

## The Famous 15 Block Puzzle.



**W**HETHER thousands of persons really went insane or not over the "15 Block Puzzle," which had such a phenomenal run some twenty years ago is difficult to prove, but it is a fact that the entire world—from the highest to the lowest, wise as well as foolish—went mad over the tantalizing mystery of the fifteen little blocks.

Many remarkable stories are told of prominent people who were held in thrall by the fascinating mystery. One clergyman of note purchased the puzzle on Park Row in the morning, and stood on the sidewalk moving the numbers around until midnight. An editor of a leading daily was discovered in a restaurant, where in a fit of abstraction he had cut his

pie into little pieces, and was pushing them about on the plate. One mild form of insanity which did develop to an alarming degree pertained to the history of the puzzle and to the veracity of such as mastered it. More than a score of cranks, who had never displayed inventive genius before, claimed its authorship; and thousands—yes, millions—of others mastered the secret, but were unable to record the illusive solutions which always left their minds blank when attempting to show how it was done.

Proctor, the noted astronomer, as well as other mathematicians and scientists, wrote articles upon the problem to demonstrate its possibilities; but changed their opinions so often that there exists greater doubt than ever as to their final conclusions. The assertion that "it was doubtless of ancient origin" is absurd and unsubstantiated, for its history is a simple matter of record. It was an accidental offshoot of the well-known "magic square" problem, which was going through a periodical revival. The idea occurred to the author to utilize a set of movable blocks 4 x 4 numbered consecutively from 1 to 16, the conditions being to remove one of the blocks, and play the others around until a magic square was formed.

The mystery of the 15 Block Puzzle was at once developed and became a craze. I give it as originally promulgated in 1872.

As every one claimed to have discovered the mystery, and the author is desirous of learning if any, or how many, kept a record of the sequence of moves which effects the solution, he offers to divide a thousand dollars equally among all who send correct answers within the next thirty days.

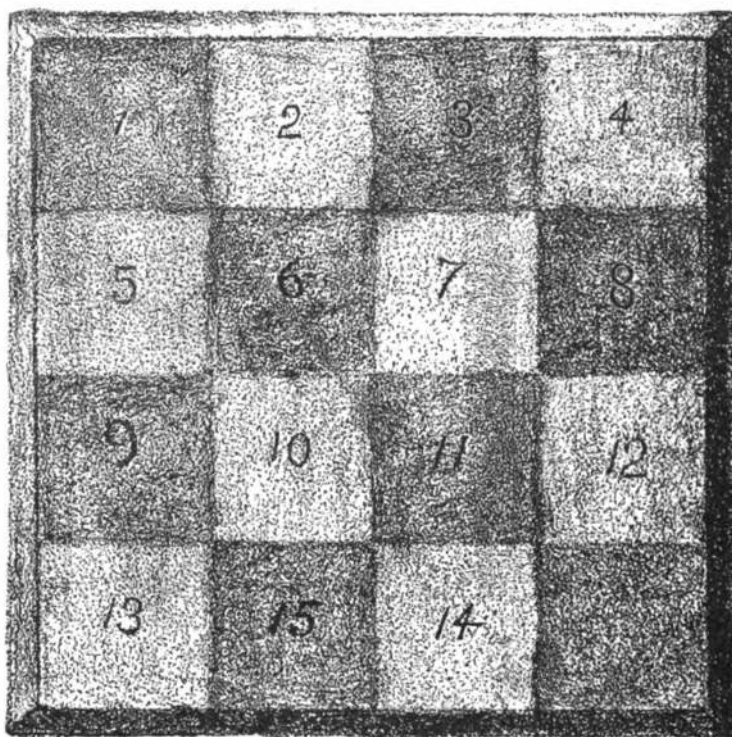
The board is reproduced just as originally drawn, with the numbers marked on the fifteen squares, showing how the blocks must be arranged at the commencement. The blocks may be cut apart, and

pasted on to small pieces of cardboard, so as to make a very convenient and durable puzzle game. Of course it is understood that the movable blocks are placed on the board with the 15, 14 standing transposed as shown.

The object of the problem is to move the blocks one at a time, and bring about an absolutely perfect sequence of figures, with the 14 and 15, as well as all other numbers, in their regular order. As a number can only be moved to the one vacant square, it becomes a very simple matter to record the required play by writing out the blocks played, as, for example, 14, 11, 10, 15, 13, etc., etc., to the desired arrangement.

It requires but a few minutes' experience, in an honest endeavor to untangle the transposition of the 15 and 14, to give one a taste of the fascination that made this remarkable puzzle so popular as to be referred to in parliamentary debates, or leading editorials throughout the civilized world.

Patience and chance are more potent than science or mathematics in the solution of this curious problem, of which it was well said "the more you study the less you know." You straighten out one little transposition only to find that an entanglement has been pro-



duced in another quarter, and never see the correct play, which would have produced the desired result, until the opportunity has passed and it is impossible to recall the line of moves which led up to it. Take the following simple sequence of plays for bringing the 15 and 14 into proper position. 12, 11, 14, 15, 10, 14, 11, 12, 15, 10, 14, 11, 10, 15, and the transposition has been effected, but unfortunately the 10 and 11 have become transposed.

The author had a sleight-of-hand trick by which he was able to perform the feat in a way that saved much time and never was detected. It consisted of an adroit turning of the 6 into a 9, and also of turning the 9 around so as to make it a 6. Place the blocks as shown on the board, and move as follows: 12, 8, 7, 9, 10, 6, 13, 15, 14, 11, 9, 10, 6, 9, 10, 7, 8, 12, 11, 14, 15, 13, 9, 15, 14, 11, 12, 10, 15, 14, 11, 15, 10, 12, 15, 11, 14, 10, 11, and if, during the manipulation of the blocks, the 9 has been turned over into a 6 and the 6 into a 9 the problem has been solved.

There are other features and coincidences connected with this remarkable puzzle which were brought to light during its popularity, and which will be remembered by such of our readers as recall their experience in battling with the mystery.

SAM LOYD.