple of Nature, lays down a process for forming an automatical speech. Bacon, in his Natural History, experiment 139, notes the trembling of water resembles the letter *h*; the quenching of hot things, the letter *z*; the sound of strings, the letters *n* and *o*; and the jerking of a switch the letter *g*.

*Ventriloquism.*

It seems that the factitious voice produced by a ventriloquist, does not (as the etymology of the word imparts) proceed from the belly, but is formed in the inner parts of the mouth and throat. The art does not depend on a particular structure or organization of these parts, but may be acquired by almost any person ardently desirous of attaining it, and determined to persevere in repeated trials. A sudden change of direction in sound, our knowledge of which does not depend on the impulse of the ear, but on other facts, will be perceived, when the original communication is interrupted, provided there be a sensible echo. This will be perceived by any person who walks along a valley intercepted with buildings, at a time that a peal of bells is ringing; for the sound of the bells, instead of arriving constantly at the ears

of the person in its true direction, is frequently reflected in a short time from two or three different places, and the steeple appears, in the hearer's judgment, to perform the part of an expert ventriloquist, that which is occasioned by accident in the case of the bells, being performed by art in the case of the ventriloquist. The following curious facts, tending to illustrate a professional display of the art, may now be introduced:—The audience were arranged in two opposite lines, corresponding to the two sides of a long narrow room. The benches on which they were seated, reached from one end of the place to the middle of it, the other part remaining unoccupied. The feats exhibited by him were the three following:—First, he made his voice come from behind his audience, but it never seemed to proceed from any part of the wall near the heads of the people present; on the contrary, it was always heard resembling the voice of a child, who seemed to be under the benches. He stood during the time of speaking in a stooping posture, having his mouth turned towards the place from which the sound issued: so that the line, joining his lips and the reflecting object, did not approach the ears of the company. Second, advancing into the vacant part of the room, and turning his back to the audience, he made a variety of noises, that seemed to proceed from an open cupboard which stood directly before him, at the distance of two or three yards. Third, he placed an inverted glass cup on the hands of his hearers, and then imitated the cries of a child confined in it. His method of doing it was this: the upper part of the hearer's arm laid close

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along his side ; then the part below the elbow was kept in a horizontal position, with the hand turned downwards, which was done by the operator himself. After taking these preparatory steps, the man bent his body forwards in a situation which presented the profile of his face nearly to the front of his hearers, whilst his mouth pointed to the cup ; in which posture he copied the voice of a confined child so completely, that three positions of the glass were easily distinguished by as many different tones, viz. when he pressed the mouth of the cup close against the palm, when one edge of it was elevated, and when the vessel was held near the hand, but did not touch it. The second and third instances of ventriloquism afford strong proofs, that this delusive talent is nothing more than the art of substituting an echo for the primary sound ; for, besides the change perceivable in the direction of the voice, it was found to be blended with a variety of secondary sounds ; such as we know by experience are produced, as often as a noise of any kind issues from a cavity. The responses of many of the ancient oracles were delivered by persons possessing this quality, so very capable of being applied to the purpose of priestcraft and delusion.

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*On Sounds excited in Hydrogen Gas.*

As the intensity of sound is diminished by the refraction of the medium in which it is produced, it