

The Marvelous Creations of Joseffy



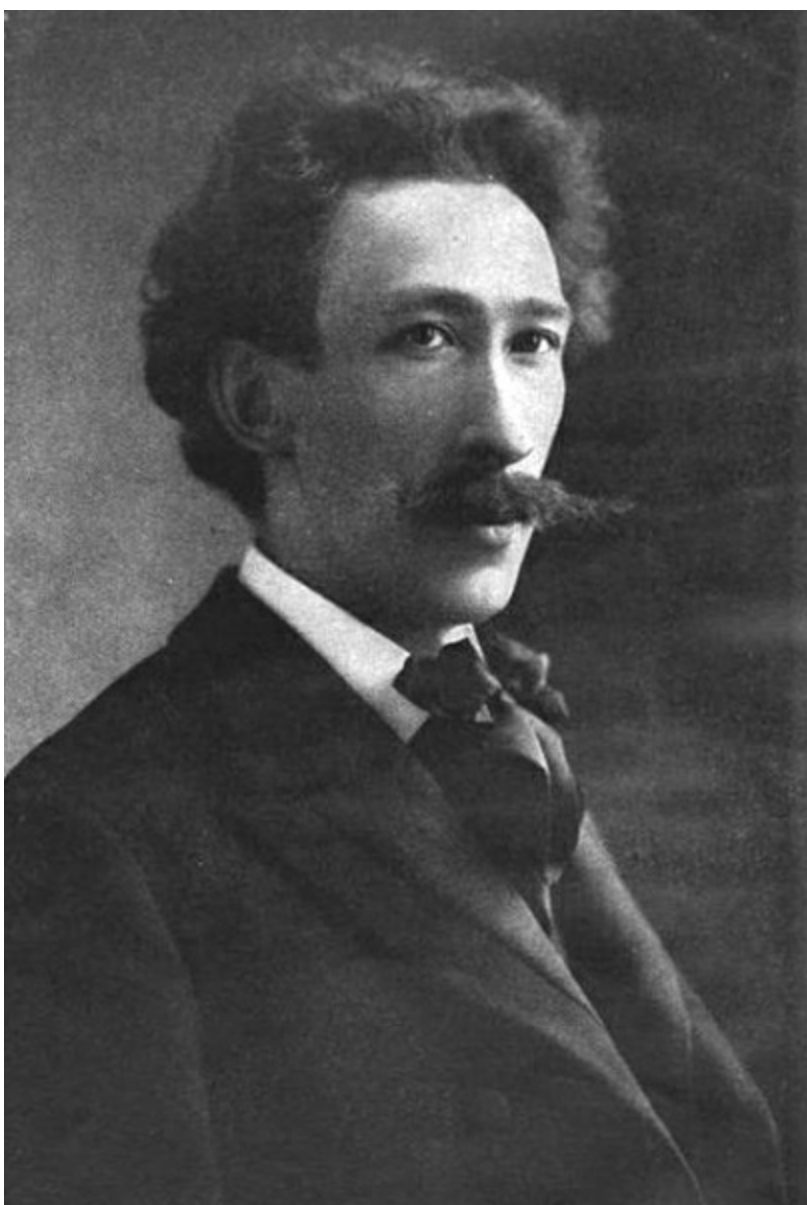
David P. Abbott

Entangled TOMES

The Marvelous Creations of Joseffy

DAVID P. ABBOTT

Originally published by
The Open Court Publishing Company
1908



ENTANGLED TOMES EDITION

Introduction and formatting by Katherine Nabity

Introduction © 2022 Katherine Nabity

Entangled Tomes feature newly formatted versions of lost classics and curated anthologies of works from the 19th and early 20th centuries.

Other Entangled Tomes:

David P. Abbott in The Open Court

Mephisto, the Marvellous Automaton

Our Past in the Uncanny Valley

More downloads can be found at EntangledContinua.com

TABLE OF CONTENTS

[Introduction](#)

[The Marvelous Creations of Joseffy](#)

[Joseffy: A Magician of Note in Omaha](#)

[About the Author](#)

INTRODUCTION

The Marvelous Creations of Joseffy, published in 1908, is a curious volume. Earlier the same year, David P. Abbott wrote a very short piece for *The Open Court* titled "New Marvels in Magic" about the effects created by a performer known as Joseffy. A talented amateur magician himself, Abbott had been writing articles for the magazine since 1905, all of which had been about methods used in mediumistic phenomena. "New Marvels" was a deviation for the author, though *The Open Court* had often published articles about stage magic.

For Abbott, Joseffy was something of an object lesson. Here was a magician performing amazing feats without the need to insinuate that the supernatural was involved. The interesting part was that at the time of writing the article for *The Open Court*, and the later expanded *Marvelous Creations*, David Abbott had not yet met Joseph Freud, the marvelous Joseffy of the title, or seen him perform.

Who initially had the idea for the book is also somewhat of a muddled story, but it seems likely that it was Joseffy's. He was based in Chicago with ties to the Lyceum circuit (as was *The Open Court*) and occasionally perpetrated entertaining acts of self-promotion. The photographs used in the book were staged and provided by Joseffy. In at least the case of the rising cards illusion, what is shown in the book, which David Abbott describes, is not the apparatus Joseffy used on stage.

Ultimately, absolute fidelity matters little. Promotional copy and even biographies for magicians are often fanciful if not fabricated. Considering that later in life Joseffy had filed nearly a dozen patents for non-magical apparatuses, we can assume this slim volume dedicated to a fine Chicago magician and mechanic, written by a fellow magician and mechanic, contains one or two kernels of truth.

Included here also is the text of a 1910 article from the *Omaha World-Herald* about Joseffy's visit to Omaha and finally meeting David P. Abbott. The caricature included accompanied the article.

The only editorial change I have made to the text is the hyphenation of the name “Robert-Houdin”. Mr. Abbott was most certainly writing about magician Jean-Eugène Robert-Houdin and not someone with the first name of Robert.

Katherine Nabity, Tempe, 2022

THE MARVELOUS CREATIONS OF JOSEFFY

I.

WERE THE PUBLIC AT LARGE to become thoroughly instructed in the means by which magicians perform their effects, the noble art of magic would disappear. It can exist only by there being suitable subjects, upon whose minds the performer can produce his illusions. Any advance in the knowledge of magic made by such subjects, necessitates a corresponding advance in the art by the performer.

Of late there has been considerable publication of the secrets of magicians, which has reached the public at large. There has also been a certain amount of exposing, conducted from the stage, by persons who could not earn their salaries by the legitimate presentation of the art.

Accordingly, any pronounced advance in the art has been welcomed by magicians generally. Performers are continually looking for improvements in their art, and are diligently searching for new principles of which they can make use. Some recent important advances in the art, are the subject of this article.

When such apparent marvels as I am going to describe can be accomplished by the magician who uses nothing supernatural, and who claims nothing of the kind, it should be a lesson to all in credulity. That the usually clumsy tricks of so-called mediums should be attributed to the supernatural, certainly seems an absurdity, after, witnessing such marvels as we are now to describe.

Certainly, if the performance of a medium requires the assumption of the supernatural on account of the mystery, then this far more mysterious appearing performance requires the same assumption in a far greater degree. This we know is an absurdity, for even the performer makes no claims to the supernatural.

The performances of magicians are usually along well defined lines. They are well exemplified by those of the late Alexander Hermann with whose work most readers are familiar. The great magicians of this day are of that type, and their performances are based on principles well known to conjurers. These principles which underlie the art consist in adroit substitutions, the misdirection of the spectator's attentions at the vital moment, the use of invisible threads worked by concealed assistants, some mechanical contrivances, etc.

Occasionally some performer is able to add a new principle or a new trick to the stock of those already employed by performers. The growth of the art has been slow, and a gradual process of evolution; although occasionally some new star has appeared above the horizon, who was of such undoubted genius that he was able to revolutionize or greatly change the magic of his day.

Of this class was Robert-Houdin, whose original productions are well known to readers of magical literature, and whose improvements were so sweeping that he may rightly be called "the father of modern magic."

At a later date the great De Kolta appeared. He was a great originator; and by copying his ideas as best they could, other magicians were enabled to add many new things to the conjurer's art. De Kolta, however, always refused to divulge his best secrets. At his death they perished with him. A committee of conjurers called on his widow and offered her a large sum for his secrets; but she positively refused to divulge a single one; and she is said to have concealed or destroyed all of her husband's apparatus. Thus some of the greatest secrets of the art passed from the earth and perished with De Kolta.

His mysterious cube illusion was the greatest mystery to the magicians of his day; and they could in no way discover, or buy the secret. It has been the dream of conjurers ever since that time to re-create that illusion; but it has never been accomplished until the present day. Further on, I shall describe this illusion, and shall also describe that great improvement upon it which has lately been perfected by an originator of undoubted genius. De Kolta also originated the flowers, of which the ones used by conjurers of to-day are supposed to be copies; but this is only a surmise; for De Kolta never revealed the secret of his flowers, and his wonderful flower trick.

Of late there has appeared in the firmament of magic a new star whose brilliancy has attracted considerable notice. This originator calls himself "Joseffy." It is his creations that are the subject of this article. In the opinion

of the writer Joseffy is among the best originators since Robert-Houdin's day. To be sure, he started where Houdin, and later De Kolta, left off; but he has certainly reached a high degree of perfection in his particular line.

Who is Joseffy? He is Mr. Freud, an Austrian who was born in Vienna. He is a man with a scientific trend of mind, a splendid violinist, and a master of six languages and five trades.

To be sure, Joseffy has in many instances obtained his original ideas from other sources; but the perfected forms of his illusions are certainly original with him. I am not at liberty to reveal the secrets of his strange creations, even in the limited degree of which I am capable. I may also say that many conjurers are puzzled as to certain of his effects. I do not mean to disparage the performances of other conjurers; but merely to say that the creations of Joseffy are in a class by themselves.

In describing some of his creations, I shall describe some similar illusions as heretofore performed and give the secrets of the latter; and the reader can then see wherein lies the particular superiority of Joseffy's productions.

Joseffy traveled all over Europe when quite youthful, and came to this country when nineteen years of age. When he first came he lived in a quiet way, did not push himself forward, and was not heard of by magicians at large. He devoted some of his time to manufacturing apparatus for a certain dealer. Magicians marveled at the perfection of this apparatus, and did not know who the maker was, as the dealer kept his name in the background. During all of this time he was quietly working on his own ideas and experimenting.

II.

MOST OF MY READERS have doubtless seen some form of the rising card trick performed by the various magicians. This consists in the performer passing among the spectators with a pack of cards from which certain persons draw cards of their own (?) choice, look at and replace them. The pack is then placed in a glass goblet which sits on a table upon the stage, and at the performer's command the chosen cards arise one by one. Sometimes a nickeled card case is swung on two ribbons and the cards are placed therein, or there are various other devices. The principles of this trick have always been the same. The magician "forces" the selection of the required cards on the spectator. He does this by running the cards from one hand to the other rapidly, and requesting the spectator to take a card. Just as the spectator reaches for one, the performer adroitly pushes the proper one right into the spectator's fingers, and the latter thinks that he has exercised free choice. Next the performer adroitly exchanges the first pack for a second prepared one which is concealed in a depression on the back of a table on the stage, or about some other piece of furniture. This prepared pack has an invisible black silk thread placed across its top end when it is being prepared, and the required duplicate cards are placed against this thread and pushed down into the pack, thus carrying down a loop of the thread which accordingly runs under each selected card. This thread is led to the floor, then through an eyelet and off to a concealed assistant in the wings, who at the proper time pulls on the thread thus causing the cards to rise one at a time. The spectators think that they see their chosen cards rising, and the trick is considered marvelous and is applauded accordingly. If no goblet is used, sometimes the thread runs through the double ribbons from which the nickeled card case is suspended.

Now it has always been the desire of conjurers to do away with the forcing of cards so as to allow the spectators free choice. It has also been their wish to do away with an invisible thread worked by an assistant, but this has never been accomplished before. For years Joseffy has been working on this idea, and he has stated to his magician friends that he hoped some day to be able to do away with all threads, forcing, and everything heretofore used; to permit his spectators to handle and examine his card case, to let them bring their own pack and freely choose the cards they desire, to let them place the

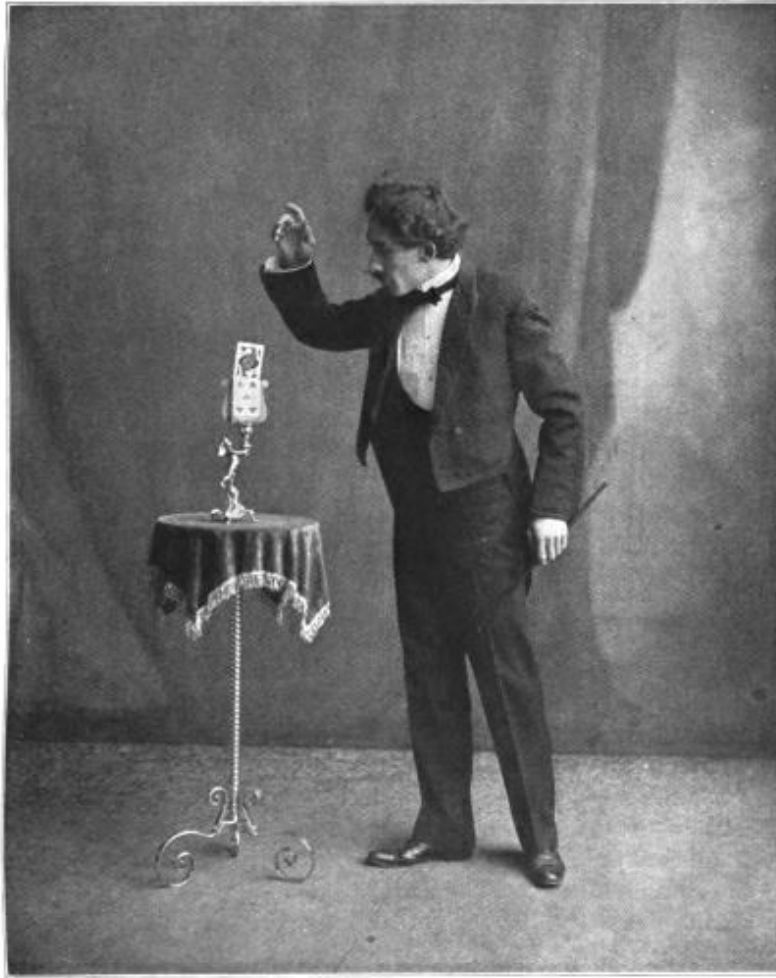
pack in the case themselves; to make no substitution, to have no outside connection with the card case, and yet to cause to arise at his command, any card called for at any time.

The reader can judge the effect of this on magicians, who regarded such things as impossibilities. They smiled a quiet smile and said nothing, but it was understood that Joseffy was just a little “off.” They knew he was an enthusiast, that his work was excellent and all of that, but they did not think that he could accomplish this. Frequently, when he was at work upon it, they would, when calling upon him, and when they thought he was not looking, tap their heads significantly, look at each other and smile in a quiet but sympathetic way, as if to say, “Poor Joseffy! He is crazy. He ‘has wheels.’ ”

The day has come for Joseffy to smile when he meets these same friends. He has actually accomplished what he undertook and these magician friends can only look on with admiration.

Joseffy uses a tiny card case made in imitation of a lyre, with glass front and back. This is held in the hand of a little cupid made of metal. The case has flat sides so as to hold a pack of cards and is very artistic. This is handed to a spectator. The latter brings his own pack of cards, which he may freely shuffle. He places the pack in the card case himself. Joseffy now takes the latter in one hand and holds it aloft so all can see. There is positively no exchange. He sets the case on a small table in full view of all. There is no thread running to a concealed assistant. Joseffy leaves the side of his card case, and can be in any part of the room, hall, or auditorium.

Now, any spectator who desires may choose any card freely. Joseffy then calls upon it to arise, whereupon it does so. It will remain up as long as desired, and at the spectator's desire return into the pack. It will keep rising and returning as long as the spectator wishes, or it will again arise at any time during the performance. This spectator or any other may now choose any other card and repeat this same performance. There is absolutely no forcing of the choice of cards, and any one may choose at any time.

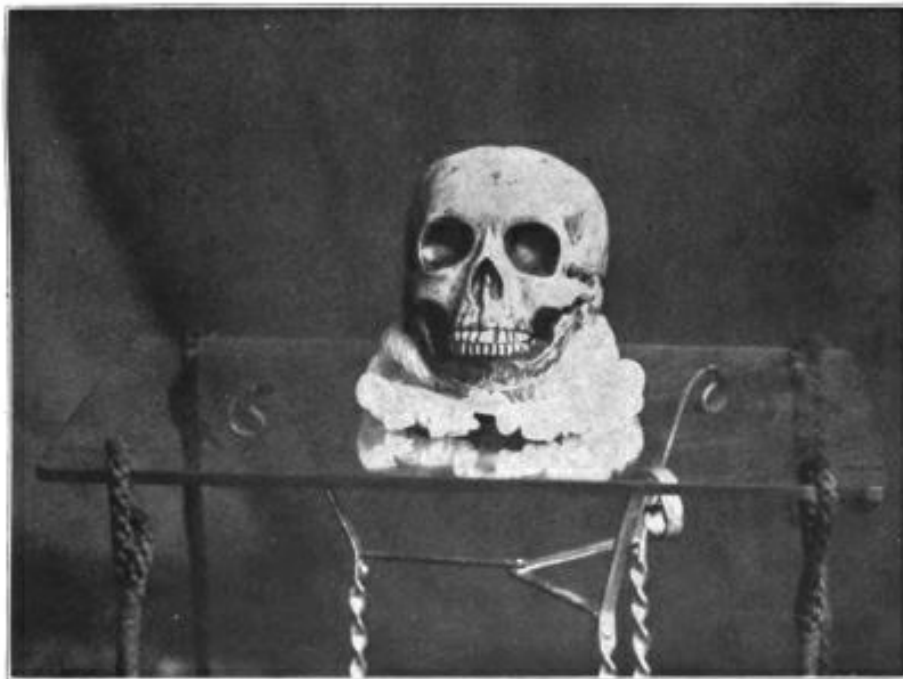


In the performance, the spectator can at any time remove the pack from the card case, examine everything, and replace the pack. He can then choose another card, or the same one, and it will come up, stay up, or go down as he desires. When the performance is finished, he may remove the cards from the card case himself and keep them as a memento.

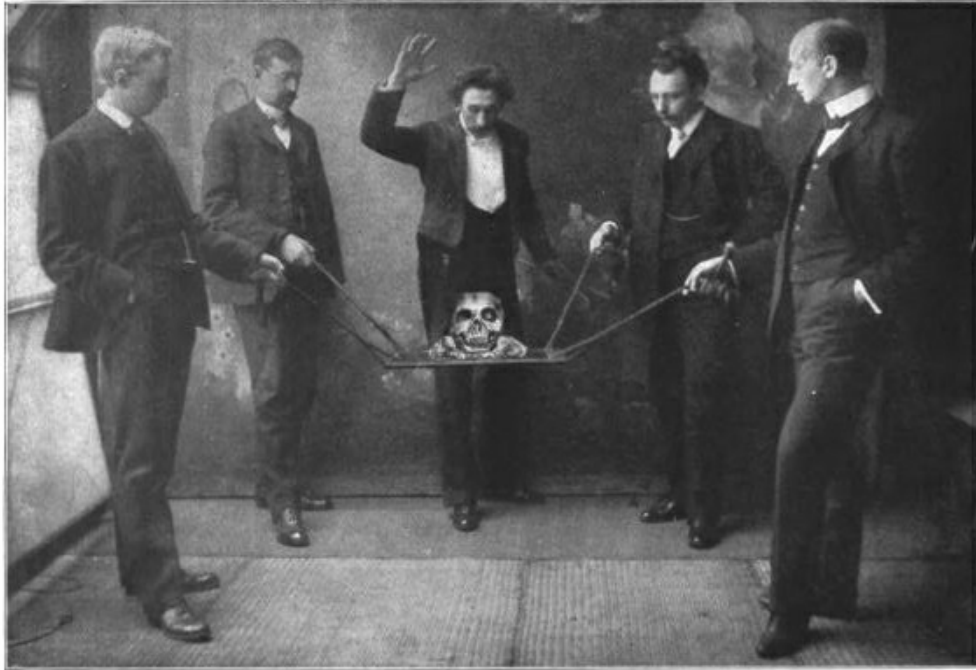
In a recent letter, while describing this creation, Joseffy said, "I know that this sounds pretty extravagant, but you may take my word for it that it is really true. It is the outcome of three years of continuous research and labor." Joseffy claims that he has been offered two thousand dollars for this illusion, but he says that he does not think that five times that amount would tempt him.

III.

THE ILLUSION WHICH I SHALL now describe may be a little more understandable to some than the last, but it is surely a marvel of ingenuity. He calls it "Balsamo, the Living Skull." There is a stage trick something like it in appearance. A papier mache skull with a movable jaw is placed on a glass plate suspended by four ribbons on the stage. This skull answers the conjurer's questions by working its lower jaw. The secret is an invisible black silk thread leading across the stage and glass plate to a concealed assistant who manipulates it. The jaw is just over the thread and a pull on the latter moves the jaw. This can be had for a few dollars.



The skull used by Joseffy is made of copper beautifully decorated or painted in the most natural manner possible. Real human teeth are set in sockets in a natural manner. It rests on a neck around which is a lace collar. Its lower jaw is articulated so that it can move and answer questions by clicking its teeth. The skull can also turn on its neck. He uses a glass plate and any four spectators may hold the cords supporting it. Joseffy places the skull on this plate in the usual manner when he performs in halls, but in a parlor he merely places it on any piece of furniture.



There is no thread or outside connections, yet this skull carries on a most intelligent conversation with its master, by clicking its teeth the required number of times when asked a question. There is positively no outside connection.

Joseffy first relates how, nearly two centuries ago, in the dungeons of the Holy Inquisition, he visited the old-time arch-enchanter of other days, Monsieur le Comte de Cagliostro (Joseph Balsamo). He relates how in these dungeons just three weeks before his death the Great Kophta presented him with his own skull.

While he is doing this, the skull turns around on its neck and looks about the room in a most life-like but ghastly manner. Finally its master discovers it looking at some lady in a very impertinent manner, and he calls to it to look around and to attend to business. The skull turns instantly and looks at him. He now asks, "Balsamo, do you know any of the persons present?" The skull turns slowly about looking at each and then turns back to the performer clicking its teeth for "no." He then permits the spectators to choose cards, to write figures on a small blackboard, etc., the skull always telling by the clicks of its teeth the correct card or figure. The skull then proceeds to add up a set of figures, tells the time of day that it then happens to be, etc., and when asked always gives answers in a very lifelike manner. It frequently turns and looks at the indicated individual when its master calls upon it for an answer.

This “Living Skull” Joseffy has always refused to sell.

There is also an old trick where a papier mache hand, which is laid upon a glass plate, answers questions by rapping. It is worked like the other old skull trick, by a concealed assistant pulling an invisible thread. Joseffy has a hand which he can lay upon *any object anywhere*, and it will answer any question he asks it by rapping. There is positively no outside connection to the hand, and no magnetism employed. He is now perfecting a means by which at the close of the performance with the hand, he can, as a climax, place it against an upright easel, upon which some sheets of white paper have been stretched. The hand will remain in that position of itself, and proceed to write on the paper answers to questions which spectators have previously written on slips of paper, sealed in envelopes and retained in their own pockets.

Recently, when in Kansas City, Joseffy desired to purchase some ribbon for the cuff of this hand. The latter is a small, very beautiful model of a lady's hand, and is very lifelike in appearance. In fact, to look at it gives one the creepy feeling of looking at a hand cut from a beautiful lady's arm. Accordingly, he took the hand to a large department store and placing it on a glass showcase, asked it to tell the lady by rapping how many yards of ribbon it wanted, the kind, color, etc. When it began to make its lifelike motions and to manifest human intelligence in answering questions, the various clerks gathered quickly about, deserting their respective counters.

Soon a large crowd was collected, and as the manager was unable to recall the clerks, or disperse the blockade, he called in the police. Some reporters got hold of the matter and their reports proved a big advertisement for Joseffy.

Joseffy obtained the original idea of his perfected hand from a more crude model designed by another magician. A hand like this could formerly have been purchased of Joseffy for one hundred and twenty-five dollars. It is needless to say that but few magicians indulged in the luxury.

IV.

AND NOW TO DESCRIBE THE MYSTERIOUS cube illusion of De Kolta, of which I made mention in the beginning. His stage was set with a center table near the rear side of which sat two wings or screens.

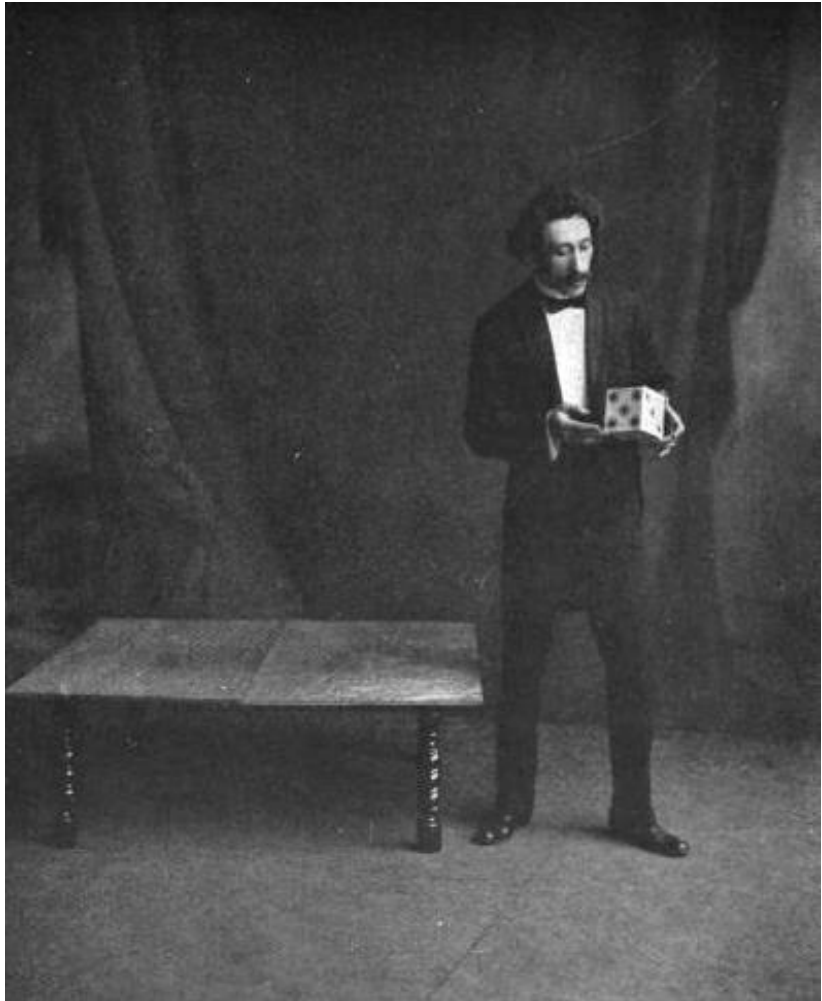
De Kolta entered, carrying a small hand-satchel which he handed to his assistant, who immediately remarked that it was very hot. De Kolta replied, "Your wife would be hot also if you carried her in a thing like that as I do mine." Then taking the small satchel he opened it and took from it an eight-inch cube. This he placed upon the center table, where it was seen by all spectators to grow slowly to a size of nearly three feet. Then De Kolta proceeded to lift the cube, and sure enough, his wife was found under it.

This is the mysterious illusion that for years has baffled conjurers and of course it is naturally one of the wonders that Joseffy would set himself the task of surpassing. I shall now describe his illusion "The Enigmatic Cube."

His stage is set with a low table, but there are no wings or screens, and it is out in the open. He first produces from the air a one-inch cube which he exhibits to the spectators. This is seen by all to grow slowly while in his hands, first to a two-inch, next to a four-inch and then to an eight-inch cube. It must be a marvel of ingenuity. This he now sets in full view upon his table, where it is seen to grow slowly to a size of three feet and six inches. The wizard now lifts this cube, from under which steps a beautiful young lady who starts to run up the stage. Joseffy snaps his fingers, when she instantly stops and disappears in a sheet of flame in full view of the spectators; and in her place is seen to be a gigantic bouquet of real roses, which are plucked and distributed to the audience.

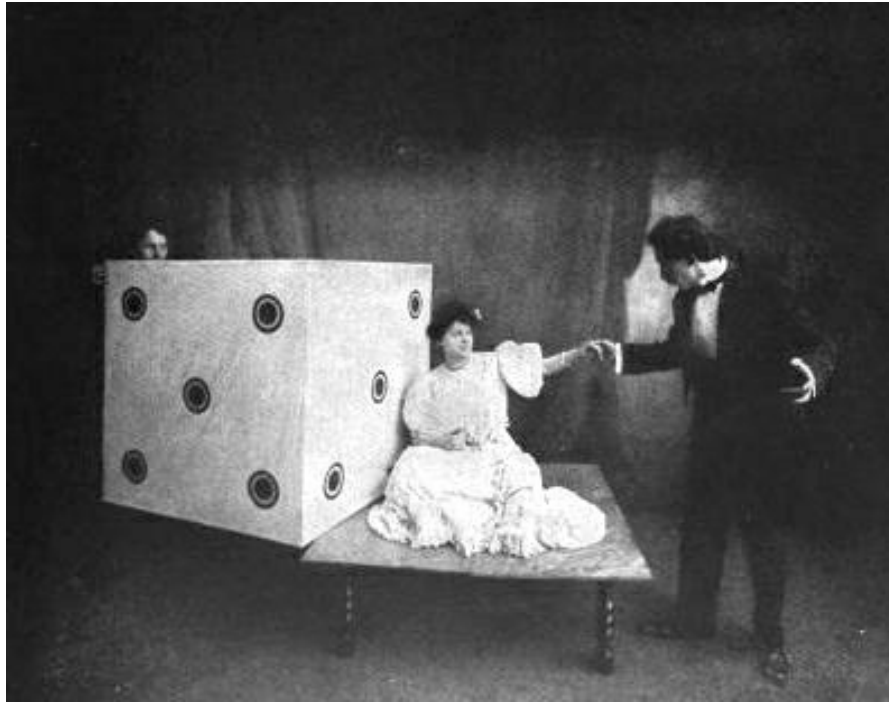












Magicians, what do you think of this? “Pretty strong,” is it not? The last transformation is surely no mirage or deception of the vision; for the lady is seen to visibly run to her position, and the succeeding roses are real and are distributed. This all takes place where but an instant before was nothing but the transparent atmosphere. I recently requested Joseffy to photograph this metamorphosis, and he replied to me, “To photograph this transformation will surely be quite an interesting problem, but I will attempt it if it is your desire.” I was glad to have this promise from a man of Joseffy's resources, as I knew if such a thing were possible, he could accomplish it.



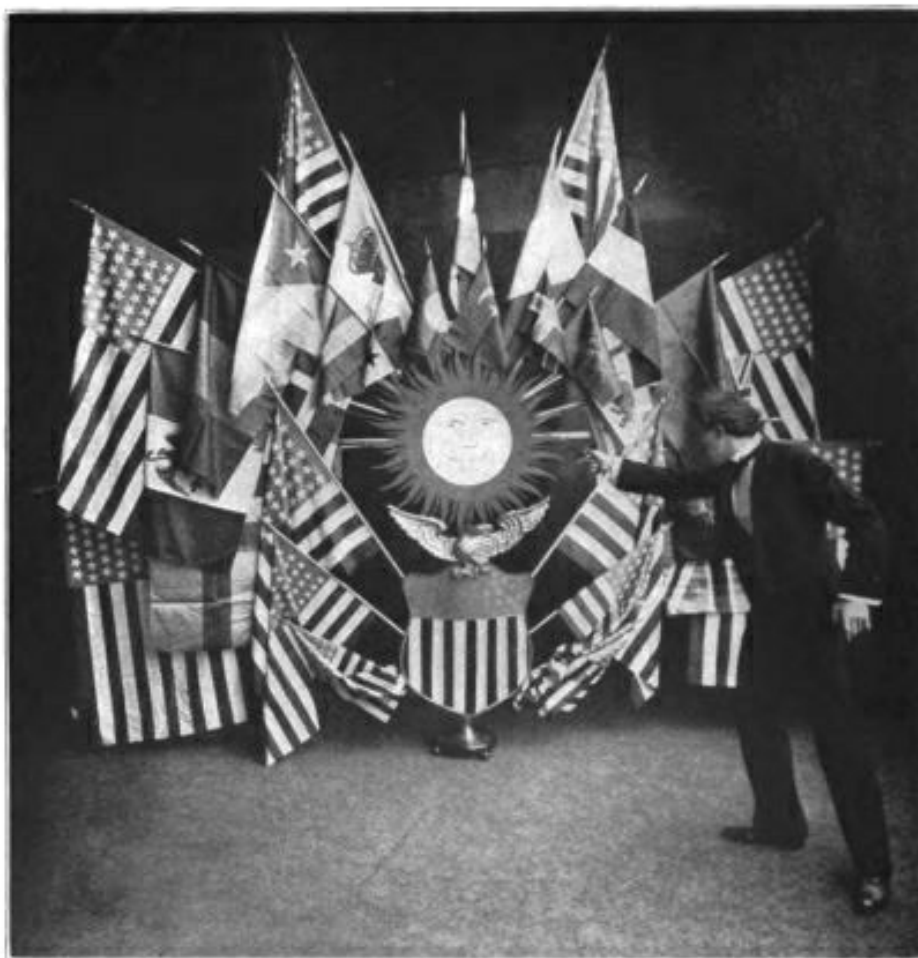
Probably one of his most weird and grotesque creations is what he calls "The Phantom Quartette." Four real human skeletons that play music on those weird-sounding instruments, ocarinas. Their repertoire is not limited; for they can play anything, however difficult, within the scope of their instruments. This is where Joseffy's musical talent has certainly been of great assistance to him. These skeletons can also sing. To see these weird figures apparently endowed with life, making their lifelike motions and playing this weird music, is surely a grotesque sight. However, the observer must remember that he is not visiting the infernal regions, and that the creator of this uncanny spectacle is not His Satanic Majesty, but merely a peculiar and strange individual who resides in Chicago. At the time of this writing the Phantom Quartette is dismantled, but Joseffy is soon to resurrect it.

V.

THE “CONGRESS OF NATIONS” is the title of a new illusion originated by Joseffy, and it depends upon entirely new principles for its production. A ring twenty-four inches in diameter, made of metal, and representing the sun and its rays, is first exhibited. A sheet of paper is now stretched over this ring, and another ring slipped over this to hold it in place, as in the old tambourine trick. The paper really takes no part in the illusion other than furnishing an excuse for some interesting “patter.” This ring is now placed upon a standard which rests on a three-foot spread eagle and shield.

The paper of the ring is now punctured and a few handkerchiefs removed. This process being too slow, however, he steps to a distance and fires at the ring rapidly. At each shot, in perfect time, flags of all nations rise out of the ring on stems one foot, three feet six inches, and six feet long. This makes a very beautiful spectacle. He now enhances this by taking from the ring a real table and three real chairs. Next, he takes out of the ring a complete dinner set, also food and coffee, all real. He now sets the chairs around the table, and takes from the ring two living ladies. The three now seat themselves at the table, light some candles, and begin a light lunch as the curtain descends.







This illusion, Joseffy assures me, is of unlimited capacity, there being no limit whatever to what he can produce, and he assures me that it depends upon entirely new principles.

There is an old-time trick in which a living rabbit was placed in a metal box, the same being held by the spectators. The performer would then place a canary in a paper bag, and shoot it to pieces; upon which the canary would be found in the metal box from which the rabbit had disappeared. There were also cages which had deep bottoms and that contained mirrors, which magicians used at times.

Joseffy has made a cage that is perfectly open to view with no deep bottoms, mirrors, or anything of the kind. He places the rabbit in full view in this cage. He also uses a dove as it is larger than a canary and can be seen much better. When he shoots the paper bag to pieces, the rabbit is seen to visibly disappear before the very eyes of the spectators, and its place to be

taken by the dove. The rabbit he takes, wriggling, from a spectator.

Now this is certainly very mystifying even to magicians, but to me this is not the greatest marvel of it all. Joseffy is peculiar. A rabbit is a delicate creature to carry about, and to properly feed and care for. To him this was an annoyance. He wished for a rabbit that would not eat.

To him an idea is the birth of a desire. With this man who does not understand the meaning of the word "impossible," and to whom obstacles present no difficulty, to desire is to possess. He immediately set about the task of creating a rabbit that would not eat. Is it alive? Well, to all outside appearances, it is. Its wriggling is certainly the same as that of life, and so is the grace with which it hops off the stage. Its fur and skin are surely those of a real rabbit. It seems under one's very eyes to be a living, breathing creature, and the spectators certainly consider it as such.

Sometimes Joseffy uses a duck in place of this rabbit. I asked him why this was, and he replied, "Bunny was lonesome, so I created a helpmeet for him." This duck is taken from the spectators, flapping its wings and quacking, but I am sure that it never eats.

Sometimes he finds other use for this duck. He exhibits an empty sauce-pan, and breaking some eggs into it, proceeds to set them on a fire. He covers the pan with a lid for a moment, then removes the latter, and next lifts the duck flapping its wings and quacking, from the pan: The duck then proceeds to lay as many eggs as there are rings which have previously been borrowed and broken up with a hammer, etc. These eggs are now broken, and each is found to contain a borrowed ring tied with a bow of ribbon, to a beautiful rose. If he prefers, the eggs may either contain written answers to questions written and retained by the spectators, or previously borrowed and broken up watches. etc.

Earlier in this article I spoke of De Kolta's wonderful flower trick. Joseffy has lately concluded successful experiments for one that I consider far superior to De Kolta's, or in fact to any other.

An empty flower-pot is exhibited to the spectators. A paper cone large enough to cover it is also exhibited. The open end of the cone is always held towards the spectators, yet when he slowly covers the flower-pot with the cone for an instant, it is filled with beautiful roses on long stems. This he can repeat indefinitely, filling as many flower-pots as he may desire, and always using the same cone.

Then, again, as a climax, he can hold a flower-pot high in the air, or if

preferred, *place it anywhere on any object suggested by the spectators*; then, leaving its side, and *with no outside connection or contact to any living being or mechanism*, he can at the snap of his fingers cause it to visibly and instantly fill with real roses which are plucked and distributed. This I assure my readers is not an idle phantasy, but a fact.

Many marvelous tales are told of the performances of Hindu magicians. During the fair at Chicago many persons had an opportunity to witness some of their feats. One that appeared quite mysterious to most observers, and that has been told and re-told over the land, is the trick of popping corn on a white sheet with no fire, while the corn is being fanned.

Four Hindus held a white sheet by its four corners. A fifth one placed some unpopped corn on this sheet, and then he proceeded to fan the corn. First he did so gently, and then more wildly, continually striking the sheet. After a time he ceased, and the upper portion of the corn was found to be popped. This seemed very mysterious, but the secret lay in the fan.

The first fan exhibited was the usual article. This was secretly exchanged for a duplicate, which contained a secret compartment, filled with corn which has previously been popped. When striking the sheet, he secretly opened the compartment, allowing the corn to gradually escape. The popped corn being the lightest, naturally settled over the unpopped corn on the sheet.

This trick naturally suggested to Joseffy the idea of actually performing what the Hindus but pretended to do. He suspends a porcelain platter in mid-air. He allows the spectators to bring their own corn, and to count the grains and place them on the platter. The spectators can then cover the corn with an open wire hood, or glass cover, the only office of which is to prevent the corn scattering over the room. At Joseffy's command the corn is seen to visibly pop, and it is then served to the spectators.

VI.

I HERE QUOTE A FEW WORDS from Edwin L. Barker, in *The Lyceumite*. “Over the river, out on Chicago's West Side, up-stairs, there is a small room, the appearance of which resembles a combination machine shop, druggist's prescription case, and chemist's den, the whole enveloped in a shroud of creepiness. This is Joseffy's laboratory—a place few noses save his own are ever allowed to peek in. When not ‘on the road’ here he labors from eight in the morning until midnight or later, experimenting and inventing. Joseffy is a mechanical, chemical, and scientific genius, and the world is sure to recognize it the same as I, as soon as the world sees what I have seen.

“When visiting his laboratory I asked, ‘Aren't you afraid of an explosion?’ ‘Oh, no,’ smiled the inventive necromancer, ‘A bottle did blow out of the window the other day though. But, you see this is a quiet street, and the landlord is deaf, so there was no fire call.’

“The lathes, drills, wheels and pulleys formed a miniature machine shop. I backed away from a point where the sparks were flying like an imaginary starry rain-storm, during the millennium that is to be, when Joseffy exclaimed: ‘Look out! Don't back into the quartette.’ I turned, saw four skeletons, and retreated toward the shower of sparks. ‘They are the members of my instrumental quartette,’ said the magician, pointing to the skeletons. ‘Their names are Cord, Accord, Discord, and Nocord.’

“ ‘Here is their companion,’ continued the inventor, ‘Balsamo, the Living Skull. He does everything but talk.’ And he did.

“I saw a pile of ‘junk’ which Joseffy said was to be a new illusion. He made me promise never to tell how it is done, and believe me, that is one promise I will always keep, truly I will—I can't help it. But the effect will be like this:

“He borrows a rose from a lady in the audience. He drops a few drops of magic oil upon the rose there is a flame several feet high, followed by an expansion into an American Beauty some sixteen or eighteen inches in diameter. Soon there is seen growing out of the rose a bubble—not unlike the soap bubbles of our youthful days. As the bubble expands, the face and form of a young lady are seen growing inside. This continues until the bubble has grown the full size of the lady. Then the bubble bursts, a shower of petals scents the room, and there stands the young lady holding the rose that was first

borrowed from the audience.

“His ‘Card Riser’ is, in many respects, the most wonderful invention I have ever seen. Magicians have told me it was a dream—nothing more. But I know better. I saw Joseffy do it, and I was not dreaming. Every minute I was more and more wide-awake. I saw and examined its innermost workings, and the more I saw the more wonderful it seemed. I will not explain it—I can't.

“I went away from the laboratory thinking as I have never thought before. Here, right in Chicago's busy heart is a genius—a genius of the olden days—who is content to work and wait.

“Prophecies are not in fashion, but if this intelligent worker does not make the world of magic and entertainment open its eyes, well—I'm a poor guesser, that's all.”

Charles Sandburg has said, “You have seen Joseffy play the violin? Then you have seen a man possessed.” A Joliet newspaper said, “He might have been god or devil.”

Elbert Hubbard says, “In every meeting of men, there are two factions—the conqueror and the vanquished.” A magical performance, unlike any other form of entertainment, may be said to be a continuous, bloodless war between one man and an entire audience. The majority of spectators usually attend with the intention of solving the secrets of the magician. The latter of course will not permit this, and the performance is thus a continuous contest of wits. Usually, in the beginning is the time when the psychological relation between the performer and his audience is established, which decides whether or not he shall be the conqueror.

Here it is that Joseffy first establishes himself. As he comes forward with a slight sweeping bow, he looks as many spectators in the eye as possible. He pauses for an instant in the intoxication of conscious power, which he well knows soon will triumph. In that instant that peculiar psychological atmosphere is established which assures him success. Sandburg once remarked that Joseffy does not seem to walk, but to float out.

His ready wit is well illustrated in the following incident. In Citronelle, Alabama, he had just exhibited Balsamo's Skull, when a lady rather loudly remarked, “That can not be a real skull. It shines too much.” This remark could not be overlooked. Now Joseffy quickly turned and replied, “Madam, you say the skull shines—quite true—but you must not forget that it is quite natural, as the Count was a highly polished gentleman.”

When walking one Sunday afternoon with one of the world's great

magicians, our conversation naturally turned to that enigma of the conjuring fraternity, Joseffy; for I may as well say that among the thirty thousand magicians of the world, many eyes are now turned toward this strange and unknown man. I remarked to my friend that I thought Joseffy might make large sums of money by abandoning the stage, which he has recently taken up, and by creating for magicians at very high figures. My friend remarked, "I do not know. Joseffy is a peculiar man. I fear it would not be a successful financial venture. You see, when he would have finished the most beautiful and perfect work of his imagination, he would suddenly think of some slight improvement wherein it might be bettered; and then he would not permit his work to be used, but would begin all over again."

As an instance of this, he worked two years on a wonderful effect, only to consign it to the scrap heap at the end of that time. The effect was this: A guitar and a mandolin were shown, and placed on a table, supported in a position as if being played by invisible performers. The Spectators could then select any composition, and the instruments would execute it. This he actually accomplished; but it did not quite suit him, and he discarded it, only preserving the mandolin as a memento of his youthful dream.

Joseffy has studied science and delved into the occult. He is a man of infinite patience to whom time or even money is of little value. He is simply wedded to his art. Thus it is with the dreamer and with the enthusiast; but it is just this thing that enables him to accomplish the marvels that he does. To me Joseffy said, "I take this subject very seriously, for I have practically devoted my life to it."

He also, when speaking of his creations, recently said to me, "Some of the most beautiful scientific problems are employed in some of them." Then again he said, "There are some other things in embryo which I hardly dare to talk about for fear that it will induce violent language, so I suppose I had better not. However, I do hope to startle at least a small portion of the world some day. You see, Mr. Abbott, I fear you have guessed my secret. I have ambitions, and those classicists Robert-Houdin, De Kolta and others are my inspiration. Yes, I do intend to penetrate the mysteries of higher magic, and to go as far as it is possible for mortal to go."

This wizard in the true sense of the term spoke thus. I could not deride him or tap my forehead. Who can say how far he will penetrate? Who can say what marvels that strange, eccentric and powerful intellect will evolve?

JOSEFFY: A MAGICIAN OF NOTE IN OMAHA

*Omaha World-Herald, Sunday edition,
August 7, 1910, pg 19*

VIEW OF A FAMOUS EXPERT AT CLOSE RANGE AND GLIMPSES OF
THE STUDY AND RESEARCH BEHIND THE WONDERS HE
PERFORMS ON THE STAGE: IT'S FUN TO BE A MAGICIAN, AS
NUMEROUS INCIDENTS SHOW

JOSEFFY'S FEATS

“There is nothing of the spiritual in my work. I don't believe in that. I don't believe in insulting the intelligence of the audience. I am trying to build up a new, a higher magic. You can call it magic, magnetism, spiritualism, occultism or rheumatism, for all I care.” —Joseffy

If the City national bank building had started to go through some strange contortions last week, if the five top stories for instance had begun to bow and leer defiantly, and the windows had flashed up and down with a winking effect, it would not have been surprising.

They would have just been obeying the magical commands of Joseffy, who was paying a little visit in Omaha. For if a skull will tilt around sneeringly and speak with a clicking of teeth, while Joseffy stands near by, waving at it, or simply gazing down upon it, why couldn't he just put a little more power into it and command a few stories of a building to do the same?

Who is Joseffy?

He is one of the most famous originators of magical devices, of the present day, and he is just as good at displaying these as he is originating them.

Two years ago David P. Abbott of Omaha, who is thoroughly familiar with the world of magic, became interested in the productions of this man and wrote about them, the article appearing in the *Open Court* and later being published in pamphlet form, "The Marvelous Creations of Joseffy."

Mr. Abbott had never met Joseffy. Last week Joseffy came all the way to Omaha from his home in Chicago to see Mr. Abbott and spend a few days with him.

Just to show his good fellowship and his willingness to help boost Omaha he went to the Ak-Sar-Ben den Monday night and gave a little demonstration there of his ability along that line.

IN EVERYDAY LIFE.

You have all see magicians on the stage in their full dress regalia or their lavender suits with knee trousers, but how many of you have met one in private life?

Do you have the idea that everyone of those long, bristling hairs of his is symbolical of a nervous irritation, so that every time you would address him some of it would shoot off and scare you into the background? Or did you consider that he would be a sullen creature, who did not care to make the effort to be pleasant with those whom he might meet outside of his profession?

Joseffy isn't that kind. Not a bit of it.

A reporter visited him one morning at Mr. Abbott's office. He came forward in a quietly courteous manner and extended his hand for a warm clasp. He is a master of the violin and he looked more the musician than the magician, with his long, dark hair, his thin face, almost sallow cheeks and dark complexion. The Ak-Sar-Ben button was still worn in the buttonhole of his light colored business suit. His eyes were filled with a dreaminess suggesting that they gazed on lofty heights as yet unattained.

DO YOU SMOKE?

He sat down and started an entertaining conversation, when suddenly he stopped and reached his hand up to his ear and shook his head, much as a

swimmer does who has an ear full of water. Again he started to talk and once more he stopped abruptly in the middle of his speech, as though he was in great pain, and his hand tugged once more at his ear. A third time this was repeated and one was about to ask if he could not be of some assistance, when suddenly a cigar seemed to protrude out of his ear and he passed it over with a query "Do you smoke?"

A little later a cigaret worked its way out of his chin.

Mr. Abbott called a dozen people into the little office, probably not more than ten by ten feet, and Joseffy started in on a few of his tricks, saying that he would use the card tricks simply to work up to his skeleton trick.

He allowed members of the little audience to draw as many as five cards at a time from a pack which he held. Then he had two men empty their inside coat pockets, and one of them counted thirty cards. Another man was asked to cut the stack in two. One of the two men was told to put the larger stack in his pocket and the other to count out the remaining cards. There proved to be eleven. He was then told to put them in his pocket. Joseffy kept away from them. Both of the men buttoned their coats. He asked the one with the larger number of cards to select one of the mystic numbers, 3, 1 or 5, and the latter was selected. He made some passes on the air, saying he was sending the cards from one to the other and on looking both of the men counted the cards out loud to find fourteen instead of nineteen, in one pocket, and sixteen instead of eleven, in the other.

"There is no such thing as brain fog," he says. "A person can get physically tired, but just as long as he really loves the work, his brain can keep on without getting worn out. Haven't you ever worked at something for ten hours straight, something that you loved to do, not even stopping to eat anything and not been worn out? That is the way with me.

"When I am not out giving some concert I start to work in my laboratory at 8 o'clock in the morning, and work all day until late in the evening. Then I go home and play the violin until 1 or 2 o'clock. I took an old violin and cut out all except the edge and then put in a support to brace it, and provide something on which to attach the strings. All the vibrations practically are eliminated, and no one but me can hear it. And so I can sit there and play and the fellow in the next room won't know anything about it at all.

"I have worked for twelve year now, getting ready one big performance and if necessary I will work for twelve years more. Most of my creations have required from two to three years to complete them. I discarded one after

ten years work because I was not satisfied with the way that it worked out. If at the end of twelve years more of labor I have not the whole thing ready I will put in another twelve and then I am going to tour Europe for four or five years. That will give me a chance to come in contact with our Indian friends. But we are living in the year 1910 and not way back in the dark ages. So that I am not afraid.

“What do I think of the trick of creating a tree? That is purely substitution, but they have been raised from childhood to do it, so they are very clever at it.”

EATING SECONDARY.

And Joseffy is a very peculiar man in one way at least. Dreamer of dreams as he is, he has little love of money, does not care to be wealthy. There is a touch of humor all through the man, and even in talking of serious subjects it will break out now and then.

“Oh, I have learned the science of starvation,” he says. “Any one can eat. There is no originality in that. Give me some brass and some iron and a couple of sandwiches and I am satisfied. Then after a while I will go out and give a concert to get more brass and iron and sandwiches.

“There is not much chance for an inventor these days who hasn't got money. Some day I am going to have an institution with laboratory, machine shops, etc., and a board of examiners and every poor inventor can come there and submit his proposition, and if the board thinks that it is a good one, he can work it out there and put it on the market and keep 90 percent of the profits himself and only give 10 percent to the institution for its maintenance.”

“You see, he is a dreamer all right,” said Mr. Abbott.

“Ah but I must bring that about one day,” was Joseffy's reply. “I have known what it is to be in that condition, no money, starving.”

Then Joseffy cleared off a typewriter table, brought in his skull mounted on a very low pedestal, and set it upon the table. In the small quarters he did not have the head move around, but he commenced to propound questions, and the skull would click off answers, by snapping its teeth. It struck off the time, the denomination of cards drawn by persons in the audience, and which were not seen by Joseffy, and answered many questions.

All this was done in the little room with the spectators not more than six feet from him, and with the skull resting on a typewriter table. “I could do it

just as well out in the street, between two car tracks,” he said.



HOW HE BEGAN.

“In a way it was an accident that I was doing these things,” said he. “When I was a boy I took up the study of the violin, and wanted to become a violinist. My father wanted me to follow him in business. Well, it came to a crisis one day, and my father naturally being stronger, it ended up with the violin being broken over my head. I left home then, and traveled over Europe, learning six different languages and becoming master of five trades.

“I came to America when I was 19 years old.”

Joseffy's real name is Mr. Freud, and he was born in Vienna. When he first arrived in America, he lived in a quiet way, and devoted part of his time to manufacturing apparatus for a certain dealer. Magicians marveled at the perfection of these. All of the time he was working out ideas of his own. He finally began to manufacture apparatus for himself there. “I was too much of a dreamer,” he said, “and the creditors came around playing tag with me, saying, ‘You are it!’ So I had to stop.”

LABORATORY OF A WIZARD.

Now, however, he has a laboratory in Chicago, which is one of the finest of its kind in the country. He is a “mechanical, chemical and scientific genius,” as one man described him, in writing of him, and so his laboratory is filled with lathes and other requisites of a machine shop, chemicals and tools of all kinds.

“The little measuring instruments alone I have cost me \$4000,” he said. “In making these devices, they are measured down to the one ten-thousandth of an inch. I have to have holes so small that it is easier to build the metal around the hole than to bore one that small. Some of the holes are only .017 of an inch in diameter.

“Some of the magicians have magical devices that do not cost them more than \$100. I spent \$75 for one tool to use in making one of the creations, because I wanted to get a certain bend.”

Joseffy regards his work as one of the greatest sciences. And the man that thinks that his little eight hour a day of labor is strenuous ought to take a few lessons from him.

PLEASANT SOCIAL STUNTS.

In ever-day life Joseffy likes to play his little tricks, “have fun with the people,” as he says. His novel way of producing a cigar is something of a stumper to the average citizen, and then when he calmly holds the match out, he commences to complain about the peculiar Chicago matches, the man opposite him does begin to grin.

When invited by a woman to dine he enjoys borrowing her scarf for a moment to examine it, gives it a couple of shakes and produces a large bouquet of roses, much to her surprise and delight.

At one place where he was displaying his skull a large, well-known man in the audience shouted to him: “Hold on there a minute. I want to come up there.” He was urged to do so.

“I know how you do it,” he said. “You have something under the glass.” (When this trick is given on the stage the skull is rested on a glass plate which, is held by four spectators.) “I want to lie down under it,” continued the man.

He was allowed to stretch himself at full length under the glass, and lay there looking up, and watching while the skull continued to click its teeth in

answer to questions.

Presently the man pulled himself out from underneath, in a dejected fashion, sat in the floor looking at Joseffy a minute, and then said, so that all the audience could hear: "I'm a d—m fool." The effect was so ludicrous that even Joseffy had to laugh, while the audience shouted.

Again, in an Alabama town, a woman said the skull shone too much to be a real one. The audience all heard this. Joseffy turned quickly and said: "Madame, the skull does shine, but you much not forget that the count was a highly polished gentleman." In his introduction of his skull he relates how two centuries ago Joseph Balsamo, Count Cagliostro, noted magician, presented him with his own skull three weeks before his death. So he calls the skull Balsamo.

BRINGS LADY TO VIEW.

To show some of the other creations of this man, he produces from the air a one-inch cube. This grows until it is two inches square, while he holds it in this hand then four, then an eight-inch cube. It is then set upon a little table, and grows until it is three foot six inches square. He lifts this cube off the table and a beautiful young woman steps out and starts to run off the stage. He stops her by snapping his fingers, and immediately there is a sheet of flame, and she disappears in full view of the spectators, in her place is seen a big bouquet of red roses which are plucked and thrown into the audience.

Starting with a metal ring, an image of the sun, two feet in diameter, he hangs it over a shield, and stepping back, starts firing at it. At every shot, in perfect time, the flag of some nation rises up, rods from one foot to six feet in length. He then takes a table and three chairs from the ring, a dinner set, food, etc., and finally produces two living women, the three sitting down to a light lunch as the curtain descends.

For some of his tricks he carried a rabbit. He was bothered with having to care for it. He proceeded to create one that would not eat, and yet its wriggling is the same as that of real life, and it realistically hops off the stage. A duck is also used which is taken from the spectators flapping its wings, and quacking, but the duck too has no digestive apparatus.

These give but a few hints to the originality of the man.

Get him to talking about aerial feats or universal peace, and you get another insight into his character.

INTERESTED IN AVIATION.

Mr. Abbott said that he was trying to get him to take up experiments in aerial machines.

“For a dozen years I have been thinking of this,” he said.

“I have some ideas that are entirely different from the aeroplanes now in use. Some day I may take it up, but I would burn up \$10,000 or so, and I haven't the money to do it now. I have the mechanical ability, and ideas and I would like to do it. I believe that this is the only means of bringing about a great universal peace. These racing machines of today are but a step. There must be something bigger and better, and then universal peace will have to come.

“Now some of the brightest men in the world are devoting their energies to create some armor to withstand them and then the first man gets busy again to go him one better. What if this genius was all devoted to scientific investigations and education of the people how to live to eliminate suicides, murder, to stop warfare, to create something, not destroy.

“The airship I believe is going to help bring it about.

“Why aren't men more courteous here. Over in France, they are overly polite. Here the policeman grabs you and says, ‘Come on you — — —.’ Perhaps he needs to. If the fellow arrested is able, he will knock the officer down. Not so, over in France. That is seldom done.

“But courtesies, good fellowship among men mean so much. That is one of the recompenses of a magician. It is a difficult task. It is a combat of minds, the magician against the whole audience. They are all saying, ‘Darn it, he can't do it.’ And I am saying, ‘Darn it, I can,’ and I have to do it. There is such a thing as control of one mind by another. This work proves that.

“But it is a wearing task. And so when one comes in touch with new friends, appreciative, gentlemanly, that is a big thing. And so I was deeply impressed with your organization out here, that Ak-Sar-Ben and the whole souled way in which they all co-operated, and I was also impressed with the cordiality and the spirit of good fellowship of the Omaha people.”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David Phelps Abbott (1863–1934) was a well-respected magician and inventor. He lived the majority of his life in Omaha, Nebraska where at his home he gave private performances to such luminaries as Harry Kellar, Howard Thurston, Ching Ling Foo and Harry Houdini. In addition to this brief profile of fellow magician Joseffy, David Abbott wrote extensively about the methods used by fraudulent mediums.

