
CHARLES MEYMOTT TIDY
THE STORY OF A TINDER-BOX


CHARLES MEYMOTT TIDY
THE STORY OF A TINDER-BOX

Charles Meymott Tidy

The Story of a Tinder-box

EAN 8596547140221

DigiCat, 2022
Contact: DigiCat@okpublishing.info

Table of Contents

[PUBLISHED UNDER THE DIRECTION OF THE GENERAL LITERATURE COMMITTEE.]

Table of Contents

PREFACE.

Table of Contents

These lectures were delivered with the assistance merely of a few notes, the author in preparing them for the press adhering as nearly as possible to the shorthand writer's manuscript. They must be read as intentionally untechnical holiday lectures intended for juveniles. But as the print cannot convey the experiments or the demonstrations, the reader is begged to make the necessary allowance.

The author desires to take this opportunity of expressing his thanks to Messrs. Bryant and May; to Messrs. Woodhouse and Rawson, electrical engineers; to Mr. Woolf, the lead-pencil manufacturer; and to Mr. Gardiner, for numerous specimens with which the lectures were illustrated.

THE STORY OF A TINDER-BOX

Table of Contents

LECTURE I.

Table of Contents

My Young Friends,—Some months ago the Directors of this Institution honoured me with a request that I should deliver a course of Christmas Juvenile Lectures. I must admit I did my best to shirk the task, feeling that the duty would be better intrusted to one who had fewer demands upon his time. It was under the genial influence of a bright summer's afternoon, when one thought Christmas-tide such a long way off that it might never come, that I consented to undertake this course of lectures. No sooner had I done so than I was pressed to name a subject. Now it is a very difficult thing to choose a subject, and especially a subject for a course of juvenile lectures; and I will take you thus much into my confidence by telling you that I selected the subject upon which I am to speak to you, long before I had a notion what I could make of it, or indeed whether I could make anything at all of it. I mention these details to ask you and our elders who honour us—you and me—with their company at these lectures, for some little indulgence, if at times the story I have to tell proves somewhat commonplace, something you may have heard before, a tale oft told. My sole desire is that these lectures should be true *juvenile* lectures.

Well, you all know what this is? [*Holding up a box of matches.*] It is a box of matches. And you know, moreover, what it is used for, and how to use it. I will take out one of the matches, rub it on the box, and "strike a light." You say that experiment is commonplace enough. Be it so. At any rate, I want you to recollect that phrase—"strike a light." It will occur again in our course of lectures. But, you must

know, there was a time when people wanted fire, but had no matches wherewith to procure it. How did they obtain fire? The necessity for, and therefore the art of producing, fire is, I should suppose, as old as the world itself. Although it may be true that our very earliest ancestors relied for necessary food chiefly on an uncooked vegetable diet, nevertheless it is certain that very early in the history of the world people discovered that cooked meat (the venison that our souls love) was a thing not altogether to be despised. Certainly by the time of Tubal Cain, an early worker in metals, not only the methods of producing fire, but also the uses to which fire could be applied, must have been well understood. Imagine the astonishment of our ancestors when they first saw fire! Possibly, the first sight of this wonderful "element" vouchsafed to mortals was a burning mountain, or something of that kind. One is scarcely astonished that there should have been in those early times a number of people who were professed fire-worshippers. No wonder, I say, that fire should have been regarded with intense reverence. It constituted an essential part of early sacrificial worship. Some of my young friends, too, may remember how in ancient Rome there was a special order (called the order of the Vestal Virgins), whose duty it was to preserve the sacred fire, which if once extinguished, it was thought would bring ruin and destruction upon their city.

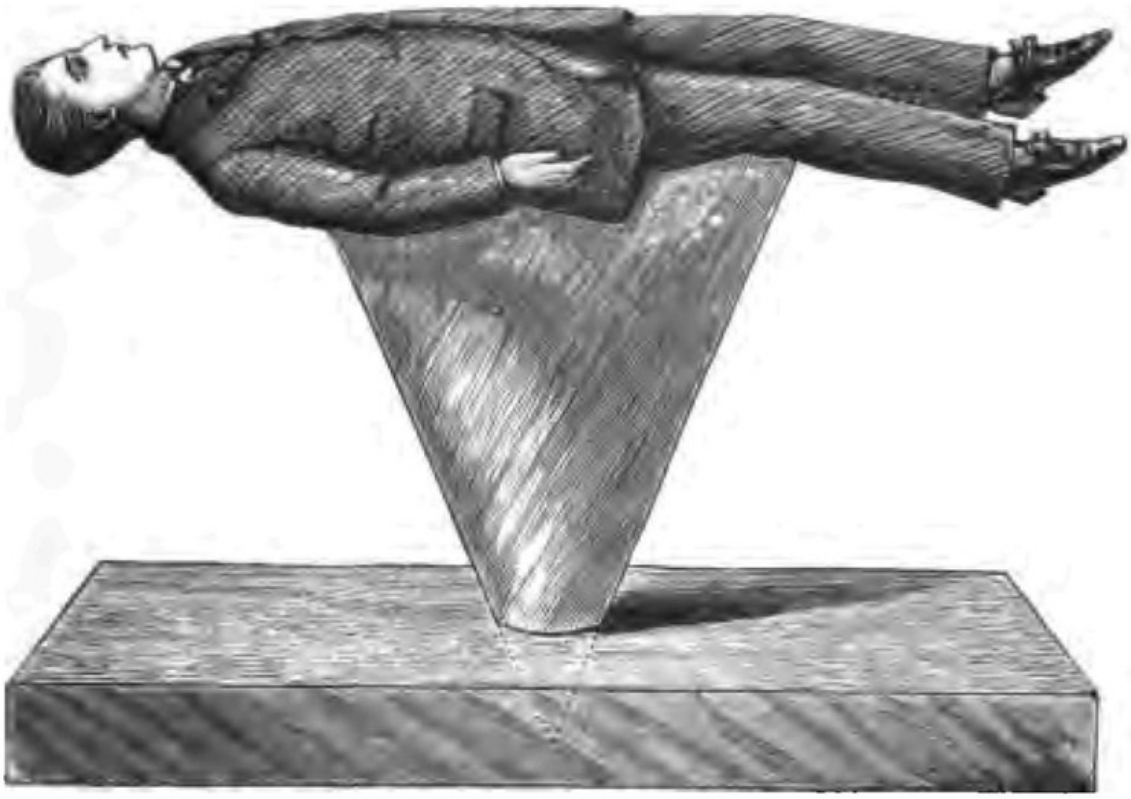

Fig. 1.

How did our ancestors, think you, obtain fire in those early times? I suggested a burning mountain as a source of fire. You remember, too, perhaps reading about Prometheus, who stole fire from heaven, bringing it to earth in a copper rod, which combined act of theft and scientific experiment made the gods very angry, because they were afraid mortals might learn as many wonderful things as they knew themselves. History seems to show that the energetic rubbing together of dry sticks was one of the earliest methods adopted by our ancestors for producing fire. I find, for instance, described and pictured by an early author some such plan as the following:—A thick piece of wood was placed upon the ground. Into a hole bored in this piece of wood a cone of wood was fitted. By placing a boy or man on the top of the cone, and whirling him round, sufficient

friction resulted where the two pieces of wood rubbed one against the other to produce fire. Our artist has modernized the picture to give you an idea of the operation (Fig. 1). Now instead of repeating that experiment exactly, I will try to obtain fire by the friction of wood with wood. I take this piece of boxwood, and having cut it to a point, rub it briskly on another piece of wood (Fig. 2). If I employ sufficient energy, I have no doubt I may make it hot enough to fire tinder. Yes! I have done so, as you see. (I will at once apologize for the smoke. Unfortunately we cannot generally have fire without smoke.) Every boy knows that experiment in another form. A boy takes a brass button, and after giving it a good rub on his desk, applies it to the cheek of some inoffensive boy at his side, much to the astonishment of his quiet neighbour. Well, I am going to see whether I can produce fire with a brass button. I have mounted my button, as you see, for certain reasons on a cork, and I will endeavour by rubbing the button on a piece of pinewood to make it sufficiently hot to fire tinder. Already I have done so.