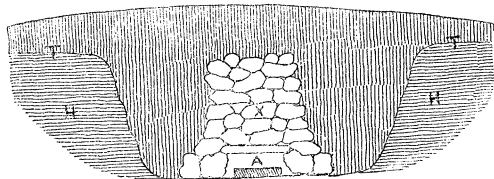


### The Davenport tablet.

As there appears to be a doubt in the minds of many archeologists as to whether these relics should be considered genuine specimens of mound-builders' art, a discussion of their claims to this distinction seems to be demanded.

To do this satisfactorily, a personal inspection of the relics, and a thorough investigation of all the circumstances attending their discovery, should be made. I do not claim to be thus prepared, nor is it my intention to enter at this time upon such discussion; my only object in view in this communication being to call attention to some items in reference to the 'limestone tablet' represented on plate vii., vol. ii., of the Proceedings of the Davenport academy of sciences. The unique and extraordinary character of these relics is calculated, of itself, to raise a doubt in the minds of antiquarians which requires more than ordinary proof of genuineness to render their acceptance as such universal. Examining the excellent albertype of the limestone tablet given on plate vii., vol. ii., of the Proceedings, we are somewhat surprised to see the sun represented with a face; nor is this surprise lessened by finding to the left of the 'hatchet' a regularly formed Arabic 8, made as is customary with writers of the present day, and near the upper right-hand corner the Roman numeral viii. These are not museum marks, as some might suppose, but parts of the original inscription on the stone when found.

The facts regarding the finding, as published by the academy and given by its members, are not calculated to strengthen belief in its genuineness. According to the account given in the Proceedings, (vol. ii. pp. 221-224), the exploration of the mound in which it was found was made by Mr. Gass, assisted by Mr. C. E. Harrison and Mr. John Hume. The account is by Mr. Harrison. The annexed cut is an exact copy of the figure of the mound as given in this account. There was an excavation in the original earth in which was built a pile of stones ( $x$  in the figure), over which the mound of earth was thrown. This earth was comparatively loose, "easy to handle, being composed of dark soil with some admixture of clay," and there appeared to have been no indications of stratification. At the bottom of the stone pile was a miniature vault covered by a single flat stone. Lying on the clay bottom of this vault was the tablet, as indicated in the figure. This



vault was about thirteen or fourteen inches square, five inches deep, and, with the exception of the tablet (an inch and a half thick), four arrow-points, a little quartz crystal, and a Unio shell, was empty, as appears from this published account; for it is stated, that, "on raising the flat stone, an irregularly rectangular, engraved tablet was suddenly exposed to view as it lay face up in a walled vault, evidently built for its reception" ( $A$  in the figure). But in order to be certain as to this inference, I addressed the following inquiry to Mr. W. H. Pratt, the cura-

tor of the museum of the academy: "Was the cavity  $A$  (fig. 17, *Proc. Dav. acad. sc.*, p. 222, vol. ii.) filled with dirt when first observed?" to which he kindly returned this answer: "Mr. C. E. Harrison, who assisted in the work, states that the cavity in which the limestone tablet was found contained scarcely any dirt when the flat stone with which it was covered was raised, exposing it to view."

That there should have been an unfilled space in a pile of loose stone in an excavation, beneath a heap of comparatively loose dirt which had stood there for centuries, is certainly most extraordinary.

In a letter now in my possession, written by Mr. A. S. Tiffany in 1882, I find the following statement: "The limestone tablet I am certain is a fraud. Mr. Gass was assisted in digging it out by Mr. Harrison and Mr. Hume. Mr. Hume informs me that there was a wall of small bowlders around the tablet. On the tablet there were some arrow-points, a quartz crystal, and a Unio shell filled with red paint, the whole being covered with a rough limestone slab, the space between it and the tablet not filled with earth, and the paint bright and clean." Mr. Tiffany was one of the founders of the academy, and, as appears from the Proceedings, was long one of its most prominent, active, and trusted local members, and is still a member.

If these statements in regard to the conditions under which this tablet was found be correct, — which we have no reason to doubt, as they appear to agree in all essential particulars, — there are strong reasons for suspecting that it was a plant made by some unknown person to deceive the members of the academy. The simple fact that the little vault under the pile of loose stones was empty, save the presence of the relics, appears to absolutely forbid the idea of age. It is well known to all who have taken any part in excavating, that the water, running down through earth and a pile of stones beneath, will at length fill all the crevices with earth, and in fact all places not hermetically sealed.

It is proper to add here that Mr. Tiffany, in the same letter, vouches for the honesty of Mr. Gass (the finder), who, he believes, was deceived. Speaking of the elephant pipe found by Mr. Gass, which he also thinks was a plant, he says, "It bears the same finger-marks as the first one [first pipe], and Mr. Gass could be deceived with that plant as he was with the tablet. Mr. Gass is honest." I have Mr. Tiffany's acknowledgment that this letter, which has been in my possession since 1882, is authentic.

CYRUS THOMAS.

### Disinfection.

In my article on 'Disinfection,' published in *Science* of Oct. 16 (p. 330), under the heading 'Sulphurous acid gas,' the statement is made that this agent 'is important for the destruction of spores.' The reverse of this is true, and the sentence should read 'impotent for the destruction of spores.' Curiously enough, the same mistake has been made by the printer in my article on 'The destruction of cholera germs,' in Dr. Wendt's recent work on 'Asiatic cholera' (p. 332). Both of these articles were published during my absence in Europe, and I had consequently no opportunity to correct the proof. Unfortunately, the printers have made several other serious errors in the last-mentioned article, the chief of which is the substitution of the word 'grain' for 'gram,' on p. 333.

GEORGE M. STERNBERG.