

Table Tipping; Table Turning

(religion, spiritualism, and occult)

Nandor Fodor described table tipping, or table turning, as “the crudest form of communication with the subconscious self or with extraneous intelligences.” Yet tables have been used since antiquity for purposes of **divination**. Ammianus Marcellinus (330–395 CE), the author of a history of the **Roman** Empire, described a table with a slab engraved with the letters of the alphabet, above which a ring was suspended from a thread. The ring would swing to a succession of letters and spell out words. However, table tipping was a little different from this and became very popular with the advent of **Spiritualism** in the mid-nineteenth century.

The usual method is for the sitters to be evenly spaced around a table and to sit with their fingertips placed lightly on the top edge of the table (*not* the underside). One of the sitters acts as **spoke person** and calls out for a **spirit** to make contact. Very soon the table will start to move; sometimes quivering and shaking beforehand. It will often rise up on one or two legs and may actually turn, pivoting on one leg. The sitters invariably have to leave their seats and move around to keep up with the table. If questioned, the table will rear up on one or two legs and then drop back down again. Taking one thump as the letter “A,” two as “B,” three as “C,” and so on, messages can be laboriously spelled out. An alternate and faster method is for the spokesperson to call out the letters of the alphabet and the table will drop down at the specific letter. In the past, whole sermons have been dictated by a table, as have poems, and information about the **spirit world**.

Table tipping originated in America. It rapidly spread to Europe, reaching England in 1853, where it quickly became very popular. One of the attractions of it was that there was no need for a professional **medium**. It could be done with any group of people, and was usually done in someone’s living room. Table tipping became such a phenomenon that scientists could not ignore it and felt they had to explain it. With the aid of the chemist Michael Faraday (1791–1867), they were able to show that the actual movement of the table was due to the unconscious muscular action of the people with their fingers on it. While honestly believing they pressed downward on the table, in fact their pressure was oblique, causing the rotation of the table. The scientists seemed satisfied to have explained that (even giving the force a name: *ectenic force*), but neglected to address the question of who or what was utilizing and directing this muscle power. How was the “table” able to give answers, unknown to those present, to the questions asked?

When table tipping is done with a medium—especially one known for physical phenomena—it is not unknown for the table to not only tip but to **levitate**. There are many photographs, taken in **infrared** light, showing such levitation. Some of the photographs also show the **ectoplasmic** “rods” that emerge from the medium to do the lifting. Of his experiments with the medium **Eusapia Paladino**, the **psychical researcher Hereward Carrington** said that the table appeared to be somehow alive, “like the back of a dog.” Paladino insisted on a table that was built entirely of wood, having no metal in it. She considered soft pinewood the best material. Rather than metal nails, the table should be fastened with wooden pegs. However, other mediums have no problem with metal, some modern circles even using metal folding card tables.

Although most table tipping **séances** are principally to communicate with the spirits of departed loved ones, they can also be for purposes of **divination**; to find out about future possibilities.

In his book *Psychic Force*, Gambier Bolton wrote of the medium **Florence Cook**,

During any meal with Mrs. Elgie Corner (Florence Cook), in one’s own house, and whilst she herself is engaged in eating and drinking—both of her hands being visible all the time—the heavy dining table will commence first to quiver, setting all the glasses shaking, and plates, knives, forks and spoons in motion, and then to rock and sway from side to side, occasionally going so far as to tilt up at one end or at one side; and all the time **raps** and tappings will be heard in the table and in many different parts of the room. Taking a meal with her in a public restaurant is a somewhat serious matter.

Sources:

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