

Entangled TOMES

David P. Abbott  
in  
**The Open Court**



edited by Katherine Nabity

**David P. Abbott**  
**in *The Open Court***

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**Edited by Katherine Nability**

**Published by**  
**[Entangled Continua Publishing](#)**

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# Introduction



IN 2012, my interest in magic was sparked by an article in *Las Vegas Weekly* [a] about magician Teller's mastery of David P. Abbott's Floating Ball illusion. Abbott was born in Falls City, Nebraska in 1863 and lived most of his life in Omaha, Nebraska. As an Omaha native myself, I was intrigued by the man. Here was a "local" early 20th century magician of such skill that he was respected by one of the 21st century's most famous magicians. Why hadn't I heard of this guy? Luckily for me, the age of easy research had dawned. Newspapers and periodicals from over one hundred years ago were available with just a quick internet search.

David Phelps Abbott was self-taught in mathematics, well-versed in the arts, and a decent musician as well as a magician. By day, he specialized in providing small loans to the citizens of Omaha. At night, he held shows of "Occult Mysteries" in his parlor for the likes of Howard Thurston and Ching Ling Foo.

His work most notable to the wider world is his treatise *Behind the Scenes with the Mediums*, published in 1907 by The Open Court Publishing Company. While not the first or the most famous debunker of fraudulent mediums, Abbott's descriptions of techniques are some of the most detailed, and, in his interactions with the mediums themselves, the most cordial. I can't help but think that his innate Nebraska niceness provided him with the ability to attend séances and trade secrets with mediums without picking fights or being particularly slanderous. He seemed to have respect for a medium's skill as a performer, while placing the responsibility for not being duped on the audience. He generally expected all parties involved to be intelligent and rational.

His accounts also stand out for their honest skepticism. Abbott readily admits when there is a technique for which he can't account. This can be seen

in "The History of a Strange Case" and later, in 1922, with his involvement with the "Wonder Girl" Gene Dennis. (Unfortunately, no articles pertaining to Ms. Dennis were ever written for *The Open Court*.) This willingness to state "I don't know" was often taken by pro-spiritualists to mean that Abbott believed there was something supernatural occurring, which was never the case.

This collection includes articles written by Abbott for *The Open Court*, a journal produced by the Open Court Publishing Company. *The Open Court* focused on the intersection of religion, philosophy, and science—an area often inhabited by magicians, especially in the age of spiritualism. This is a fairly complete collection of articles. The original works can be found in their respective magazine issues (which are in the public domain) with a fair amount of searching. My intent has been to gather all these articles together in an easily distributed format. Some pieces have also been included in *House of Mystery: The Magic Science of David P. Abbott*, an amazing compilation of Abbott's works edited by Todd Karr and Teller. If you have the means, opportunity, and interest, I highly suggest their work of scholarship over this meager collection.

The articles are in chronological order, except for two correspondence threads. Also included, for context, are a short news piece from the *Falls City Tribune* and an excerpt from the *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research*. The texts of all articles were obtained from scanned documents available online. Aside from format, I provided only light editing which did not include correcting eccentricities of spelling.

Longer works also published by Open Court Publishing, which are somewhat easily available, are *Behind the Scenes with the Mediums* (1907) and *The Marvelous Creations of Joseffy* (1908).

Katherine Nabity  
July 2016

[a] "A man, a ball, a hoop, a bench (and an alleged thread)... TELLER!" (2008, November 20).

Retrieved from <http://lasvegasweekly.com/news/2008/nov/20/man-ball-hoop-bench-and-alleged-thread-teller/#/0>

## An Important Discussion



(No byline.)

*The Falls City Tribune*

December 8, 1905, Vol. II, No. 100, pg. 8

(originally published in the *Beatrice Express*)

ONE OF THE MOST interesting scientific articles of the year is "Some Mediumistic Phenomena," by David P. Abbott of Omaha, and published in "The Open Court," a Chicago and London magazine. The author of the article was a former resident of Falls City, and has relatives and many acquaintances in Beatrice.

The article describes a most intricate spiritualistic trick performed by a traveling mediums some time ago, and the explanation of the trick as figured out and demonstrated by Mr. Abbott after the departure of the so-called medium. It is a story well told, and the fact that it is published in one of the most exclusive scientific journals in the world, shows how highly is regarded the discovery made by the writer and indicates the care taken in the preparation of the article.

Mr. Abbott is not only one of the best thinkers in the country along scientific lines, but he has devoted a large amount of time and money to the investigation of the mesmeric and spiritualist tricks so much used by the traveling clairvoyants and mediums, and has been of much service in exposing some harmful frauds. At the same time he is capable of giving demonstrations of the most intricate of these tricks, whereby he is able to entertain and thoroughly puzzle those who like to witness or investigate this

sort of business. It is to his credit that he has never permitted an auditor to go away with the idea that anything he has done is mysterious or supernatural. In the article referred to above he says:

"With the knowledge of trickery that I possess, I have in all cases where I have seen anything of this kind, been able to explain it by trickery. All my life I have been looking for phenomena of this kind, but I have never been able to see just one little bit that was genuine."

After reading this admirable article in the "Open Court," one wishes that it might be published broadcast in order that a stop be put to the absurd business which gulls so many people out of money in these clairvoyant and "trance medium" parlors.

## Some Mediumistic Phenomena



David P. Abbott

*The Open Court*, edited by Paul Carus

August 1905, Vol. XIX (no. 8), No. 591, pg. 494-504

IN THE BOOK ENTITLED "Psychics: Facts and Theories," by Rev. Minot J. Savage, at page 15, the following account will be found:

"Soon I began to hear raps, apparently on the floor, and then in different parts of the room. On this, the lady remarked, simply: 'Evidently there is some one here who wishes to communicate with you. Let us go into the front parlor, where it will be quieter.' This we did, the raps following us, or rather beginning again as soon as we were seated. At her suggestion I then took pencil and paper (which I happened to have in my bag), and sat at one side of a marble-top table, while she sat at the other side in a rocker and some distance away. Then she said: 'As one way of getting at the matter, suppose you do this: You know what friends you have in the spirit world. Write now a list of names—any names you please, real or fictitious, only among them somewhere include the names of some friends in the spirit world who, you think, might like to communicate with you, if such a thing were possible.' I then began. I held a paper so that she could not possibly have seen what I wrote, even though she had not been so far away. I took special pains that no movement or facial expression should betray me. Meantime she sat quietly rocking and talking. As I wrote, perhaps at the eighth or tenth name, I began to write the name of a lady friend who had not been long dead. I had hardly written the first letter before there came three loud, distinct raps. Then my

hostess said, 'This friend of yours, of course, knows where she died. Write now a list of places, including in it the place of her death, and see if she will recognize it.' This I did, beginning with Vienna, and so on with any that occurred to me. Again I had hardly begun to write the real name, when once more came the three raps. And so on, concerning other matters. I speak of these only as specimens.

"Now, I cannot say that in this particular case the raps were not caused by the toe joints of the lady. The thing that puzzles me, in this theory, is as to how the toe joints happened to know the name of my friend, where she died, etc., which facts the lady herself did not know, and never had known."

It has been the writer's good fortune to witness practically this same experiment, performed by a very expert medium, Dr. Schlossenger, who was traveling over the country a few years ago.

I was residing at that time in Falls City, Neb., a place of a few thousand population. For two winters I had traveled some as a magician, so when the medium came to town, and began to perform his miracles, certain members of the community suggested having me witness one of his séances, thinking I would be able to discover whether his tests were genuine, or whether they were performed by the aid of trickery. Accordingly, one evening, a prominent physician invited me, with certain relatives and friends, to attend a séance given in his parlors.

When we arrived I was introduced to the medium, an elderly gentleman with a long white beard, and wearing glasses. He appeared to be slightly deaf, as he placed his hand to his ear and had my name repeated. He was introduced to the remainder of the company *en masse*, the names of the visitors not being given to him.

The medium soon announced that "his mission on this earth was to absolutely prove to humanity the immortality of the soul." He now offered to give some tests to those desiring it, and asked for a small table which was placed in an adjoining room. He invariably held his hand to his ear, to catch what was being said, being apparently quite deaf. He also used this same expedient when listening to the voices of the unseen spirits, and reporting their communications.

My father and another gentleman were selected for the first test, as they were considered very skeptical in such matters. As they retired to a closed room I did not see this experiment, but will give some parts of it as reported to me, further on. In a short time they returned to the parlor, engaged in a

discussion over the matter; and my father remarked, "I do not know how you got your information, but I feel certain it was not from my brother, or he would have given a certain point correctly." The medium then said, "If I will tell you where your father died, and the disease he died of, will you be convinced?" My father replied, "I suppose I will have to be, if you can do that."

They then retired, and the medium succeeded partially in the experiment; and would have certainly succeeded entirely, had my father followed his instructions. I will describe what was reported to me of this test, further on.

I now offered myself for a test. I retired to the room with the medium, and incidentally offered him one dollar and fifty cents, the same my father had given him; but he refused the money, saying: "Your father is not convinced, and I will not take any more money."

He now took a sheet of paper from a tablet, and drew five straight lines across it, spacing the sheet into six spaces about equal. Next taking my hand, and looking earnestly into my face, he said: "Promise me that if I succeed, you will not make light of this. Promise me, for this is very sacred to me." I did so. He now directed me to write names in the spaces on the sheet, any names I pleased, writing but one name in each space. All the names were to be of living or fictitious persons except one, this one to be the name of some one I had known who was then dead. He said, "Be fair with me, and I will scratch out the dead person's name." These were his exact words, therefore I in no way tried to hide my writing from him, although he stood at a distance and did not appear to watch me. I took a pencil and began writing the names; being unprepared I had to think of the names I wished to write. I desired to select names of persons living at a distance, so that he could in no possible manner know them. While I was writing he talked incessantly, which in spite of myself divided my attention. At the same time he kept urging me to write, and immediately after urging me, would begin talking rapidly on some spiritualistic subject. I remember saying, "You must give me time to think." I thought I used great care, so as to write each name with the same precision, and tried to betray no emotion when writing the dead person's name. I selected the name "Cora Holt" for the dead person's name. This was the name of an aunt who had died in another state.

As soon as I had written the names he asked me to cut them apart into slips, having one name on each slip. Now here I do not remember whether he folded them himself, or had me help, as I was not expecting them to be

folded. However, we folded each one into a billet with the writing inside.

He now directed me to place them in a hat, and to hold the hat under the table, take out the billets one at a time, and throw them on the table top. This I did while he stood with his right arm extended toward the table and about one foot above it. After I had thrown a few billets on the table, as I threw the next one, I heard three loud distinct raps. He said, "There, that's the one that is dead. Open it and see if I am right, but do not let me see it. Fold it up again and place it in your pocket." I opened the billet. I did not know what the name would be, as I had mixed them under the table; yet I had a feeling that it was correct. I opened it, and sure enough the name was "Cora Holt." I refolded it, placing it in my pocket. I must confess that I felt a momentary creepy feeling pass over me, as my emotions were wrought up to such a pitch by the intense manner in which I had watched all the details of the experiment. I informed him that he was right, but did not tell him the name. He now took my hand in his, and leading me into the parlor, had me state to the company what had just occurred. Now placing his hand on my head, he said: "I will endeavor to give you the name." Closing his eyes, his body trembled or shuddered with a kind of paroxysm, and apparently with a great effort he pronounced the name, "Cora Holt." This effort seemed to greatly exhaust him, and coming out of his temporary trance he begged us to excuse him, saying that there were opposing spirits present and he could do no more that night; that he had done all for us that lay within his power. He now took his leave.

This was all very impressive to me at the time, except the raps. It was only afterwards that I thought out the explanation, which I will give further on. As to the raps, they had the sound as of a pencil tapping loudly on a thin strip of wood, or a ruler, and not the sound of tapping on a table. I had previously known of the mechanical and electrical rappers, supplied by certain conjuring depots, and worn on the person of the medium, or attached to a table. My impression was at the time that possibly he had a rapper in the sleeve of the arm extended over the table, and by directing the attention to the table the sound would appear to come from there. As I was sitting right against the table, will say that the sound did not appear to me to come from the table, but more nearly from, his person.

Referring again to the test given my father, the medium first announced his prices, which he would accept if satisfactory. This was agreed to and paid. He then had my father write names on a paper in a manner similar to the way

I have described, except he did not request my father to write a dead person's name; instead, he requested him to write, among other names, his mother's maiden name, his wife's maiden name, his father's name, also the names of certain members of his family and of some of his friends, some of whom should be dead. This my father did.

Among the names written by my father was his mother's maiden name, viz.: "Celestina Redexilana Phelps," a name certainly out of the ordinary. He also wrote his wife's maiden name, his father's name, his brother's name, and several other names—six or eight altogether.

When the medium had the billets taken out of the hat he said, "You have there the name of your mother; the name is something like 'Celestia (not Celestina) Roxalena (not Redexilana) Phelps,' thus giving wrong pronunciations to the first two names. However, when my father opened it, sure enough it was his mother's maiden name. My father now took another billet which had written thereon his father's name. This the medium gave correctly, stating that this was his father's name. The next billet had written thereon the name of my father's brother; the name was "James Asahel Abbott." The medium then said: "Your brother James is here, and he says to tell you that he is happy and that you are making a great mistake not to believe."

Now this brother had always been called by his second name and not by the name of James. My father said, "If you are my brother, give me your full name." The medium replied. "James Asha-bell Abbott," giving an entirely wrong pronunciation of the second name. This it was, with some other error, that led to the discussion they had on returning to the parlor, and in which my father remarked, "If you get your information from the dead, they should be able to pronounce their own names correctly."

My father, not being familiar with the methods of trickery could not with exactness give all the minute details of the test as I would have wished; and as I never had an opportunity to see this experiment myself, I can only surmise the means employed in its production.

The second experiment with my father had been an effort to tell the disease of which my grandfather died, also the place where he died. The medium required my father to write on the usual ruled paper, a name of a disease and also a name of a place, in each space, that is, one disease and one place in each space. He remarked in giving directions, "Like New York measles, Philadelphia smallpox, etc." He required, however that my father

write *in the same space* the correct disease, and also the correct place of his father's death. The remainder of the spaces were to contain the names of any disease or any place he might choose.

This my father did, writing in one space "Sacramento dysentery." This was the correct disease, but the city was the place of my grandfather's burial, and not the place of his death, the latter being a village called "Hangtown." The medium quickly gave dysentery as the disease, and Sacramento as the place of my grandfather's death. It was plain that had my father written the village where his father died, instead of his burial place, the medium would have succeeded.

This, however, proved beyond a doubt that the medium obtained his information *from the writing*, and not from spirits of the dead.

After thinking the matter over, I decided that, while I was uncertain as to the manner in which Dr. Schlossenger had performed all of these experiments, I could reproduce two of them with certainty as often as he did. I immediately made the trial and found I could succeed fully nine times out of ten on an average. I might state that the doctor also failed about one time in ten on an average; nevertheless, the people of the community were greatly excited, talking of his miracles, in groups on the streets, for some days. The medium was coining money, yet I found a few cases where he failed totally. The failures were seldom mentioned; it was the successes that excited the people.

The method I use in reproducing the first test given me, is to so direct the attention of the subjects before the writing, by my discourse, as to cause them to unconsciously select the name of the dead person in advance. This is easily managed with a little practice in talking, and still they will never guess that it is done on purpose.

Now, as they begin to write, they will naturally pause before writing each name, to think of a name to write. The pause may be but slight, yet there is some pause. Of course, when they write the selected name, no pause will be necessary: and if hurried properly at that time they will make none. This is the object of the incessant talking during the experiment. If left to themselves, the subjects will, in about one-half of the cases, write the selected name in the third space from the top. In about half of the remaining cases the selected name will be written in the fourth space from the top. This is especially true if in your instructions you direct the subject to "mix the dead person's name somewhere in among the others, where you cannot know where it is." In the

remaining cases the subjects are liable to write the selected name anywhere, generally first or last. Now my object is to so manipulate my subjects as to cause them to write the selected name when I want them to do so. This is done by continuous talking, and distracting their attention until the proper moment. I choose the third space, since this, being the one they are most liable to choose of their own accord, is easiest to force. Just as they begin to write the first name, before they make a mark, I say suddenly, "Now be sure and select names of living persons that I could not possibly know." This is almost certain to insure a pause, and the name of a living person to be written first. I continue my talking in a natural manner, taking the attention to a great extent from the writing, and nearly always observing another pause just before writing the second name. When the second name is almost finished I exclaim suddenly, "Now write as rapidly as possible!" If the subjects have been properly impressed with the seriousness of the experiment, they will almost invariably, on finishing the second name (in obedience to my command "to be as rapid as possible," and in their desire to please me), hurry into the name already in their minds, thus writing the selected name in the third space. If such is the case they will now most surely pause to think of a fourth name. If so, I am certain that I now know the selected name. However, if they should rapidly pass into the fourth name, it is then uncertain whether the selected name is in the third or fourth space. This, however, seldom happens if worked in an expert manner.

In rare cases the subject cannot be manipulated by the performer, in which case it is purely guesswork; even in such cases, however, I stand one chance in six of succeeding; and if I make a second trial on failing (not uncommon with mediums), I stand one chance in three of succeeding.

It is hardly worth while to say that as I fold the billets, I fold the third one slightly different from the rest, so that while it will not attract attention, I can see at a glance what it is when thrown on the table. I memorize the name; also, if in doubt, I fold a second choice in a still different manner for a second trial. Frequently I memorize more of the names, folding so I can pick them out. Then, after giving the dead person's name with proper effect, I pick up the others, hold them to my head and call out the names. The effect of this on a subject is very impressive.

With a little practice the above test can be given with very small chance of failure; and in the event of making a failure it can be explained by the statement that "there are opposing spirits present," or some similar excuse. If

one has other tests at his command, it is well in the event of failure, to announce that he will try something else, and then give another test. As these experiments are always tried alone with one or, at most, two subjects, a failure attracts little notice.

Now I can not say positively that Dr. Schlossenger performed this experiment in exactly this same manner; but I do have a recollection of his hurrying me along in my writing at some stage of its progress. I also know that I can succeed as often as he did. I will add further that a few days later I prepared six names in advance, and, with my wife, had a sitting with the medium; this time, although I paid him, he failed utterly. He tried in every way and had me write additional names. This time I guarded the points in above explanation, yet no matter how he tried, he made an utter failure. All tricks require certain conditions, and this is why it is not safe to repeat the same trick for the same person. There is too much danger that the subject may notice the sameness of the *modus operandi*.

Referring to the second test which was given by the medium to my father, will state that when the subjects are writing the cities and diseases, they will naturally pause after writing a city, to think of a disease to go with it. Of course, when writing the correct ones, which are already in mind, no pause will be necessary. Also advantage may be taken of the fact that a small percent of persons die of smallpox or measles. If in giving the directions one says, "Write like this: 'Philadelphia smallpox, New York measles,'" and the subject writes smallpox or measles in the list, it is safe to eliminate that from the case. This is especially true if written in connection with some large city, the name of which occurs readily to the mind. It is safe also to eliminate Philadelphia or New York if these should be written, providing you mentioned these names in the directions, and that the test is not being given in their section of the country. A small percent of the people of a country die in any two places of prominence. Yet these places will be written readily by most subjects, if they are suggested, or at least other places of equal prominence will be written. If an unusual place or disease should be written, it is almost certain these are the ones.

It can readily be seen how expert one can become at this by continued practice, such as a medium has many times a day; how one can learn to take advantage of every little point, and use it with telling effect on unsuspecting strangers, who do not know what is going to happen, or what to look for.

I have been told that Dr. Schlossenger had a very sharp eye although

wearing glasses; and that the glasses were probably to make the subject think it impossible for him to read writing when they were moved out of position and placed on the forehead, as they were during the tests. It has also been suggested that his poor hearing was feigned, to enable him to hear remarks made about himself in his presence. I have suspected that his memory had become trained to a high degree of accuracy, enabling him to give his tests with such marvelous success, as he did with nearly all wherever he went. That he does not use one set of principles only in his tricks, I am certain, but has many more at his command which he uses continually. However, I can only vaguely guess at them from having seen his tests but once.

Now, I do not say that this was the method employed by the lady with Rev. Savage, given in the account at the beginning of this article. But as the experiments are practically the same, it is safe to conclude that the methods used are the same, or nearly so. If the test were genuine in the case of the lady mentioned, it was probably genuine in the case of Dr. Schlossenger. On the other hand, if it were trickery in one case, it probably was in both.

When Rev. Savage speaks in his book of spirit rappings, clairvoyance, etc., as established genuine phenomena in some cases, and even alludes to independent writing, I must conclude that he has been deceived in some instances; and if in some, probably in more.

With the knowledge of trickery that I possess, I have, in all cases where I have seen any thing of this kind, been able to explain it by trickery. All my life I have been looking for phenomena of this kind; but have never yet been able to see just one little thing that was genuine.

On the other hand, I know the apparently marvelous things that can be performed by the aid of trickery. Referring to clairvoyance, I will say that there are simple means by which sealed writings may be read with certainty and despatch. It is possible for a subject to write a name, or a question, on a thick non-transparent card, and seal same in a heavy non-transparent envelope; sealing same himself, with wax if desired: yet it is possible for an expert performer, on taking it in the tips of his fingers, instantly to read the writing, unobserved, in the mere act of placing same in full view on a table. The writing can be given with due effect, and the envelope returned at once unopened and undisturbed. Yet this is all trickery, pure and simple.

It is also possible to hand an ordinary slip of paper and an envelope to a subject; to let him write a question and seal it himself, using his own hand as a support on which to write; and after sealing same, to keep it in his own

possession. Yet in a very short time the operator is in full knowledge of the writing.

It is likewise possible to allow a subject to write a question and also the name of a dead friend from whom he desires a communication, on an ordinary tab. After same is written he can tear off the sheet, folding and retaining same. The tab is an ordinary one, no carbon paper or anything of the kind being concealed therein. Yet although the tab remains on the table in full view, the operator is in a short time informed fully as to what was written.

All of the above is trickery, pure and simple. Yet I will say that it makes little difference as to the intelligence of the subject. The wisest are deceived as readily as the most simple; and if anything, the effect is greatest on the most intelligent. The principle in each of the above experiments is entirely different. That which would explain one would not explain the others. I use all of them frequently in my parlor entertainments with the greatest success. An explanation as to the methods used would be out of place here, besides being too lengthy.

As to independent writing, I will say that among the many methods used, it is possible to allow sitters to clean two ordinary unprepared slates themselves and hold them under an ordinary unprepared table themselves; and yet to have any message desired appear on one of the slates in genuine chalk or slate pencil writing, no chemicals being used, and the slates being actually free from writing at the beginning. The clothing of the operator can also be examined before and after the experiment.

The effect of this is very startling; especially if the subjects have previously written the name of the person whom they desire to have communicate, and a question they desire answered, retaining the writing themselves.

This experiment is trickery of the simplest kind; yet the effect is so great that, although I always state afterwards that it is not performed by the aid of spirits of the dead, many, in fact most, of my subjects insist on believing that I use some occult power in its production, and in the production of the previous clairvoyant readings.

I recently had a sitter write the name of a person from whom she desired a communication, folding and retaining same herself. When afterwards she received a spirit message on slates cleaned and held by herself, signed "Governor McComas," the name she had written, and a relative, she remained affected throughout the evening, although I assured her that it was not done

by spirit power.

With this knowledge of trickery, and my experience in investigating mediumistic phenomena at every opportunity, I have concluded that there are no genuine mediums; unless Mrs. Piper, whom the Society for Psychical Research has investigated for so long, be one. I can hardly pass judgment in her case, having never had a sitting with her myself, and I would be greatly pleased to see an article in your columns by H. R. Evans giving his ideas on the subject.

I will conclude with a short account of a medium who gave some very successful séances in Omaha a few years ago, as a "Materializing Medium."

The audience could examine his cabinet and himself thoroughly, then lock the only door to the room and keep the key themselves, besides bolting the door on the inside. The sitters would now form a circle about the room, holding hands and guarding the door. Nevertheless, as soon as the lights were lowered, the medium came from his cabinet, leading numerous spirits. Parents recognized their children; and one fond parent still has a withered flower which money cannot buy, given by the spirit of a dead child. The medium took the town by storm, carrying three thousand dollars away with him in a short time; yet his spirits were produced in the simplest manner.

He had trained children in costumes in an adjoining room. There was a trap in the base board running along the wall of the room. This trap was behind the curtains of his cabinet. Through this the children entered and retired at the proper time. As they hooked the movable part of the base board with strong hooks to the studding from the room where they were concealed, and as there were dummy nails in this board apparently holding it in place, the audience could not discover but that it was perfectly solid. In the room where the children were concealed, the base board was held in place by door knockers which were screwed through it into the studding. When time came to perform, the children unscrewed the base board on their side, letting it down; now unhooking the other board, they entered through the opening into the medium's cabinet. After the experiment the children hooked the base board in place and screwed the second board in place on their side of the wall: then with their make-up material they made their escape to other apartments, leaving the door open in a natural manner.

During this time the spectators were examining the medium, his cabinet and the room again, and telling each other of the "dear one" they had recognized, while the medium sat, exhausted, recovering from the weakening

effects of his recent "trance."

# Mediumistic Reading of Sealed Writings



David P. Abbott

*The Open Court*, edited by Paul Carus

April 1906, Vol. XX (No. 4), No. 599, pg. 194-211

## I.

IN RESPONSE to a request from the editor of *The Open Court*, accompanied by a letter from Mr. I. G. Bartel of Nelson, New Zealand, I have decided to give to the readers of this magazine (in so far as I am at liberty to do so) the methods which I use in reading sealed writings, to which I alluded in the paper entitled "Some Mediumistic Phenomena," which appeared in the August number.

Perhaps, as Mr. Bartel says, it is somewhat inconsistent in me to say, "An explanation of the methods used would be out of place here," while at the same time explaining other things of a similar nature. But, the fact is, when making this statement I was looking at the matter from the magician's point of view. While magicians frequently publish or allow to be published many valuable secrets, yet the secrets of their very latest and best work are jealously guarded from the public. The reason for this is because if the secrets become too generally known, it lessens the value of the experiments for purposes of entertainment, by rendering them common. Consequently, from the magician's point of view, it is regarded as out of place to allow such secrets to become public property through publication.

In some instances secrets of this class are sold by certain dealers to

performers, and to professional mediums, at prices that might astonish an outsider. If the secrets are regarded as exceptionally good and a high price placed upon them by the vendor, so few will buy them that the performance of the experiments will be very rare, and the performer can well afford to pay the high price asked. When such sale is made, it is generally accompanied by a request that the purchaser faithfully guard the secret from the public.

The fundamental principles of these experiments are not new, but the details make them useful for practical purposes. I purchased them from dealers who place considerable value on them; as they are catalogued at prices which, for the four I am about to describe, make an aggregate of some seventy dollars.

As received by me from the vendors, I found some of them impracticable until I had added certain improvements to the ideas. In the improved form I assure the readers of this paper that they are thoroughly practicable, as I have performed them some hundreds of times with such success as would astonish one who has not seen them. I have never yet made a failure in performing them; nor have I found even one person, among the many who have witnessed their performance, who could even remotely guess at the methods employed. There are many methods of reading such writings, but the ones I am about to describe are the very best of which I have ever even heard.

Still, my readers must not expect me to explain a miracle. Miracles are never performed. The experiments are pure trickery; but if properly performed, have the appearance of being produced by some occult or psychic power. However, all that is necessary is a few simple articles, and *their proper manipulation*. When one reads the explanation of a trick before seeing it performed, the value of the trick is seldom realized. It would be much better, were it possible to do so, to see it performed first and then read the explanation afterwards. However, as this is impossible in this instance, I will first give the effect, or appearance of the experiments as I perform them, and follow this with an explanation of the methods employed. Performers who may read this paper, will notice that most of the articles employed have been previously used in such experiments; and they may not at first sight attach the importance to these experiments which they deserve, owing to the fact that as used heretofore such tricks were by no means a decided success. The ideas have gradually been improved upon, and the perfected tricks are the result of a process of evolution. A few little improvements will frequently make a poor trick one of the best and most difficult of detection.

Each of the four is performed on a different principle, and is fine when performed singly. They should first be practiced in this manner; but as I produce them, I work them as one experiment, or rather as a combination trick. I have performed two of them singly from the stage with the greatest success; but worked in combination, I generally give them in a double parlor. Here the effect is so great, especially on the more intelligent class of persons, (owing to the fact of all being done under the very eyes of the spectators,) that I prefer this method; and I shall describe the experiments as I perform them in my double parlors.

I would suggest that those who desire to easily grasp the explanations should pay close attention to the following description, as it is given with a view to making the explanations intelligible. Each little detail should be remembered; for all is for a purpose, and must be just so.

I have the audience seated in the front parlor, and facing the back parlor which opens into other apartments, through a folding door. I have a writing desk in the rear parlor in which there is a drawer containing the articles I use; and to which I frequently go to get new articles, sometimes getting rid of others at the same time.

There is also in the center of this back parlor an ordinary table, on which I place a porcelain skull, open at the top. This same skull, I might remark, is what I use instead of a hat, for collecting the billets in the experiments described in my former article.

Briefly stated, when I perform this combination experiment, I first prepare the three sealed writings that I am to read; and I then proceed to read first the one prepared last. I next read the one prepared first; and then, after a slight wait, give a slate writing experiment, producing a message signed by the name of the person which the second writer has written on her sheet of paper, sealed, and kept in her own possession. After this I read the writing of the second writer, and answer the question asked therein.

There is some little time taken up in the preparation of the different writings; so in order that the spectators may not grow restless, and also to give them some food for thought during the wait, (and incidentally to render my task more easy to accomplish,) I first perform Yost's "Spiritualistic Slate and Dictionary" test.

This is a very fine spirit slate trick in which three slates, a flap, some other articles and some excellent manipulation each play a part. Its effect upon the more intelligent class is very marked. This experiment convinces

the spectators that the performer can "do things" and that they are not wasting their time in what is to follow. It thus does not allow the interest to lag during the little time required in the preparation of the writings. It also occupies the minds of the spectators to such an extent that what is to follow is much more easily accomplished. I will not take up space here in explaining this trick, as persons desiring it can obtain the articles and explanation of Yost & Co. of Philadelphia, for what the articles alone would cost. [1]

[1] Yost's number 128

## II.

I NOW PROCEED to prepare the first writing. This, however, I shall read second. I request some lady to be seated in a chair in one of the front corners of the front parlor. This places her rather in the rear of the other spectators. I state that this is to prevent the others from seeing what she writes.

I now step to the writing desk and bring forward some envelopes and slips of paper. I hand an envelope and a slip of paper to the lady, asking her to write plainly on the slip of paper some question about her future which she would like to have answered. I ask her to hold the paper in her left hand, in such manner while writing that neither the audience nor myself can in any manner see what she is writing. As she thus holds the back of her hand which contains the paper towards us, it effectually conceals her writing. I pay no attention to her while writing, except an occasional glance to see that she complies with my request.

As soon as she finishes writing, I request her to fold the paper in half. This she does. I now request her to fold it in half the other way and when she does so, I ask her to place the same in the envelope herself and to seal it herself. When she has all ready, I direct her to place it in her own pocket and keep it there until after I have read it. I in no way touch it.

When I desire more questions written, I pass to other ladies with the remaining envelopes and slips of paper, and have others prepared. I always do this when performing from a stage; or have my assistants pass to four or five persons each, thus preparing some eight or ten questions for me to read mentally. I, however, rarely prepare more than one question when performing in parlors, as the time taken up delays the experiment.

I now proceed to prepare the second writing which, however, I read last when I have begun the reading.

I ask the lady, whom I shall call Lady Number One, to exchange seats with some other lady; and this lady I shall call Lady Number Two.

I next bring Lady Number Two an ordinary writing tablet, and ask her to write on it some question about her future which she would like to have answered; and also to write below this question the name of some person who is now dead, from whom she would like to receive a message. I also request her to hold the tablet while writing in such a manner that no one can see the writing, and to use care that no one in any way may know what she writes. I ask her to leave a margin around the sheet free from writing, to be used for folding purposes; and when she is through with the writing, to tear off the sheet, fold it several times, then seal it in a small envelope which I have previously given her, place the same immediately in her own pocket and keep it there until I have read it. When she has all prepared, I direct her to lay the tablet on a table that is convenient, and there it remains throughout the evening in full view. When she lays it on the table I do not go near it or pay any attention to it; and it can be examined thoroughly, as there is no carbon paper or any similar thing about it. I do not especially call attention to this fact, as the suggestion of any possible trickery weakens the effect. However, on several occasions I have noticed certain wise persons examining it quietly. This is all the preparation for Lady Number Two's writing; and I now proceed to prepare the third writing, which when prepared I read as the first reading.

I now bring from my drawer a small card about one-thirty-second of an inch in thickness, red on one side and white on the other. These are cut from ordinary cardboard, obtainable at any printing office. I ask some gentleman whom I regard as particularly intelligent, or as hard to deceive, to kindly take his seat in the center of the front end of the front parlor.

I ask him to write across the card the name of some great man, statesman, or politician, any one of whom he can think, living or dead; only I ask him to write the name plainly in a bold hand, and to be very careful that no one sees what he writes. I also give him some article, it makes no difference what, (usually one of the slates used in the "Spirit Dictionary" trick,) on which to place the card while writing. I ask him when through to turn the card over face downward on the slate, turning it over *towards himself* and not towards the audience, as otherwise they might see the writing. This he does. While he is preparing this card I return to the rear parlor to the drawer to get some

other articles, and pay no attention to him until the card is written and turned over, and until he informs me of that fact.

I now come forward with an envelope into which the card will fit nicely; and presenting it to him open, flap side toward him and face downward, I ask him to insert the card himself, keeping the writing downward while so doing. I merely ask the privilege of touching the card with the tip of my finger as he is passing it into the envelope.

I next request him to seal the envelope himself, to place it on the slate sealed side upward, and to make certain marks across the sealed parts so that he can tell if I should tamper with the same. I now bring forward a seal and some sealing wax. I give him the seal previously moistened, and proceed to melt the wax, allowing it to drop on the center of the envelope. At the same time I request him to seal the envelope doubly, and to examine the seals so thoroughly that there can be no possibility of substitution. When all is prepared I am ready to begin the readings.

### III.

I NOW TAKE the gentleman's envelope in the tips of my fingers; and, stepping to the center table of the second parlor, I lean it against the skull previously mentioned, so that the wax seal faces the audience, while all is in the brightest light.

I instantly return to the front parlor; and, seating myself facing the spectators, I pay no attention to the sealed envelope resting against the skull in the back parlor. This requires not over two seconds of time, there being no pause whatever in my movements.

I proceed to make passes over my own face in a manner similar to those which the early mesmerists made over their subjects. I simulate considerable nervousness, allow my shoulders to be convulsed a time or two, gaze toward the ceiling as if looking into infinity, and begin my attempt to read. I first request the writer not to answer any questions I may ask, except those I may ask him directly. This prevents him from answering the first questions I ask and which I am directing to some unseen being.

I hold my hand to my ear, *à la* Schlossenger. Allowing it to tremble violently, I ask the unseen spirits if the name written on the card is the name of a person living or dead? I apparently hear an answer which the spectators

do not hear, for I turn to the writer and with great solemnity inform him that he has written the name of one who is now dead. This of course is supposing that he did write the name of a dead person. If the person should happen to be living, I with the same solemnity announce that fact to him.

Let us now suppose that the name written is that of Aaron Burr. I again turn to the spirits and ask if the person whose name is written died more than one thousand years ago. When they answer me I turn to the writer informing him that the person whose name he has written died less than one thousand years ago. I then ask the spirits if this man died in the last five hundred years and get the answer that he died in the last century. This I also give in a dramatic manner. I then say, while gazing into emptiness, "I see before me a man who is 'small in stature and slight in figure, but with a face finely cut and almost classic in its mold.' He wears no beard, his hair is brushed back from over a wide forehead, and he regards me with a pair of beautiful eyes. There is a look of ineffable sadness on his face, as if there were something he would have undone. He wears a coat of black velvet, with black velvet knee breeches, black silk stockings and shoes with silver buckles. I see behind him a beautiful lady who regards him with a look of infinite tenderness and pity. She appears to be a daughter."

The effect of this is very fine, as the writer corroborates my statements, or else states that he himself is not familiar with the personal appearance of the one whose name he has written.

I now attempt to read the writing. I begin by looking into space and repeating the letters of the alphabet. I finally get the letter A. I repeat the process. When about to get the second letter a, and while making great efforts to get it and seeming rather uncertain, I request the writer to be so kind as to step to the table and bring his envelope and hold it on the top of my head. This he does, while I close my eyes, and proceed with slight effort to read the complete name.

I offer him a knife and ask him to open the envelope and see if his card is still within untouched, which of course it is. I also ask him to examine the seal and the envelope, and to hold the same close to the light and see if it is possible to read the writing through the envelope. This he and the spectators do, and of course find everything as it should be and the writing perfectly invisible. When he returns the envelope to me, I offer it to him to keep as a souvenir, which generally is accepted gladly by him.

I am now ready to read the writing of Lady Number One and answer the

question she has written. I ask her if she still has concealed about her the writing which she sealed and retained herself. She replies in the affirmative. I then ask her if any one in the world knows what she has written. Upon her informing me that no one knows, and of the impossibility of such a thing being the case, I ask her what she will think if I can now succeed in reading her question without going near her, while she retains the same in her own pocket. The spectators generally express their incredulity as to the possibility of such a proceeding, upon which I inform them that I will make the effort.

I ask the lady, in order to remove the idea of mind-reading or telepathy, to keep her mind entirely off what she has written. I then make the second effort, assuming an air of great earnestness. I slowly read her question letter by letter, and give a full and minute description of the writing, the style of letters used and any peculiarities of any of the letters. The effect of this can well be imagined.

I now ask her to open her envelope, to examine it carefully and see if I am correct, and to exhibit the same to the spectators. This she does, while I stand at a distance repeating the peculiarities of the strokes of the letters, etc., for their verification. I never look at the writing at all even after reading it. I simply pay no attention to it, as my mysterious power of vision is now superior to the sight of mortal eyes.

I now tell Lady Number Two to continue to keep her writing concealed, and that I will use it shortly; whereupon I frequently have a selection of music; or if not, I allow the spectators a minute or two of time in which to consider and talk over what they have just seen.

I am now ready to produce a spirit message for Lady Number Two, signed by the name which is written below her question on her concealed paper; and to read and answer her question.

I arrange a table just inside the back parlor, sidewise to the spectators, placing a chair on each side of the table and two slates on the table. I ask Lady Number Two to come forward, take the chair next the audience and to clean the slates. As she does this I seat myself at the opposite side of the table.

As soon as she cleans them, we place the slates under the table; and I ask her to hold them while I place my hands on the table top. In a few moments, under my instructions, she brings from under the table the slates, on which is a fine spirit message of philosophical import, to which is signed the dead person's name which she has written on the sheet of paper and which she still

retains sealed. The effect of this upon her, and upon her friends who may have known this person, is very great; especially as it is some one of whom I have never heard. I have very frequently known some of the spectators, who happened to be acquainted with the person whose name is signed to the message, to identify the writing and sometimes to identify the language as that of the dead person.

I next, with some little effort, proceed mentally to read her question, minutely describing the writing, etc. I then ask her to bring out the envelope, exhibit the writing and verify my statements, which she does. I now proceed to answer her question; and if I have not previously done so, to answer the question of Lady Number One. Let us suppose the question asked is, "Will I ever be wealthy?" I first consult the "Mystic Oracle of the Crystal Spheres." I place on the table a highly polished crystal globe three inches in diameter, such as is used for experiments in "Crystal Gazing." This globe is supported by a bronze griffon. I have the lady gaze into the globe while I intently look into it from the opposite side. I then with solemnity inform her that she will never be wealthy but that she will be "well-to-do."

I assure my readers that the effect of this all is just as great as if I really performed by some occult power that which in reality I have but performed by trickery of the simplest kind. I would have no trouble in passing it off on the majority of my spectators as the work entirely of spirits. The experiments are so superior to those usually employed by mediums, that the audience is simply confounded. Also, there is abundant opportunity after reading the dead statesman's name, to call him up in the manner so common with mediums and give the audience an elaborate message from him, which will have much weight with them, owing to the manner in which his spirit has been summoned from the land of shadows. However, I will say that while I use these things in the manner outlined, after all is over I assure my audience that it is not spirit power which I use; but I do not tell them it is trickery, as that would detract from the effect. I simply let them speculate and think what they please; and I not infrequently find them determined, notwithstanding my statement to the contrary, to believe that it is the work of spirits, or else some occult power which I possess. I have had intelligent and wealthy business men of Omaha and other places question me, afterwards, about the apparently marvelous power which they seem to think I possess.

At one time I gave to the sisters of a Catholic school, or convent, one of my entertainments. I had the Mother Superior write and seal the great man's

name. The name she wrote was "Hannibal," which of course I read for them very successfully. I was some time afterwards informed, privately, that one of the sisters ever after insisted that I was in league with His Satanic Majesty. This was notwithstanding the fact that in this particular instance I had assured them that it was nothing but trickery. I knew the teachings of the Roman Church in regard to anything like sorcery, or necromancy, or even modern spiritualism; and not desiring to give offense, I stated in advance that I was merely illustrating what might be done by trickery and how good people might be imposed upon by impostors. I stated that such things were never done by spirit power; and the Mother Superior remarked that she was sure, if spirits did such things, they were only "evil spirits." In this case I only gave the single reading of the statesman's name as described above. I do not know what would have been the result, had I performed the complete combination experiment, with all the dramatic play I usually employ.

The description given above is the exact appearance of the experiments as seen by the audience. This is exactly what the spectators see or think they see; and it is all that any of them do see. However, things are not always just what they appear to be.

#### IV.

AND NOW TO TEAR down the structure I have erected—to shatter the idols, and return from the romantic land of mystery to the commonplace things of earth.

I will proceed to explain the principles and the methods I really employ in reading these writings. The readers of this article who desire to fully grasp the explanations I am about to give should either memorize the description of the experiments, or else refer to each one separately when reading the explanation of that particular one.

I will give the explanation of the different tricks as far as I am at liberty to do so, and in the order in which I read them. I will explain each one separately beginning with the reading of the statesman's name, which was the third writing in the preparation.

The reader will remember that after this envelope is properly sealed with wax, I take it in my fingers and carry it to the table in the back parlor, and lean it against the skull. The principle used consists in this instance in

rendering the envelope temporarily transparent, and instantly reading the writing in it unseen by the spectators, while on my way to the table.

I use, for this, "Colonial Spirits," which is a kind of odorless wood alcohol manufactured in this country. If a sponge saturated with this be rubbed across any piece of paper, it is rendered instantly transparent, as soon as moistened; and any writing under it can be easily read. In a few moments the alcohol evaporates, and the transparent condition of the paper disappears. This principle has been known for some time in the world of magic, but not in the particular way in which I use it; and therefore it has not usually been worked so successfully.

I accomplish my object in the following manner. I have in the drawer with my paraphernalia a half ounce round tin box such as druggists use for vaseline and similar articles. I have crowded into this box a small silk sponge which fills it a little above the edges like an envelope moistener. I have soldered to the bottom of this box on the outside, a circular disk of tin for the purpose of "palming." This box I prepare in advance just before the experiment by saturating the sponge in it with colonial spirits. I leave the lid on the box to prevent evaporation until I am ready for it.

When I have the envelope sealed with wax, I return the sealing wax and the seal to the drawer in the writing desk; and this gives me the opportunity to palm and go forward with the box containing the saturated sponge. I allow my right hand, which contains it, to hang carelessly against my right side. This effectually conceals it, and I avoid looking toward my right hand in any manner. I advance leisurely to the writer and ask him if he is sure he can be certain of the identity of the wax seal, and if he could tell if the same should be broken. I now take the envelope from him with my left hand, and turn around, carrying it to the table. On the way, as soon as the envelope is out of the angle of view of the spectators, I raise my right hand, and, passing the sponge over the face of the envelope a couple of times, quickly read the name under the bright light of a gasoline pressure lamp with which for such occasions I have my parlor lighted.

Having the writer choose the name of a statesman or some great man, greatly facilitates the reading; as the names written are usually so familiar that the merest glance is sufficient to read them. I then, as soon as I reach the table, turn half around so that my left side faces the audience; and with my left hand still holding the envelope with the seal towards the spectators, I stand it on the table against the skull, asking the spectators if they can plainly

see the seal from there.

The envelope has only been out of the view of the spectators a fraction over a second; yet I now know the name on the card. Meanwhile, with the right hand I secretly drop the moistener into my right coat pocket, or preferably into a small bag at the back of the table behind the skull. If I use the bag at the back of the table, I have it suspended open from a pivoted wire, so that I can quickly swing it under the table out of view with the fingers of my right hand. This I do, after dropping the moistener into it; and at the same time with the left hand I place the envelope against the skull, and direct the attention of the spectators to the seal by my discourse, and by my looks. I in no way look toward my right hand. Swinging the cloth bag under the table, makes it safe for the writer of the name to go to the table and get the envelope when I request him to do so. I make all of my movement leisurely, throughout the entire experiment; as by so doing I can have a little more time when walking to the table with the envelope, and yet not attract the attention of the spectators to this fact.

For the dramatic play, it is necessary to have a previous knowledge of the personal appearance and history of the great men of the country whose names are most liable to be written. The time required in the dramatic play before the reading allows the alcohol to thoroughly dry; so that there is no trace of it when the writer of the name goes to the table after it. By using colonial spirits there is no odor noticeable. It is safe to say that in a few seconds after the sponge is passed over it, the moistened side of the envelope could be turned towards the audience; and nothing would be detected, as the alcohol evaporates so quickly. I use a small envelope of wove paper of sufficient thickness to effectually conceal the writing in the strongest light. I found it necessary to use a card, the white side of which is not glazed and which has a slightly dirty color; as otherwise the writing would be slightly visible through the envelope, and thus mar the effect of the experiment. If a thicker envelope is used, a whiter card may be used also; but a thick envelope is not rendered so transparent as a thinner one. I use two styles of envelopes,— a thin one where the lights are not strong, and a thicker one if the lights are strong. I like to use stationery that can afterwards be inspected by daylight: so, therefore, at my home I use a gasoline pressure lamp on such occasions, as a strong light in the room permits the use of an envelope of sufficient thickness. I also select a style of envelope, that does not expand or pucker from the effects of the alcohol, and thus arouse suspicion.

When I have the writer turn the card over on the slate *towards himself* and not towards the spectators, this is in reality to insure having the writing right side up when I afterwards pass the moistener over the envelope. I present the envelope to him open, flap side towards himself, face downward, and hold it until he has started the card into it. When I ask permission to merely touch the card on its way into the envelope with the tip of my finger, I do this to insure the card going into the envelope with the writing towards the front side. When I afterwards pick up the envelope I notice which is the flap he has just sealed, and I have this flap uppermost. This brings the writing right side up in my hand, and saves the time necessary to turn the envelope when reading it.

I furnish the writer with a large-leaded soft lead pencil, not too sharp, to write with, though any pencil will do. However, a pencil of above description makes the writing plainer and in a larger hand, which is of considerable assistance in reading the writing so quickly. The reader will remember, that I also request the writer to write the name in a bold hand plainly.

Should one reach the table before succeeding in reading the name, it were better to make a slight pause than to fail with the trick. However, after a few trials this will never happen.

Immediately after leaning the envelope against the skull, I return to the front parlor and proceed with the readings as given in the description of the appearance of the experiments.

While considerable time is required in reading this article, much less time is required in giving the readings. Only fifteen or twenty minutes is required, for the entire combination experiment.

The principle of using odorless alcohol on a sponge has been published before, but as heretofore described I have never found the trick practicable. As furnished by the vendor, the instructions are for the performer to prepare, or have his assistant prepare, several of these envelopes; and have them placed flat on a table, at which the performer seats himself. He now partly closes his eyes; but in reality he can see the envelopes all the time. Then he slowly passes the hand with the sponge over the different envelopes, reading aloud the writing therein. It is intended to convey the idea to the spectators that by passing the hand over the envelopes the performer gets *en rapport* with them. This method is obviously for the stage only, as in a parlor the spectators could see the effect of the alcohol. I have never found this method very practicable; and I assure my readers that in the method I have described,

less time is taken up and a much finer effect obtained. It is also much more certain of success, and leaves the spectators absolutely in the dark as to the method employed.

I have frequently performed these readings in audiences where are persons who have seen me perform them before; and in such cases they invariably inform me that they are more mystified than they were in the first place.

The secrets of the remaining experiments, so far as I know, have never been given to the public. The principle that is used in the production of each of them is entirely different; therefore, if a spectator should ever surmise the principle used in one of them, the moment he should try to explain the others by it, he would see that it would not work; and he would conclude that he was entirely wrong.

And now in regard to the principle which I use in reading the writing of Lady Number One, I am sorry to say I must here disappoint my reader. I am under a promise to the dealer not to reveal this secret and can not do so. Those who desire to use it, however, can obtain it from George L. Williams & Co., 7145 Champlain Ave., Chicago, 111. I regard this as one of the best tricks extant, and regret my inability to give its secret to my readers.

After the preparation of the writing for Lady Number One, I immediately go ahead with the preparation for Lady Number Two. I will now give the secret of this reading as completely as my promise permits me to do.

In this experiment the secret lies in getting an impression of the writing, but *not* a carbon impression. This impression can not be seen by the eye at all, but has to be "developed" afterwards. This is really a very fine idea and was originally intended for professional mediums to use in tests with their subjects at private sittings. The tablet is apparently unprepared and would stand the most thorough inspection, yet there is a preparation.

I will first describe the preparation of the tablet, and then I will describe how I obtain possession of it and how I develop the writing.

I use for this experiment a finely finished and highly glazed paper. I take one sheet of it and prepare one side of it by rubbing it over thoroughly with a material common enough to be within every one's reach; but the vendor of tricks might deem it a violation of my promise if I were to give its name, although the secret to this part of the trick has been well known for some time, and has even been published. It leaves a perfectly smooth surface. Only one in the secret could discover that there is a preparation. Even I am

frequently puzzled to tell which is the prepared side, and can only do so by holding it so that the light strikes it at the proper angle.

This sheet is now to be placed on the tablet, prepared side down; but, before doing so, I first touch the two corners of the top two sheets of paper on the tablet with library paste. I do this so that they will adhere to each other a trifle, as this prevents the lady from tearing off by accident the sheet which bears the record, when afterwards she tears off the prepared sheet bearing her question.

I now place the prepared sheet in position, prepared side down, and paste the top in position with white library paste. However, I allow this sheet to protrude at the bottom about one-thirty-second of an inch. This is to make it so easy for the lady to get hold of it, that she will be in no danger of tearing off more than the one. Of course, when she writes, the writing is transferred to the second sheet, *but it is entirely invisible*.

After she has written, I direct her to lay the tablet on a table which is convenient; and it apparently lies there throughout the evening. This is the point where I begin the preparation of the writing of the statesman's name, immediately thereafter giving the first two readings. I, only *after the first two readings* obtain possession of this tablet and develop the writing.

I do it in this manner. I bring forward two slates, which I shall soon use in the slate writing experiment, and leave them on the center table in the front parlor. Under one is a duplicate tablet, which I also leave on the table, unnoticed by the spectators. I remove the slates used in the dictionary trick, carrying away under one of them the original tablet. Meanwhile, the spectators are deeply engaged in a discussion of the two readings I have just given them; and I inform Lady Number Two that I will read her question a little later, and for her to keep it in her possession until I have done so.

I now go to other apartments for a few moments to develop the record. I use for a holder for the sheet of paper while working with it, the frame of a slate of proper size with the slate portion removed. I fasten the sheet in position on this frame with a couple of pins, using care to keep the side with the record on it upwards; because if it gets turned over, I can in no way discover the fact until it is too late.

The writing may be developed in several ways; the best way and the one I generally use, I can not reveal on account of my promise of secrecy to the firm before referred to. I will, however, give a method which is well known to many mediums, and which has been used by them for a number of years.

I merely dust a little powdered plumbago, or a little lampblack on to the sheet of paper, shake it around and then turn it over a vessel and dust it off by striking the paper very lightly with my finger nail. The writing will appear on the sheet plainly and may be read. The method furnished by the above named firm, however, is much superior to this method.

I quickly memorize the question; and on a slate close at hand, where I have a message already prepared, I sign the name of the dead person. This slate is an exact duplicate in appearance, of the two slates which were left on the table in the front parlor.

I now proceed to prepare the Spirit Slate experiment, and give the final reading; but before describing this, which is the finest slate trick of which I know, I will give a little additional information relating to the last reading experiment.

I was told to use a tablet with every sheet prepared, but I first prepared only every alternate sheet and left the rest unprepared. This worked nicely; but as soon as the tablet was used a few times, I found that all the questions that had previously been written on the tablet were copied for several sheets down. This caused so many words to appear, that I was compelled to discard all prepared sheets, excepting one, as I have above described. A tablet could be prepared with two prepared sheets on top and an unprepared sheet between them. There would then be two impressions on unprepared sheets in the tablet, but it would be necessary to discard all these top sheets after each reading.

This trick, however, was originally intended for the use of professional mediums at private sittings with a single person. In such cases, after the sitter has written and sealed his question, he is directed to proceed to the mantel and clean and examine some slates. While he is doing so, the medium takes the tablet from the table and places the same quickly in a large pocket on the inside of his coat, taking therefrom and leaving on the table a duplicate. He then advances to the sitter and begins a lecture, when his doorbell rings. As his servant fails to answer the bell the medium excuses himself for a moment, and attends to the matter himself, engaging in a discussion with the servant while out, for not properly attending to the door. This he does within hearing of the sitter. Meanwhile he is rapidly developing and reading the record.

This method I never liked, as it requires the assistance of another person. I much prefer the method I have outlined.

And now for the Spirit Slate Message. I use three slates, but the

spectators never see more than two of them at one time. I make an exchange of one of the slates, unknown to the sitter or spectators. The table is an ordinary one, and I do not conceal the prepared slate on the person. The secret lies in the chair I sit on. The slate is concealed under the seat on a shelf. Just above this shelf is another shelf onto which I slip the unprepared slate when I make the exchange. These shelves can not be seen as the chair is one of the variety known as "box seat." One of the sides, the right one, can be raised up to admit the hand to the shelves. This side is hung on hinges at the top, but they can not be seen.

I prepare the chair as follows: I get a nicely finished, box seat, oak, dining chair. I remove the cane seat and replace it with a beautiful leather cobbler seat. This renders what is underneath invisible. I now, with a fine-tooth saw, neatly saw the ends of the box strip underneath the right side of the seat, where they enter the legs of the chair. I remove this strip, which is some two inches wide. It is too thick; so with a saw I split the piece lengthwise, from end to end, so as to leave it only about one-half inch thick. It remains, of course, full two inches wide, and I am careful not to mar the finish.

I hinge it back in place with three small hinges, at its top, so that I can raise and lower it like a trap door while sitting on the chair. By screwing the hinges on a mere trifle out of line, the strip will move stiffly, and will remain in any position in which it may be left. I now place two, thin padded shelves under the seat, one above the other. These are concealed when the side piece is down, but when it is up they are of course visible and the right hand can easily reach them. As the strip is now so thin it offers no obstruction when up, to getting at the shelves and making the exchange of slates.

I have this chair in the room adjoining the back parlor. As soon as I have developed and read Lady Number Two's writing, I sign the message as stated before, and slip this prepared slate onto the bottom shelf of the chair, message side up. I lower the side piece and all is ready.

I next place an ordinary table sidewise to the spectators, but just inside the back parlor. There is a cover on this table which hangs down some six inches on the side next the audience, and somewhat less on my side. I place the prepared chair with its right side towards the table, at the side of the table away from the spectators. I have in the front parlor another chair just like mine, except it is unprepared. I place this chair for the lady with its left side towards the table, and at the side of the table which faces the spectators.

I place on this table the two slates which I have previously placed on the

table in the front parlor. I ask Lady Number Two to be seated at this table. This effectually conceals from her view and from the spectators, the portion of my person and the prepared chair that are below the table top. We thus both sit sidewise to the table, and face the same direction. I ask her to clean the slates; and just as she is finishing the second slate, I take the first one in my right hand and apparently place it under the table.

Now I have just raised the trap of the chair while she was cleaning the first slate; so, as I bring this slate below the table top, I slip it on the top shelf of the chair silently, quickly drawing out the prepared slate in its place, and lowering the side piece of the chair. I immediately bring the prepared slate up under the table, requesting her at the same time to place her slate under the table with her right hand. Upon her doing so, I immediately ask her to take her other hand and hold my slate also. I instantly withdraw my right hand. This all requires but a moment and she has soon forgotten that I placed one of the slates under the table.

Sometimes I take a small slate pencil and quickly place it on the slates, instantly withdrawing my hand. I now place my hands on the table top, and gradually turn, facing the table. I call on the spectators to come forward and watch the experiment, and the trick is practically done.

At the proper time I direct the lady to bring out the slates, which she does, producing the message. After the effect of this is over, I mentally read her question on the slip of concealed paper; then I direct her to produce the envelope, open it and verify all. After this I bring forward the crystal globe and answer the questions as before described.

After all is completed, I take the cover off the table and turn it over to the view of the spectators, that they may see that there is no trickery, but that the table is an ordinary one. I also offer my person for examination that they may be convinced that nothing is concealed about me. I have never yet had any one suspect the innocent looking chair.

I have performed many experiments in magic and sleight-of-hand, and I have seen the best work of this class in the country; and I can conscientiously assure the readers of this article that I have never seen one experiment of this class, the effect of which could in any way begin to compare with the effect of the experiments I have just described. This is especially true among the more intelligent class of persons, who may regard the very best work in magic as but the result of practice; but who insist on regarding this as something else; as something at least bordering on the occult, and as

something very rare.

## Mediumistic Séances: correspondence with an inquirer



David P. Abbott

*The Open Court*, edited by Paul Carus

October 1906, Vol. XX (No. 10), No. 605, pg. 577-586

LETTER TO MR. ABBOTT.

DEAR SIR:

I had the pleasure, some time ago, of reading an article of yours in *The Open Court* on "Mediumistic Phenomena." Of the following which I submit to you, I feel that I will be satisfied with the explanations you may make. I am not a spiritualist, but while visiting some friends in Kansas City, recently, who *are* spiritualists, I was invited to attend a "trumpet" séance given at a private house. Out of curiosity I attended. The séance was held in an unfurnished back room up stairs. All the room contained was a row of chairs around the wall. In the center on the floor was a small rug on which stood a large trumpet and some flowers. A lady clairvoyant from Topeka conducted the séance. In the circle were believers and unbelievers. We were seated around the room with feet touching. Lights were put out and we were in black darkness. They said the medium was controlled by an Irish spirit. Presently the Irish spirit spoke through the trumpet giving us a welcome greeting. After this each one in turn was spoken to by supposed dead relatives.

When it came to my turn, a sister who has been dead many years spoke

her name and talked to me. (No one in the circle knew anything about me except a sister-in-law who was with me.) I had not been thinking of this sister, but of others whom it might be possible would appear, and my sister-in-law said, *she* had not. I have no faith in it all, but would like your explanation, if you will be kind enough to favor me with it. I would like you to explain another thing. My sister-in-law told me she had seen her husband, who died about a year ago. She said she saw him as plainly as she ever did in life: that he came through the front door, went right up to her, spoke a few words and disappeared. This she declares to be true.

I will tell you of another instance. A daughter of the sister-in-law of whom I have spoken, when quite a little girl, saw my mother who had died some time before. She went up-stairs and in one of the rooms she saw my mother sitting in a rocking-chair. She ran screaming down-stairs, almost frightened to death. At another time she saw her standing by the stove in the room. This all seems very strange to me, but I have no reason to doubt their word.

Very respectfully,

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### REPLY.

DEAR MADAM:

Your letter is received. It is hard to explain something some one else has seen; when, to do so correctly, one should have been present to personally observe all the little details, for trickery.

I will say that no one would be more happy than I were it possible to prove personal immortality in this manner; yet I do not wish to be deceived and to believe that which is not true. Therefore, I always look for fraud or trickery in manifestations of this nature. I will further add that all my life I have been looking for things of this kind, and have never yet been able to see one little thing that was genuine. Always, when I have been present, I have found a trick.

I have attended but one "Trumpet Séance," which was some eight or ten years ago in Lincoln, Nebr. This was given at the home of a lady where the medium stopped; and as the family was poor, the lady was glad to have the

medium's séances a success, so that she might receive the proper financial remuneration for his board.

The room was bare of furniture, and the guests were seated around the room on chairs holding each other's hands. The medium sat in this circle, and the trumpet stood in the center of the circle.

As soon as the lights were out the trumpet apparently floated into the air, and from its mouth we were greeted by an "Irish Spirit." This spirit attempted to be a comedian; but his brogue was unnatural, and his wit was so poor that I felt ashamed for the medium. It, however, seemed to satisfy the majority of the sitters, who appeared to be possessed of only very ordinary mental powers.

Tests were given to various persons present; but as no one present knew anything about me, I, of course, received no test.

I was satisfied that the medium held the trumpet to his mouth and did the talking. I knew that by pointing it rapidly in different directions, the voice would appear to come from the various positions occupied by the bell of the trumpet; and the spirit would thus appear to change places rapidly over our heads.

I felt certain that the persons sitting on each side of the medium were his confederates, and that they held the hands of the ones next to them; but, of course, released the medium's hands so that he could handle the trumpet.

I was inclined to think that there were a goodly number of confederates in the circle, who probably shared in the proceeds of the séance; for I found the persons next to me would not let my hands loose for even an instant. I felt sure that confederates took possession of all strangers, and saw to it that their hands were not released; and thus they prevented accidents.

To me it seemed merely a very cheap and poor trick. I have never fancied any trick where the lights had to be put out. It requires too little skill to perform such tricks. I have always felt that if the spirits of the departed could return to us mortals, they would not require a tin horn to talk through, and the entire absence of light-waves in the room. To me this all savors too much of charlatanism, and that of the cheapest kind.

Some time after I attended this séance, I had some financial dealings with the daughter of the lady at whose home this medium had boarded. I told the daughter what I had concluded in regard to the matter, and she confessed that I was right in every particular. I thus verified all my suspicions in the case. This lady told me that there was money in this business and that she intended

going into the profession. This she did soon thereafter, advertising as a clairvoyant and trance medium. I understand that she has become quite successful in the business.

There is one statement in your letter that is entitled to considerable more consideration than ordinary work of this kind. This is the statement of the appearance of your dead sister's voice, when no one in the room knew of this sister except your sister-in-law who was with you. In regard to this I cannot say positively how the medium obtained the necessary information in your particular case; but I do know the methods employed in securing such information by nearly all the first-class professional mediums who are traveling over the country.

Each medium keeps a record of all information obtained in a book for that purpose. All questions asked by any persons at any of the séances, are catalogued alphabetically in this book under the names of the persons asking them. Also the medium catalogues alphabetically any other information he may be able to obtain about any of the persons who attend spiritualist meetings. When visiting with the members and gossiping the medium quietly "pumps" each person about other members. As soon as the medium is alone all this information is catalogued in this book. Children are questioned adroitly about their own relatives, and about those of their neighbors and friends; and all this is added to the store of information.

Graveyards are visited and the secrets of the tombs catalogued. Also, the old files of the daily papers are searched for information relating to deaths and marriages; and, by all these ways, in time the book contains many tests of value to a medium. When this medium leaves town, the book (or a copy) is passed on to the next medium, who enters town equipped with all the information previously gathered. Professional mediums are generally pretty well known to each other, although for obvious reasons they pretend not to be.

Some of the better grade of mediums have an advance person, who, in the guise of an agent of some kind, visits the proper families. During the time he is in each home, he asks for a drink of water; and while the lady is getting it, he studies the family Bible and the album, or questions the children about such matters as will be of use to the medium who will soon follow. In all of these manners much information is secured in the course of time. It is not unusual for a good medium to enter town with over a hundred good tests for the citizens there.

In addition to the above there are certain members of each spiritualistic community who make a business of acting as confederates for mediums. They usually receive pay for their services. You would be surprised were you once behind the scenes, and a performer, to know how many apparently respectable persons at a séance are secretly confederates of the medium. These confederates make it their business to learn all they can of the family history of their neighbors, or of any friends or relatives visiting their neighbors ; which information is at once conveyed to the medium, and the same properly catalogued.

You would think that respectable persons would not take part in fraud in such matters; but they get into it gradually, and really come to enjoy it. I am personally acquainted with a certain sleight-of-hand performer in this city, who has for years served as a confederate for most of the mediums visiting this place. He tells me that he enjoyed it at first, but being so well versed in tricks, his services were of so much value to mediums that they were after him to help them out continually. This required so much of his time that he has of late entirely given up this work and now refuses to attend séances at all.

In addition to these methods of obtaining information, most members are so anxious to see some one converted, that what information they possess is not guarded from the medium very closely. In fact, they seem in many cases to be trying to help the medium out. They are all so anxious to see their medium succeed; and are very quick to feel proud of him, when such tests are given.

There can be little doubt but that the information about your dead sister was obtained in some of these manners from your sister-in-law or her family, especially if she has children. No doubt some confederate has heard her mention your dead sister's name, in some time past. This may have escaped your relative's memory. Or, if she is a believer, she has undoubtedly attended other séances, and asked questions, usually written ones. If so, the mediums may have been in possession of the proper information for some considerable time.

I feel certain that this information was gained in some such manner; and while you may doubt this explanation, I feel that were I to go there and begin operating as a medium, the confederates would soon make themselves known to me; and that I could quickly learn where the medium got her information in your case.

You thought you were a stranger; but you may rest assured that you were known as soon as you entered the room, and that a test was planned for you that would make a sensation. And they probably hoped also to make a convert.

It is probable that your dead sister bore the same relation to your sister-in-law that you do. If this be the case, and she being dead, your sister-in-law would have been almost certain at some meeting some time, to have asked some question, which, within its lines, conveyed the information that there was such a person then dead.

It is a great advantage to mediums to be able to give tests of this character; the effect being so great on those present and so convincing, it adds greatly to the medium's reputation, as well as to his finances, to be able to give such tests. As a result, a medium is always on the lookout for such information; and makes securing it his principal employment when not engaged at the regular work. You may rest assured that a medium will not hesitate to use such information in the manner you have outlined, no matter how he may have come into possession of it.

Frequently, when such tests are given, the ones receiving them are so taken by surprise and so greatly impressed, owing to their affection for the departed and their longing to feel that the departed still exists as an individual or unit, that they imagine afterwards that they noticed a resemblance in the voice, to that of their dear one. I do not know whether or not you noticed such a resemblance to your sister's voice.

There are dealers who sell to mediums secrets which give them instructions for performing their work. I have bought many such secrets myself, paying a large price for them; and I can assure you that I know what I am talking about in this instance.

The fact that dealers in such secrets can follow the business successfully, is proof that they receive sufficient patronage to support it, and this patronage comes almost entirely from professional mediums.

I could recall to you many instances of fraudulent mediums, had I time and space to do so. I hope at a future time to publish in *The Open Court* another article, describing the work of some of the best mediums. If ever you come to Omaha, I should be pleased to make your acquaintance: and would personally illustrate to you what may be accomplished by trickery in this field.

As to the apparitions which your sister-in-law and her daughter claim to

have seen, there are but three solutions possible.

First: There is the solution that the statement is not true; but as you assure me you have every confidence in their truth, I will not consider this solution.

Second and Third: We have the solutions either that they did see what they claim to have seen objectively: or that they imagine that they did, but really saw it subjectively. There is no professional medium at work here, and consequently no trickery to explain.

If the doctrine of scientific men (as for instance set forth in Dr. Carus's *Soul of Man*) be correct, each object viewed throughout life leaves an impression in our brain-structures. When such object is first viewed, the form of the outside motions of the ether (lightwaves) is transferred to the proper position within the brain by the mechanism of the nervous system. Here this produces a commotion and as a result this commotion leaves a "trace" which is preserved in the brain structure.

When such trace is being formed, the subject experiences subjectively a sensation which he identifies with the outside object producing it. The fact is the formal features of the outside object have been transferred to, or reproduced in, the sensation. When next the same object is viewed, the same nerve energy passes along the same channels into the same trace and stimulates or excites it again as was done in the first instance. During this process the subject again experiences the same sensation as was experienced in the first instance. The subject recognizes the sensation to be the same as the first one experienced, and naturally attributes it to the same outside cause.

If, now, this particular trace in the brain structure be artificially excited or stimulated by any means, the subject will experience the original sensation, and will perceive the object that originally formed such a trace. The perception will be just as real to the subject as was the original perception, or as it would be if the exciting cause were the original object outside. The original object could not produce a perception more real to the subject, because it could only excite or stimulate the same trace in the same manner; and the subject would have no means to distinguish between two identical impressions, although produced by different causes.

It is due to such local excitements and stimulations that we see objects in our sleep, just as real as if they existed objectively in the positions in which our perceptions picture them.

Now, if, from any cause, a highly-strung, sensitive, or nervous person, stimulate or excite any particular trace in the brain structure, he will see

subjectively but as perfectly real, the original object that formed this trace. Such person is most liable to excite in this way that portion of the brain wherein is the image of some dear one on whom the mind has been dwelling too intently; and which has thus been overworked, so that the mechanism of this particular part of the sentient substance has been weakened and impaired.

If we conclude that your relatives really saw these dead persons objectively, this can only mean that these dead persons were really present in this room. Now, if they were clothed as in life, we must also conclude that the clothing of persons as well as their spiritual part, is immortal. As Ingersol said, we must conclude that clothing has ghosts. But if we accept the theory of a mere subjective apparition or illusion, caused by a local excitement in the brain structures, we should naturally expect the images to be clothed as in life.

The question is, which do you regard as most probable: that your relatives really saw the spiritual part of two beings objectively—that is, the part that is not material, and that it had this material appearance—or that they saw a mere subjective apparition within their own brains? I should prefer the subjective theory.

I remain, dear madam, yours for truth,  
David P. Abbott.

### ANOTHER LETTER OF MR. ABBOTT.

DEAR MADAM:

Since writing my former letter, it has been my good fortune to come into possession of a little information that might interest you: accordingly, I write you this second letter.

There recently arrived in Omaha two "Celebrated Occultists." They hired a hall and some parlors, and began a series of public meetings, séances, and private readings. They had considerable difficulty in securing rooms, as the property owners were afraid of the reputation their property might acquire of being "haunted." Finally the papers came out with quite a sympathetic article in their behalf, with the result that they have started off very prosperously. There is an attendance of three or four hundred persons at their Sunday night meetings, while they have from thirty to forty at the parlor séances; and

during the day they are continually employed giving private readings.

I called on these mediums, and was surprised to find that the principal medium was the lady I formerly knew in Lincoln, Neb., to whom I referred in my former letter. She has been regularly in the profession for the past nine or ten years, has a good acquaintance with all the professional mediums, and comes here direct from Kansas City, Mo.

She recognized me at once, and seems to intend making a convert of me. She has evidently forgotten the little confession she made to me just before entering the profession.

I had several little confidential visits with her manager, and incidentally mentioned to him the name of a certain dealer in secrets for the use of mediums, stating that I was familiar with most of the effects of the kind, and was a performer of them. This seemed to "break the ice," and he was ready enough to give me any information he possessed about other mediums; at the same time claiming that his medium was, of course, genuine.

I find that the lady who gave the séance you wrote me about is an acquaintance of theirs. They know her well, and her name is Miss ——.

You will know if this be right and if my information be correct. He assured me that her mediumship is fraudulent, and informed me that she has an artificial hand which she frequently uses in her "Trumpet Séances." This hand is attached to the person, and can be bent into different positions. When she sits with the subject next to her, she takes hold of the subject's two hands with her left hand, and, incidentally, does not let loose of them during the séance. This is done after the lights are out. Then she, with her remaining hand, bends down the artificial hand (which has been concealed in her clothing), so that its fingers clasp the arm of the sitter. The subject can then inform the spectators at all times that the medium has both hands on his person. Meanwhile, the medium's right hand is free to grasp the light aluminum trumpet, and point it into different positions while she talks through it. She also, on occasions, uses a telescopic reaching-rod which can be carried in the pocket; but when extended it reaches a length of several feet, and enables her to float the trumpet on its end around the room over the heads of the spectators, giving them an occasional "bump," while her voice can be heard in the position where she sits. This is done in the same manner that guitars and other instruments (frequently self-playing) are sometimes floated over the heads of a circle of sitters by many mediums. This is done while they apparently hold the hands of one of the spectators at their side of the

circle.

I asked the manager how he considered that the medium got her information about your dead sister. He replied that she undoubtedly got it from what is known to certain members of the profession as the "Blue Book." This is the book I referred to before in which the tests are alphabetically catalogued for each town. He said that his medium never uses the "Blue Book" as her mediumship is genuine; but, however, he has in his possession a similar book of Kansas City. I asked if I could find the information about your dead sister in his book: but he said that possibly he did not have that particular item, although there could be no doubt but that it was contained in the book of the lady or of the noted medium Mr. ———, as these two have worked together to a considerable extent.

There can be no doubt but that all the questions that your relative ever asked the mediums in any of the Kansas City meetings, have been preserved and catalogued; and thus the information about your dead sister may have been obtained for some considerable time. Although the medium was a stranger to you, it is quite certain that you were known to the medium when the séance began. This is part of their business, and the knowledge of a suitable number of "tests" is a medium's stock in trade. I remain, dear madam,

Very truly yours,  
David P. Abbott.

### INQUIRER'S REPLY TO MR. ABBOTT.

DEAR SIR:

Your communication which I have just received deserves an early reply.

The name of the medium who held the séance was ———, the same as you mentioned. I was introduced to her but I never heard her given name. Of course, she must be the same one. I saw her and Mr. ——— at a Sunday evening meeting at their hall, so you are on the right track.

I do not see how any one can practice so much fraud in such serious matters.

Thanking you for your kindness,  
I am very respectfully.

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# A Puzzling Case

✱

A Statement of Dr. O. O. Burgess  
Commented Upon By David P. Abbott  
*The Open Court*, edited by Paul Carus  
January 1907, Vol. XXI (No. 1), No. 608, pg. 43-52

[We have received the description of a curious séance from Dr. O. O. Burgess who suggested that this "Puzzling Case" be submitted to Mr. David P. Abbott. While Mr. Abbott abstains from touching upon mediumistic manifestations which he has not witnessed himself, the comments which he has to make throw light on all performances of the same class. —Ed.]

## THE STATEMENT OF DR. BURGESS.

ONE WOULD HARDLY expect any proof of the future life to reach his ear in the dark through an aluminum horn. But if it was not what it purported to be, the puzzle is to know what else it could have been. Like your valued contributor, Mr. Abbott, I have usually had little trouble in arriving at a solution of such puzzles. But this one stumps me, and I should be glad to have him help me out, if he will kindly do so. For I am satisfied that the "spirit" in this exceptional case did not inhabit the medium's body, and Mr. Abbott seems as anxious as I am to be convinced that the spirits of departed friends may really live without any bodies whatever. It is a plain proposition that there can be no life without wear and tear upon the means of its

production. To believe in the future life, therefore, one must confess that he believes in something that utterly passes his comprehension. But we not only believe in many uncomprehended things but know them to be true. Just as we will believe in this trumpet affair—that it was done by spirit agency—unless some one can point out how else it could be done. There will be doubting Thomases in any event; but the writer, with seventy-five years of life behind him, cannot help feeling that he will soon be in a position to know the truth of the matter—or else to be lost in the depths of utter knownothingness.

The puzzling occurrence alluded to took place at a trumpet séance which, for precautionary reasons, was held at my own house; and the medium and members of my own household were the only persons present. None of those present except myself had ever seen the medium before, and I had simply met her once to make arrangements for her coming. She was an intelligent, middle-aged woman of somewhat reserved but agreeable manners, and she came alone to the séance bringing no paraphernalia with her except the trumpet. She never to my knowledge advertised herself or gave public séances.

She readily consented to be bound to her chair in such a way as to effectually prevent any movement of her hands or body, and the tapes she was bound with were finally tacked to the floor so that the chair itself could not be moved without detection. In fact, in the stillness of the room it would have been impossible for any person to move about without attracting attention. Having taken these precautions, it seemed a foregone conclusion that any trickery or collusion with confederates on the part of the medium was simply out of the question.

The trumpet occupied a position several feet in front of the medium, and after a tedious wait in the dark, we were finally startled by hearing it move. Shortly afterward faint whispers were heard through it which soon became so strong as to be partly or wholly understood. And now jocularity gave place to intense interest, and the anomalous character of the proceedings was lost sight of as the names of friend after friend were feebly given. No one could help sympathizing with them in their heroic efforts to be heard and understood. And not all of these efforts were made through the trumpet. Clearly some of the whisperings were outside and independent of it.

Not much of details will be necessary to my present purpose. Suffice it to say that, one after another, the trumpet came close to every one of us, giving the names of departed friends and relations most of whom had never been

within thousands of miles of San Francisco. But the marvel was how the trumpet could move about so rapidly and unerringly in the dark, caressing us gently on the hands, cheeks, top of the head and elsewhere, and occasionally dropping to the floor with a thud as though the force which sustained it was well nigh exhausted. Once, indeed, it fell near me with sufficient force to drive the two sections of it together so that I had to pull them apart again before the performance could be proceeded with. As a further illustration of the mysterious forces employed, raps, some of them loud and jarring, were occasionally heard upon the doors and walls of the room in various places, and once the tall doors of my bookcases were rapidly swung back and forth a number of times as if to make sure that it had attracted attention. No person in the room was in a position to have swung the doors or made the raps without leaving their seats, and thus attracting attention. Many remarkable things were said by the trumpet voices, but I pass them by as merely cumulative evidence.

The puzzle is to account for the remarkable doings of the trumpet which were as much or more mystifying than its sayings.

It is needless to add that when the lights were turned on the medium was found securely bound in her place as we had left her when the lights were turned out.

### MR. ABBOTT'S REPLY.

I HAVE READ the communication of Doctor Burgess, and it is evident that he is quite critical, and that this case is worthy of attention. I have attended trumpet séances quite recently; also rope- and tape-tying séances, but have not attended a séance where the two were combined.

I take it for granted that the persons present were all so nearly related to the Doctor, that the possibility of confederates being employed was entirely out of the question.

As the Doctor says, I should be glad to prove personal immortality in any manner if possible to do so, yet I should want to be quite certain that there was no resort to trickery in the case. I have investigated so many cases and found so much fraud that naturally I always expect to find it.

It would be no reflection on the Doctor, if he were deceived by a clever trick, for the most intelligent are easily deceived by an art with which they

are not familiar.

It would be impossible for me to explain the exact method this medium used, unless I could see her work. I can only describe work of a similar nature with which I am familiar, and explain how it is done. I am aware that this does not prove the present case to have been clever trickery; yet if this work is duplicated frequently by trickery, it is strong evidence that the medium resorted to the same means in this case.

In regard to rope- and tape-tying, I will not enter into a detailed explanation of the various tricks of the kind used by professional mediums and conjurers, as this would require altogether too much space. Suffice it to say that the Davenport Brothers originated the first rope-tying experiments. They were bound in the most thorough manner, and left in their cabinet; when the most marvelous manifestations would take place as soon as the curtains were drawn. It was supposed that spirits appeared in the cabinet through the occult powers of the Davenports, and performed these maneuvers in order to convince unbelieving mortals. It was many years before the secret of their original tie was discovered. I will refer the reader to the work, *The Spirit World Unmasked*, by Henry Ridgely Evans, for a full account of this.

Soon after the appearance of the Davenports, other mediums experimented and invented many different ties. Finally the conjurers took the subject up, and the secrets of such ties became common property. One has but to witness Kellar, the magician, on the stage using his best spirit tie, to realize the possibilities of this art. The committee tie his hands together behind him very tightly; yet he will instantly bring either hand forward and exhibit it, place it behind himself, and turn his back; when his hands will be seen to be tied together as tightly as ever. The committee think that they tie his hands in their own way.

Yost & Co. of Philadelphia, dealers in magical apparatus, spiritualistic secrets, etc., advertise for sale the secret of a tie which they call "Kellar's Best Tie."

It is doubtful if any rope-tying experiments ever performed were equal to that of the Davenports. Their work was surely the greatest mystery of the kind ever exhibited before the public. The following passages I quote in full from *The Spirit World Unmasked*.

"In the dark séance, flour was sometimes placed in the pinioned hands of the Davenports. On being released from their bonds, the flour was found

undisturbed.

"This was considered a convincing test; for how could the brothers possibly manipulate the musical instruments with their hands full of flour. One day a wag substituted a handfull of snuff for flour, and when the mediums were examined, the snuff had disappeared and flour taken its place. As will be understood, in the above test the Davenports emptied the flour from their hands into secret pockets, and at the proper moment took out cornucopias of flour and filled their hands again before securing themselves in the famous slip-knots.

"Among the exposes of the Brothers Davenport, Hermann the conjurer, gives the following in the *Cosmopolitan Magazine*: "The Davenports, for thirteen years, in Europe and America, augmented the faith in Spiritualism. Unfortunately for the Davenports they appeared at Ithaca, New York, where is situated Cornell University. The students having a scientific trend of mind, provided themselves before attending the performance with pyrotechnic balls containing phosphorus, so made as to ignite suddenly with a bright light. During the dark séance when the Davenports were supposed to be bound hand and foot within the closet and when guitars were apparently floating in the air, the students struck their lights, whereupon the spirits were found to be no other than the Davenports themselves, dodging about the stage brandishing guitars and playing tunes and waving at the same time tall poles surmounted by phosphorescent spook pictures."

Tape-tying was not originated until after rope-tying had become quite common. Annie Eva Fay used a tie called "The Cotton Bandage Test." She was seated on a stool which was placed against a wooden post, the latter being screwed tightly to the floor. Her wrists were bound tightly with cotton bandages, and the spectators were allowed to sew the knots thoroughly and place court plaster over them. These bandages were tied tightly together behind her and fastened securely to the post, the knots being sealed. She bewildered a committee of English scientists, yet the secret of her tie is well known to conjurers at the present time.

The reader can find a full explanation of this tie in *Shaw's Magical Instructor*, or in the above-mentioned work by Mr. Evans from which I quote

the following:

"One of Annie Eva's most convincing tests is the accordion which plays, after it has been bound fast with tapes and the tapes carefully sealed at every note, so as to prevent its being performed on in the regular manner. Her method of operating, though simple, is decidedly ingenious. She places a small tube in the valve-hole of the instrument, breathes and blows alternately into it, and then by fingering the keys, executes an air with excellent effect."

There is a celebrated medium in Kansas City who submits to a tie allowing the tapes sewed to the carpet, and corn meal is placed in his palms, where either it or other meal will be found after the performance. The manifestations are very convincing, yet recently a "spirit" was "grabbed" at one of his séances, and it proved to be the medium. This was written up in a daily paper there, as among those who grabbed him was a reporter.

I have an acquaintance, an ex-medium, who is quite expert at the tying tricks. He permits himself to be tied to his chair, yet he can instantly release, and replace himself in the ties. It is very instructive to watch him do this. There is no doubt but that a clever artist, in the art of rope- and tape-tying, can instantly release himself from almost any tie, and as quickly replace himself.

Such being the case, the fact that the medium was well tied in the Doctor's case can hardly be regarded as evidential. While this lady may not have done so, yet the probabilities are that she either escaped bodily from the ties, later replacing herself; or, that she secured the free use of her hands, so that she was enabled to perform the necessary maneuvers.

In case the lady escaped, she probably slipped around the circle handling the trumpet. She could thus drop the trumpet, recover it, whisper through it, etc. She could also make the raps with it, or with a "telescopic reaching rod." This latter is made of aluminum and when closed is but little larger than a lead pencil. Such appliances frequently extend six feet or more when fully drawn out. Being of aluminum they are very light. They have a hook on the end for hooking into the handle of the trumpet or other objects to be floated.

Sometimes the rod is made as a tube. The medium can then insert a small mouthpiece and whisper or speak in the end of it. The voices will appear to be at whatever location the farther end of the tube occupies at this time.

Sometimes this tube is inserted into the small end of the trumpet; and in such cases the trumpet can go very high in the room, even to the distant corners, and at the same time have a voice in it.

The reader will readily see that it would only be necessary for the medium to get the free use of her hands to manipulate this tube; and that she would be able to produce the raps with the end of it, swing the book-case doors, etc. As the tube is but little larger than a lead pencil when closed, it would be very easy for her to conceal such an appliance in her clothing, and as soon as her hands were free, proceed to conduct the manifestations.

It would not be necessary to leave her chair at all. The aluminum trumpets are very light, and for this reason they can be manipulated so that the touches on the sitter's heads are but little more than a caress, and it is very easy to manipulate them. They and the telescopic tubes can be purchased at the mediums' supply depots for a nominal sum.

The mediums who perform the most marvelous appearing work use the telescopic tubes very frequently. They do not all submit to being tied but quite frequently allow a sitter to hold their hands and feet. This is regarded as more convincing than if the medium be trusted beyond the sitter's reach, although he may be securely tied. In some of my articles I have described these holding tests, and the little deception by which the medium gains the free use of one arm with perfect safety.

In some cases the medium has a cage of iron tubing, or heavy wire large enough to cover his person. He is seated on a stool, and the cage is placed over him and securely screwed to the floor. Wax is then placed on the screw heads and sealed. The trumpet and other articles are placed near the cage and all of the manifestations take place when the lights are put out. He reaches the telescopic tube through the open-work of the cage and manipulates the articles.

I had an acquaintance with a medium who talked through a trumpet very often. She informed me that it requires considerable practice to talk well through a trumpet and let no sound escape near the mouth. It is an art of its own, as it were.

In some trumpet séances the lights are not put out but merely lowered until quite dim. The trumpet is laid on the floor in front of a cabinet, and voices issue from it. This usually occurs at the medium's own home. In such cases a concealed rubber tube lies under a loose rug; and when the trumpet is laid on the floor, this tube is secretly slipped into the small end of it. This

tube runs into the cabinet where sits the medium, who inserts a mouthpiece and does the talking. In case of the medium hearing any sudden movement among the spectators, she quickly draws the tube into the cabinet, and conceals it in a pocket under her clothing.

In some cases the trumpet is laid on a chair in front of the cabinet and voices seem to issue from it. In this case there is no connection, but the medium in the cabinet has a second telescopic trumpet concealed under her clothing. When the curtain is dropped, she secures this trumpet and extends it, holding it near the curtain directly behind the other one. The sounds seem to listeners outside to issue from the trumpet on the chair. This illusion is perfect, as the sounds have the tone of the trumpet, are in line behind the one in view, and the attention is directed to the trumpet on the chair just as a ventriloquist directs the attention of the spectators to his "figure."

I am digressing some, as these last methods could not have been used in the case the Doctor describes; but I believe the reader will pardon this digression, for the sake of this additional information. While I am dealing with the subject of trumpet séances, independent voices and dark séances, I shall take the liberty of describing some more work of this kind.

When a medium works in his own home, it is an easy matter to have speaking tubes whose openings are masked by picture moulding or other objects. These lead to the confederate who can, by a system of switches, send the voices into the room through any or all of the tubes at will. Such sound appears to come out of the very air and is difficult to locate. The origin of sound is difficult to locate anyway, and in such cases it is much more so.

At one time I heard a report of a case where independent voices followed a young girl out in the open air, and would on occasions converse with her. A certain party accompanied her to a well, and heard a voice speak out in the open air and address her. I do not know if such report were entirely true or not, as the opportunity to investigate the case was lost when I heard of it; but the idea occurred to me that it would be very easy to lay a small iron pipe under ground from a house, and have it terminate in a well near the surface. Its termination could easily be masked and a confederate in the house could send voices into the top of the well at will. To one unacquainted with the secret, the voice would be extremely difficult to locate. Of this I am certain, from some experiments I once conducted, wherein I sent voices through some hundreds of feet of pipe which ran through a public hitching rack. Passers-by at the farther end would think themselves addressed by some one

near them, and would look around in a very foolish manner in search of the speaker. We boys thought this great sport.

By this means, voices can be made to appear on a lawn in the open and will seem very mysterious to a small party. A small half inch pipe can be laid under the ground near the surface and terminate under an urn, the roots of a tree, or even in the grass just below the level of the earth. It can be kept corked to prevent moisture from entering when not in use, and if the grass be a trifle long and the entrance of the tube a trifle below the surface of the ground, it would escape discovery. Of course it should only be used in the evening, in a dim light, *and then used but sparingly*. If two or three of these were located in different positions, and used sparingly, marvelous reports would go abroad, of the mysterious voices heard in the open air by persons when there. After using, the cork should be re-inserted, a little moist earth placed over it, and the grass rearranged and sprinkled.

I have a letter from a gentleman in Oldtown, Kentucky, who reports to me a séance where in the twilight he saw a trumpet move across the floor, out into the yard and up into the branches of the trees. I have the name of the medium who produced this manifestation. I do not know the means she used, but I know a means by which I have caused other articles to move across the floor. The secret was a thread pulled by a concealed assistant, and which of course was invisible. If I were producing this manifestation, I should lay a strong black linen or silk thread on the floor, out of the door, on the lawn, and then up over a limb in a tree. From there I should lead it to a concealed assistant, who at the proper time should draw it in. I would have a soft copper-wire hook on the end of the thread, which I should secretly bend around the handle of the trumpet when laying it on the floor. When the trumpet should catch in the branches of the tree, the assistant could, by pulling on the thread, straighten out the wire hook, drawing it in, while the trumpet would drop to the ground. In case the trumpet had no handle, a small hole near the rim would attract no notice. The wire hook could be passed through this hole. I have no doubt that this was the means employed.

At one time I fitted up my home with a number of mechanical rappers under the floor in different positions. The threads that operated them all entered the room through some tiny holes in the floor back of a couch. My wife lay on this couch, apparently resting, and secretly manipulating the threads. I had most marvelous raps which would seem to move to any position asked for by the spectators, and would answer questions

intelligently. The effect was very great, although I always afterwards informed my spectators that it was not spirits. I had one set of strings which caused a piano to voluntarily strike chords when I should desire. I have seen nervous ladies greatly frightened by these manifestations.

Mediums claim that spirits have a horror of light-waves and that certain manifestations can only occur in the dark. It is true that the *manipulating spirit has a horror of the light*, and that certain manifestations can only take place in darkness. If any one will have the courage at such times, to suddenly flash a pocket electric light on the trumpet, it will not be necessary for him to be a performer in order to discover the secret of the manifestations. There is not a reliable report in the country, where at any time any one suddenly flashed one of these lights on a trumpet séance, that he did not find the medium or the confederates at work producing the manifestations in a very simple manner. It seems to me that if in any instance such a phenomenon were genuine, there would some time be a case where these exposers would find something not a trick.

A lady medium from Lincoln, Nebraska, recently informed me, that the dark séance is rapidly losing prestige since the manufacture of the pocket electric light. She said that these were being used on the trumpet mediums all over the country with disastrous results, and that the profession would soon have to drift into other channels of trickery. She also told me of a medium who uses his chandelier to bring voices secretly into his room; and that he hangs the trumpet on the chandelier and the voices appear to issue from it, while in reality they issue from a number of tiny holes in different parts of the chandelier.

I look at the question of spirit communion somewhat in this manner: We all have a spirit while we live. This spirit cannot perform a physical miracle. For it to talk, nature has found it necessary to develop vocal organs. Without these no living spirit can talk. To move objects, physical contact and force are necessary. Without these, no living spirit can move objects. Why should any disembodied spirit, (if such exist), be able to execute any act which it could not execute if in the body; or, in other words, why should it be able to perform a miracle?

The theory of certain psychical researchers whom I know seems to be something like this: Spirits of the dead can only manifest themselves through the organism of some person fitted for their control. Such organism is what they term a medium; and they are very doubtful about any physical

manifestations being genuine.

As to the information which the voices gave the Doctor, I am not in a position to judge; for I do not know what opportunity the medium may have had secretly to learn the history of those present. However, many tricks are used successfully, even in this feature of the work.

### EDITORIAL CONCLUSION.

DR. BURGESS having read the proofs of Mr. Abbott's reply writes:

"I like the tone of Mr. Abbott's reply. He is certainly master of the subject in hand. But the puzzle still remains unsolved for none of the tricky methods he speaks of will apply in this particular case. This is not to say that, had he been present, his wide experience and special aptitude might not have uncovered some other fraud. But I doubt it."

On behalf of Mr. Abbott, who cannot see this comment of Dr. Burgess before the present number goes to press, we will repeat that he expressly refrains from explaining any particular séance which he has not himself witnessed, yet he discusses enough parallel cases to indicate that the one in question is no more mysterious than others.

## Correspondence Concerning "A Puzzling Case"

✱

*The Open Court*, edited by Paul Carus  
March 1907, Vol. XXI (No. 3), No. 610, pg. 190

TO THE EDITOR OF THE OPEN COURT:

"A Puzzling Case" interested me very considerably. It well shows how a person of scientific training and good moral judgement in all ordinary affairs of life, may be deceived by very simple means in case a shade of mystery be thrown about the matter. Abbott's answer ought to be deemed satisfactory,—at least it is so to me.

Fifty or sixty years ago, the "spirit rapping" folly had its course. At the time, 1851-2-3, I was living in Chillicothe, the first capital of Ohio. Being invited to a "séance", I went, and saw through the case without difficulty. As the next "séance" I was invited to sit at the table in and as part of the mystic circle. About the third evening I began to do a little "rapping" quietly. Soon I became the chief one,—kept it up,—for months, and finally exposed the whole thing, at the close of what the "Medium" called the best "séance" that there had been in the city. I exposed and showed up the whole Process before a large audience of citizens.

That ended the "cult" in that city. To me it was a very interesting bit of "psychological" history.

R. W. M.

✱

*The Open Court*, edited by Paul Carus  
May 1907, Vol. XXI (No. 5), No. 612, pg 318

TO THE EDITOR OF THE OPEN COURT:

I am glad that your correspondent, R. W. M., was satisfied with Mr. Abbott's reply to "A Puzzling Case." It was highly satisfactory to me also; for like the man of good judgment and good sense that he is he declined to give an opinion upon something which, personally, he knew nothing about. Undoubtedly he believes that could he have witnessed the same performance, he could have detected trickery in it. But if he could not it would by no means follow that no trickery was practiced. True, I could detect none, and I am far from being the novice in such investigations that R. W. M. seems to suppose. My experience began, like his, in 1851-2, at a time when Broadway, New York, was flooded with three-cornered signs, each bearing the legend of "Spiritual Manifestations, Admission 25 cents." After two or three visits I was able to rap the raps and tip the tables with the best of them—especially when the sitters' questions were put with the rising inflection until the right one was indicated by a downward inflection of the voice. As thus: Was it one year? (no), three years? (no), four years! (yes). But when the sitting was over I always claimed it to be a humbug and showed how it was done.

O. O. Burgess

# Half Hours with Mediums



David P. Abbott

*The Open Court*, edited by Paul Carus

February 1907, Vol. XXI (No. 2), No. 609, 92-117

## I.

IT IS PROBABLY due to the scientific training of the present age that there are those amongst us who can not accept the promise of immortality on faith alone. Such as these require something in the nature of a positive proof for any belief which they may entertain. They seem unconsciously to realize that the chances of any unproven proposition or statement being untrue are vastly in the majority.

Such persons seem to feel that if a race of thinking beings were slowly evolved upon a flying world, the majority of ideas which such beings would evolve in their minds, if unproven, would not correspond with objective facts; that only those which could be proven in some manner would possess a value; that the chances are greatly against the probability of the truth of unproven ideas of things and existence in general; also that minds which could in a superstitious age evolve and believe in such superstitions as witchcraft, sorcery, etc., might in the same age evolve and believe in other superstitions that are unwarranted by the facts, although pleasing to the individual.

Such persons as these would solve the mystery of mysteries by the power of their intellect alone. Such as these would unlock the lips of nature and rob

her of her secret, but to such as these no answer framed in words of hope has ever come.

"We ask, yet nothing seems to know;  
We cry in vain—  
There is no 'master of the show,'  
Who will explain,  
Or from the future tear the mask,  
And yet we dream and yet we ask.

"Is there beyond the silent night  
An endless day,  
Is death a door that leads to light?  
We cannot say.  
The tongueless secret locked in fate  
We do not know, we hope and wait." [2]

"If a man die shall he live again?" This question of questions still appeals to the human heart with the same strength that it did in the days of old. Many solutions to this problem of problems have been offered, many times has man answered this question; yet it ever and ever repeats itself in the human heart.

If the structures which are our bodies must dissolve at death, does the innerness of these structures which is spirit vanish utterly? Does death hold for us but the promise of the same unfathomable gulf of blackness out of which we came at birth? Is the eternal future to be to us the same as was the eternal past? Is life but a temporary abode on a peak that is touched by the fingers of light for a day, while all around yawns an infinite, shoreless gulf of impenetrable darkness, from one side of which we appeared and to whose other side we hurry to meet our destiny?

We feel certain that both our material and spiritual parts are actualized by elements eternal and indestructible. But does that something, other than these elements—that which they actualize, that creation which appears as a result of their combination in a special form, that something else which is ourselves—vanish utterly with the dissolution of the elements which temporarily actualize both our bodies and our spirits?

Not long ago I saw an aged father lying in a coffin,—a pale, waxen figure, silent and cold. Around his bier stood the weeping relatives while the

minister recited these lines:

"Some time at eve when the tide is low,  
I shall slip my moorings and sail away,  
With no response to the friendly hail  
Of kindred craft in the busy bay.  
In the silent hush of the twilight pale,  
When the night stoops down to embrace the day,  
And the voices call in the water's flow—  
Some time at even when the tide is low  
I shall slip my moorings and sail away.

"Through purple shadows that darkly trail  
O'er the ebbing tide of the unknown sea,  
I shall fare me away with a dip of sail  
And a ripple of waters to tell the tale  
Of a lonely voyager, sailing away  
To mystic isles, where at anchor lay  
The craft of those who have sailed before  
O'er the unknown sea to the unseen shore.

"A few who have watched me sail away  
Will miss my craft from the busy bay:  
Some friendly barks that were anchored near,  
Some loving souls that my heart held dear  
In silent sorrow will drop a tear.  
But I shall have peacefully furled my sail  
In moorings sheltered from storm or gale,  
And greeted the friends who have sailed before  
O'er the unknown sea to the unseen shore." [3]

I thought, as I listened, "Is this true? Shall we greet again the friends that have gone before?" The cold facts of science and philosophy are poor consolation in a time like this. Then it is that but one promise can satisfy the longing of the human heart.

When one lays a life-long companion in the tomb; when one looks for the last time on the pitiful, pinched little face, and realizes that never, never again will the loved one answer to one's voice: then it is that the darkness of despair

settles down on the night of the soul. The desire to again meet the loved one may be but a sentiment to which nature's answer will finally be, if not its gratification, the extinction of the sentiment in annihilation; yet the heart craves but one answer to its longings.

Is it strange that the tired and weary soul, worn with its despair, should at times turn its breaking heart to these mystic priests of occultism for consolation—to these mysterious beings that claim the power to summon from the silent abysses of emptiness, the shades of our loved ones who have vanished and are but a memory? It is the consolation of feeling beyond a doubt that one's dear one still exists, together with the love of the miraculous which lies in every nature, that makes it possible for these persons to perpetuate their religion. This religion requires a seeming miracle for the proof of its truth, but it is not the first religion in which miracles have played a part.

One gray winter afternoon as the north wind was howling down the streets and swirling clouds of snow against my windows, I thought of some place to spend the evening that would break the loneliness. I noticed in a daily paper an advertisement of one of the high-priests of this strange religion, and I determined with a friend to visit the realm of the supernatural that evening.

[2] From "The Declaration of the Free" by Robert G. Ingersoll

[3] From "The Unknown Shore" by Elizabeth Clark Hardy

## II.

ACCORDINGLY, my friend and I, together with some thirty or more other guests, assembled in the medium's parlors at eight o'clock. The Rev. Madam E., "Celebrated Occultist, Trance Medium, Clairvoyant, Possessor of the Sixth Sense, etc., etc.," delivered the opening sermon. This sermon was certainly unique in its entire absence of ideas. I was involuntarily reminded of the passage in Hamlet where Polonius says, "What do you read, my lord?" and Hamlet replies, "Words, words, words."

I will however modify this statement. There was one idea which seemed to impress the spectators favorably, and its logic seemed to entirely satisfy them. It was the statement that "there never was an imitation of anything until

after there had existed the genuine thing to be imitated; that accordingly there never was a fraud until after there was something genuine of which the fraud was an imitation; now as there is fraud in mediumship, there must also be the genuine mediumship of which the fraud is an imitation."

This seemed to thoroughly convince the listeners, so the "Occultist" proceeded with her tests, giving every one in the room a test, which performance was really very effective.

I will now describe the tests. Slips of paper were passed around with the request that each sitter write on the slip of paper given him a question which he desired to have answered. The sitters were also instructed to address the questions to a spirit, and to sign their own names to them. After writing they were requested to fold the slips in halves with the writing inside. This was done.

The manager then collected these questions in a hat and turned them out on the center table. The billets made quite a display in quantity as they lay carelessly on the table, and the medium paid no attention to them whatever. The medium now invited some spectator to blindfold her; and taking a lady's kid glove, she first placed it over her eyes as an additional precaution, and then placing a large handkerchief over the glove she had the spectator tie it tightly behind her head. She then held her face to the audience and asked them if they were satisfied that she was properly-blindfolded. As there seemed no doubt on this point the medium proceeded.

She first informed the sitters that she would make no attempt to answer the questions asked, or even to read them, but that she would simply give them the impressions which she should receive from them, no matter how they applied or to what they referred. She also requested that each spectator speak right out and identify his message as soon as he should recognize the same as being for him. She now felt her way to the table, and took a seat at the side opposite the audience, so that she faced the audience with the table and billets between her and the spectators. She next nervously fingered a few of the billets; and opening a few of them, she stacked them on the table, smoothing them out.

She now took one of the billets, and smoothing it out, pressed it tightly against the bandage on her forehead and began:

"I get the vibration of a man who passed out very suddenly. It was entirely unlooked for, and I get the name of Fred."

"That is for me," remarked a spectator.

"Do you recognize him?"

"I do."

"Yes, he was shot—shot right through here," said the medium, placing her hand to her breast. "Do you recognize this as a fact?"

"I do," replied the sitter.

"There was a baby, was there not?" asked the medium.

"There was," replied the sitter.

"Where is this baby?"

"That is what we want to know," the sitter answered.

The medium then said, "I see that she is well and growing. She is in the care of an elderly lady who is kind to her. She is east, for I go east to get the vibration. She was taken by a younger lady and given to this elderly lady. Are you satisfied?"

"I am," replied the spectator.

The medium now took another slip of paper, and pressing it tightly to her bandaged forehead, gave the second test.

"I get the influence of a younger lady. Her name is Mary."

"That is for me," remarked an aged lady among the spectators.

"You recognize her, do you?"

"I do."

"You are her mother, for she comes to me as your daughter."

"That is right," replied the lady.

"You recognize this thoroughly, do you?" asked the medium.

"I do."

"She says, 'Tell mother that nothing could have been done for me,'" said the medium.

"She says that, does she?" asked the lady, as she began crying.

"Yes, she says, 'Mother, nothing could have saved me; you did all that it was possible to do,' " answered the medium.

"Thank God for that," said the lady, with tears rolling down her aged cheeks, and her withered hands trembling violently. "I have worried much about that; I thought that perhaps she might have been saved."

"No, she could not have been," answered the medium.

The medium now took another slip of paper, and pressing it to her forehead, gave the third test.

"I feel the influence of a lady around me, a rather young lady who died of consumption. I get the name of Priscilla."

"That is for me," replied a spectator.

"You recognize her, do you?"

"I do."

"She was your sister?"

"Yes."

"She had high cheek bones and tawny brown hair, did she not?" asked the medium.

"She did."

"Several of your family had consumption, did they not?" asked the medium.

"Yes, there are three dead," replied the spectator.

"All from consumption?"

"Yes."

"There are four of you alive," stated the medium.

"Only three," corrected the sitter.

"I get the vibration of four, or rather seven in your family: I am certain of this," stated the medium.

"There were but six," corrected the gentleman.

"There were seven. There was a little child of whom you do not know," asserted the medium.

It was impossible for me to remember any more of the tests literally; but these three are a fair sample of some thirty or more, all about equally successful. The audience was visibly impressed and affected with this séance. The three tests I have given above are very accurately reported just as they occurred, for I exerted my memory to its utmost to fix them literally in my mind. She made a few errors; but when she discovered she was following the wrong clue, she quickly adopted another course. She explained her error by saying that the vibration was broken or the influence weakened. When asked what good it did her to have written questions if she did not answer or read them, she replied that this helped her to get "concentration," whatever this may mean. Later on she came to my question, and gave me a test, as follows:

"Mr. Abbott, I get for you the name of James. I feel the vibration of an elderly man with short chin whiskers. He is quite portly built, has very bright eyes, and was always sarcastic. Do you recognize him?"

"I do," I replied. (I hope to be forgiven in the hereafter for this statement, but I did not want to throw discouragement on the séance.)

"I see you give something wrapped up to this James, but I can not make

out what it is," she said.

"You are correct," I replied.

I was thoroughly convinced that she was reading the questions, and that she was getting her information from the questions asked. I was sure that she took what information she could from each question and added to it from her fertile imagination and from the replies of the sitters; and that thus she produced the effect, which was certainly quite great, with the audience.

Accordingly, after the séance, I sauntered around to the center table, and got an opportunity to read a few of the questions that were written on the slips of paper.

One read: "Fred: Who fired the fatal shot? Where is the baby?" This was signed, "George." This was the question from which the first test was given. If the reader will compare the first test given with this question, it will be seen that there is no information contained in the test, that could not be surmised from the question itself by a shrewd person.

One question read, "Mary: Could anything have been done that would have saved you?" This was signed, "Mother." This question was the one from which the second test was given. It can be compared with the test with the same results as in the first case.

Another question read, "Priscilla: Are we all to die of consumption?" This was signed, "James H—." In this case I feel sure that the medium knew, by the gentleman's voice and position in the room, whom she was addressing. The writer of this question had high cheek bones, and hair of a color that would indicate the description that the medium gave of his dead sister. It is possible that this gentleman had attended her former séances and that she knew him from former experiences. I feel sure that the medium studied the different characters in her room thoroughly while the company was gathering; and that she remembered the peculiar looks of each, and in some cases, their voices.

In one test she said, "I get the name of Frat or Prat, or something of the kind. I can not quite catch it." A spectator replied, "That is for me. It is Frat."

I found that this question and the name were poorly written so that one could not tell with certainty whether the name began with an "F" or a "P." *This proved that her difficulty was not in hearing the voice of the spirit, but in reading the writing of the mortal.*

As to my own question, I addressed it to the name of a dead friend. The name was "Will J—." I wrote it hurriedly with no support for the paper but

my hand, and the last name resembled the name "James," but it was another name entirely. I signed my own name plainly, and the question read, "Did you read what I sent you?" It can thus be seen that the test given me had no bearing. Mr. J— was a young man and wore no whiskers. I know of no "James" answering her description.

And now to explain the method she used in reading the questions. This is an old and well-known trick in a new dress. The trick of which this performance is a variation, is known to the profession as "Washington Irving Bishop's Sealed Letter Reading." I have performed it many times and I recognized it at once. In the first place I noticed that she used a lady's kid glove when being blindfolded. This is precisely the method of blindfolding given in the instructions for the above-mentioned trick. The kid is a little stiff; and it is an easy matter for the blindfolded person to look down upon the table from under the bandage. There is thus a strip of the table top some six inches wide easily in the view of the medium. It is also easy to shift a bandage of this style slightly upward by a motion of raising the eyebrows.

A close observer would have noticed that the medium first unfolded a couple of papers, smoothed them out and laid them on the table *writing side up*; that these lay between the pile of unread papers and herself; that she next took another paper and pressed it to her forehead, and at the same time placed her right elbow on the table and apparently rested her head in her right hand, which at the same time pressed the paper against her forehead; that when she did this she leaned forward on her hand and thus the part of the table on which lay the opened papers came directly in range of her concealed eyes. When she gave the first test, *she was reading the question on the table under her eyes, and was not getting it from the paper against her forehead.*

As soon as she finished the first test she laid the paper in her hand on top of the opened ones, *writing side up*; and opening and placing another one against her head, she gave the second test. Meanwhile she again leaned her head in her hand so that she could read the writing on the paper she had just laid down. She was thus all the time one billet behind in her reading, and was really reading the one under her eyes, while pretending to draw inspiration from the one pressed against her forehead. A close observer would have noticed that she invariably held the side of the paper on which the writing was, next to her head. The spectators thus never could see the writing and thereby discover the deception. She could tell the writing side of the papers by feeling, as this side was folded inward in all cases.

A few evenings after this séance, I attended her Sunday night meeting. The hall was packed, and even standing room taken. The tests given were of the same character as those given at her séance; and as she gave them, they met quick responses from persons over the hall. The effect was really fine, and I was surprised that such an old and well-known trick could affect so many persons so seriously. When writing my question, I tore the slip of paper given me into halves, and wrote on half of it. I later saw the medium with half a slip in her hand while giving another test. When she laid down this half slip and took up another, she gave me my test. I thus verified what I already knew in regard to the manner in which she read the questions.

On both occasions, after the meetings, when the guests were departing, I noticed the manager gather up the questions and place them carefully in his pocket. I knew that this was in order that next day they might be studied and catalogued.

I might mention that at the Sunday night meeting some tests were given before the medium began her regular tests. She merely said that certain spirits came to her, gave their names and other details, and said that they wished to communicate with some one in the room. The medium asked for whom each test was; and as certain spectators recognized each test, the effect was very fine on the audience. In one case, after a gentleman had identified one of these tests as for him, the medium asked, "Is your name Mr. — —?" The spectator replied that it was. "Correct," said the medium, "I see that name written right over your head." These tests were in the nature of "Blue Book" tests, but I do not think this medium has a book of Omaha. I think that she got her information from questions asked her on slips of paper at the previous meetings, séances, and private readings; also from gossiping with different persons who called during the daytime for private readings. I understood that she frequently visited with such persons after giving them a reading, and that she was accounted a very friendly and sociable person. It is very easy to gain information by keeping all written questions and studying them after the meetings.

That this method is generally used, I know from the fact that some time ago a certain medium came to grief in Omaha. The police confiscated his paraphernalia, in which was found a "Blue Book" of Omaha. The public was invited to call and see this book; and believers could go and read their own questions, written in this book, with their own names signed to them. Yet, notwithstanding all this, the persons of that faith are ready to be duped again,

so great in the ordinary man is the love of the occult and the desire for positive proof of individual immortality.

### III.

I KNOW A LADY in a country place who recently received a letter which read as follows:

Mrs. S. E. J—,  
C—, Neb.,

DEAR MADAM:

At one of our séances recently the spirit of a young lady made her appearance and gave her name as Mary E. J—. She claims to be your daughter and strongly expressed a desire to communicate with you. If I can be of any service to you, you may command me.

I remain faithfully yours, — —.

This letter was signed by a professional medium at that time located in Lincoln, Neb., and was written on a letter-head which contained the information that the writer was a famous trance medium, etc., etc.

The lady, on receiving this, was greatly impressed by such a letter from an utter stranger in a city some distance from her. There was no reason why she should be known to this medium in any way, as she had never heard of him. She had a daughter, Mary, who had died of typhoid just before graduating from a certain school; and her heart had been nearly broken over the loss. She had passed a few weary years grieving over her dear one; and after receiving this letter, her mind continually dwelt on its strange contents. Finally she could stand the strain no longer; so she determined to make a visit to the city, and learn what this mysterious person could reveal to her.

Accordingly she made the journey and in due time arrived at the residence of the medium. While waiting her turn at the home of the medium, she fell into conversation with another lady from another place who was waiting for the same reason; and who had received a letter similar to the one described above.

When her turn came she was invited into a private room of the medium,

where she was informed that he charged one dollar for his time; that, however, he was at the lady's service; and while he made no promises, he would do the best he could for her.

She paid the medium his fee, and he brought out a box of envelopes. He first handed the lady a sheet of paper, and directed her to write a letter which he dictated. It read something like this:

**DEAR MARY:**

Tell me if you are happy over there. Can you see me and your brothers, and are there wonderful sights to see in the realms where you are? Did you suffer much when you passed out?

Your mother,

S. E. J—.

The medium now took an envelope from the box of stationery, and opening it up, requested the lady to breathe in it so as to magnetize it. This she did, and incidentally noticed that it was empty. The medium now requested her to place her letter in this envelope which she did. He immediately sealed it before her eyes without removing it from her sight for one instant; and taking one end of it in the tips of the fingers of his right hand, he requested the lady to hold the opposite end in her fingers so as to "establish connection, and the proper conditions."

They sat in this manner for probably five minutes during which time the medium discoursed on the truths of spiritual science. At the end of this time the medium said, "Let us see if we have anything." Taking the envelope in his left hand, he tore open its end with his right hand, and removed the letter the lady had placed in the envelope, handing the same directly to her. She immediately unfolded it and to her surprise found that her writing had utterly disappeared, and in its place was the following letter:

**DEAR MOTHER:**

I am happy, oh, so happy, over here! I can see you and my brothers at any time, and I visit you every day; but you do not know it. You can not tell at what moment I am looking at you all with my invisible eyes and listening to your voices. I will be waiting to meet you when you come over, and you will be so happy to see the wonderful sights there are here. My suffering ceased the moment I began to die, and I knew

nothing but the greatest joy.  
Yours with love forever,  
Mary E. J—.

The lady said she never could express the joy she felt on reading this communication from her beloved daughter, and that to her dying day she would treasure this missive. The medium immediately handed her the envelope in which it had been sealed, and told her she could keep all in memory of her daughter, which she did.

She remarked that the writing did not seem quite natural to her, and the medium explained that his "guide" did the writing, while her daughter merely dictated the communication. The lady never had been a spiritualist but now is certainly greatly impressed with this religion of wonders.

I will now explain the method used by the medium in this performance. He uses a box of envelopes of the ordinary business size or a trifle smaller. He takes one envelope and with a pair of scissors cuts a small margin off the ends and bottom of it. He now discards the back side of the envelope, and uses only the front side with its flap which is attached to it. This half of an envelope will now slip inside of another envelope, and the two flaps will fit each other very accurately. By moistening the flap of the complete envelope it can be sealed to the flap of the "dummy." This the medium does so neatly that none but the sharpest eye could detect that the envelope has a double front and that the flap really consists of two flaps stuck together neatly. Before fastening the two flaps together the message is prepared and placed in the compartment between the two fronts.

After all is prepared, the envelope looks like an ordinary one; and if it be taken from a box of envelopes, there is nothing to give an idea of preparation. The medium always sits in such manner that the subject is between him and the light, as otherwise the subject might see the paper in the concealed compartment of this prepared envelope.

The medium now gives the sitter a sheet of paper on which to write the letter he dictates. This sheet of paper is an exact duplicate of the sheet in the prepared envelope, and if the subject were a close observer he would notice that this sheet had been previously folded. The object of this is that the subject may fold it up at the same creases, so that when it is folded it will be the same in appearance as the duplicate. When the medium asks the subject to breathe in the envelope and magnetize it, this is for the purpose of calling

to the sitter's attention the fact that the envelope is empty, and at the same time not use words to do so. Should the medium make the statement that the envelope is empty, this statement would suggest trickery, and might cause an investigation that would reveal the secret. If, however, in breathing in the envelope, it be held so that the subject can see the entire interior of the envelope, it will be remembered afterwards and cited as evidence of the impossibility of trickery of any kind.

When the lady places the letter in the envelope, the medium is holding it open. He immediately seals it himself and taking it in the tips of the fingers of his right hand, requests the sitter to hold the other end of the envelope. When the medium is ready to produce the message, he tears the end of the envelope off himself; and holding the envelope in his left hand, he reaches in the front compartment with the fingers of his right hand, bringing out the message which he hands directly to the sitter, with the request that it be examined for a message. The moment the sitter sees the message, the excitement of reading it is so great that it is exceedingly easy for the medium, with the left hand which contains the envelope to slip into his left pocket the envelope just used and take therefrom the duplicate. His left side is away from the sitter; and he has ample time to make the exchange and bring out a genuine envelope with the end torn off, which, now as the sitter finishes reading the message, he takes in his right hand and presents to the subject.

After the performance, it is most usual for the sitters to forget that the medium dictated the letters which they have written; and they will almost invariably tell one that they wrote a letter themselves and received one in reply to their own questions. This is a most effective trick, and is the entire stock in trade of this medium. Of course he has a means of getting information in the little towns about certain persons, and to these he sends his circular letters. This can be managed in many ways. The medium can visit the different towns and get his information from the files of local papers, graveyards, etc. Or he can have a man who is canvassing for something, to secretly send in the information with the names; and he can pay such person part of the proceeds for his work. Such a person frequently learns much about certain citizens, by adroit questions addressed to other citizens, in the course of his stay in the towns.

When the medium sends out a circular letter, he immediately prepares an envelope with a suitable message, and labels it on a separate slip of paper. He also writes on this slip a note which reminds him of what the letter must

consist, which he is to dictate to this subject when she arrives.

All persons do not respond to these circulars; but a goodly number do respond, and when one arrives, she usually introduces herself or else presents to the medium the letter which he wrote to her. As soon as a subject introduces herself and states her business, the medium retires to another room to get his box of stationery and of course selects the properly prepared envelope and places it in the box where he can easily choose it. He also reads his notes and is now prepared to dictate the letter for the subject to write.

I have known other mediums to use this same trick, but not in so effective a manner as this medium uses it.

#### IV.

A FIRST-CLASS MEDIUM is not only expert in the performance of certain particular tricks, but is also very resourceful when occasion demands it, and is particularly expert in the use of language. I can not better illustrate this than by giving a short account of a private reading which a certain medium of considerable renown gave to a gentleman in Omaha some five years ago.

The medium was traveling under the name of Dr. Lee H—. He was really very expert, and simply mystified all with whom he came in contact. His tricks, from what I can learn of them from descriptions given to me by observers, were surely very superior.

My informant, an advertising agent for a daily paper, is a mutual friend of the medium and myself, well versed in trickery and mediumistic work, and the medium kept no secrets from him. This friend of mine was an eye-witness to the scene I am about to describe, and I am indebted to him for the details of the experiment, for he happened to visit the medium when a gentleman called for a reading.

The room was a very large one with a large bedstead standing across one corner of the room, with its head next to the corner. The medium beckoned to my friend to step behind the head of this bed, which he did; and from this point he saw all the details of some of the finest mediumistic work that is ever performed off-hand. The sitter could have seen my friend, had he observed closely, but he failed to do so.

The medium was a very large and powerful man, and wore no beard. I may incidentally remark that, in looking up his history, I am informed that at

one time he had been a pugilist. After this he became a minister of the Gospel, finally taking up the profession of a spirit medium, as this was more lucrative for one of his talents and personal appearance.

The gentleman stated to the medium that he had read his advertisement, and that he desired to consult him. The medium requested the gentleman to write down the questions he desired answered, also to write on the slip of paper his own name and the name of some spirit with whom he desired to communicate, and to fold and retain the writing himself.

The sitter refused to do this. He said, "You advertise that you will tell callers their own names, and that you will answer their questions without them asking the same. Now I am an unbeliever; and if you can do these things, do so, and I will pay you and have a reading. I do not purpose to write anything." He in fact showed that he had considerable intelligence and that he did not intend to assist in any sleight-of-hand trick and be duped.

The medium was a very pompous old fellow; he stood very erect and very dignified, and talked very gruffly and rapidly. He wore a smoking jacket; and I may incidentally mention that it had two large outside pockets near the bottom, and two large inside pockets, one on each side with large vertical openings; and with a stiff material around the openings that held them slightly open. Of course, these details could not be seen by the sitter, but my friend had ample opportunity to discover this fact at various times.

The medium when talking, continually ejaculated a kind of noise like he was slightly clearing his throat; but it was also in the nature of a growl. This noise is hard to describe on paper; but from the imitation which I have heard my friend give of it, I would say that it is such as I have frequently heard large gruff old fellows use when they gaze down at one from over their glasses and give the impression that they are greatly condescending when conversing with one. The medium kept interspersing his rapid remarks on spiritualism with these growls. He kept tapping the sitter on the breast with the extended fingers of his right hand as if emphasizing his remarks. At the same time he held the sitter's right hand with his other hand, and gazed very intently into his eyes. The medium was so strong that he could easily swing the sitter around into almost any position he desired; and while lecturing him, the medium kept emphasizing his remarks with his right fingers in a manner entirely too vigorous for the bodily comfort of the sitter.

The medium appeared very angry that the sitter should have the effrontery to call on him for a reading, and at the same time insult him by a

suspicion of his honesty in a matter which the medium held so sacred. The medium acted as if he were about to order the gentleman from his rooms; but continued to hold him by the hand, while he kept a stream of excited conversation flowing. He kept tapping the gentleman on the breast, and emphasizing his remarks, while he gazed intently into the sitter's eyes and backed him around the room. He would, occasionally, while tapping, gesticulate wildly; and in all these ways, he continued to distract the sitter's attention and to make him wish he were in more congenial surroundings. At the proper moment my friend saw the medium deftly slip from the breast pocket of the sitter a letter which he had spied. He brought it instantly into his palm, which was a large one, in the manner a magician does when palming a card. He turned his right side from the sitter and with his right hand slipped the letter into his own lower pocket on that side. He never took his eyes from the sitter's during all this; and when he ceased tapping, the sitter seemed evidently relieved.

The medium then said that he would give the gentleman something that would convince him; and he brought from a table a dozen or more slates all alike, and laid them on the bed. He requested the sitter to select a clean slate from these, which the sitter did. The medium then took the selected slate; and turning, he placed it in a chandelier a few feet distant and left it there for the spirits to write on, which they did in a few moments. Meanwhile the medium entertained the sitter properly.

What the medium really did when he turned with the slate, was quickly to slip it into his left inside breast pocket, which stood slightly open, and instantly to draw from the other pocket a duplicate slate on which was a message already prepared. He placed this slate containing the message in the chandelier in such manner that the sitter could not see the writing.

In a few moments the medium took down the slate with the message, and handed it to the sitter. Just at this time the medium seemed to hear some one at his door, which his servant failed to answer; and excusing himself for a moment, he left the room, and could be heard outside storming at the servant for his neglect of duty. Meanwhile the sitter examined the slates and read the message, as he had no desire to attempt to escape through the outside hallway wherein was the raging medium. During this time the medium of course read the stolen letter.

He soon returned, and now came some of the finest work of all. His task was to replace the stolen letter in the gentleman's pocket unobserved. He

finally succeeded by following his original tactics, at the same time discussing the message the gentleman had received on the slate. He kept tapping the sitter on the breast, while with his left hand he again grasped the sitter's hand, and continued wildly to discourse and gesticulate. He kept backing the gentleman around the room, and if he did not partially frighten him, at least made him feel rather uncomfortable and long for a more congenial clime. The sitter wore a pair of glasses with a cord attached to the pocket wherein the medium desired to replace the letter. This occasioned considerable difficulty, as the letter caught on the cord when the medium attempted to slip it from his palm into the sitter's pocket.

For a time, the medium gave up. He slipped the letter into the lower pocket of the sitter, and was evidently going to give the sitter the remainder of the test, but seemed to reconsider his determination. He now renewed his efforts and finally withdrew the letter from the lower pocket of the sitter and eventually succeeded in replacing it in the original pocket. This was very difficult, as he did not dare to take his eyes from the eyes of the sitter during the entire experiment.

It seems incredible that the medium could have taken a letter from the breast pocket of his visitor and replace it unnoticed, but professional pickpockets can do even more extraordinary things, and the medium was well skilled in tricks of sleight-of-hand. The main feature of the performance consisted in overawing the skeptical sitter to such an extent that he had not sufficient power of concentration left to observe either the filching of the letter or its replacement. My friend, however, from his hiding-place, could calmly observe the performance, and he saw how in spite of difficulties the medium finally succeeded.

The medium's manner now grew more mild. His excitement seemed to disappear and he was master of the situation. He said that although the sitter came to him an unbeliever, and although he refused to write and thus help to establish the proper conditions which were required for the sake of harmony, etc., that he really believed the sitter was an honest man. He accordingly would suspend his rules, and he would make a great effort and give the gentleman a test. He said, "I have decided that *I will tell you your name.*" The medium then allowed his person violently to convulse while he conversed with the spirits of the empty air and questioned them. He had great difficulty in hearing their voices, but finally letter by letter spelled out the gentleman's name for him, which was, "John A. Crow."

This startled the sitter greatly and the medium then said, "You are a great skeptic, but I will convince you yet. I will tell you where you live." Then repeating his process of conversing with the shades of the departed, he got the street number of the gentleman's home, which was Twenty-three hundred and something North Twenty-fourth Street, Omaha, Neb.

This put the sitter completely at the mercy of this man of mystery. The medium now said: "I see mines and mining. You are having some trouble there. But it is not about mines; yet there are mines there, for I see them. Yes, you are in some serious trouble, and I keep seeing mines, mines, mines everywhere. I see this trouble, but it is not about mines." Then finally he said, "I get the name of Deadwood. Your trouble is at Deadwood." The sitter acknowledged this to be the case.

Now the facts were that the sitter had just received this letter from an attorney in Deadwood, and it was about a serious personal matter. The medium had of course gained all his information from this letter. The sitter had evidently just received the letter and placed it in his breast pocket. While it was worrying him, he had called on the medium to consult him about the matter uppermost in his mind.

Well, this performance converted the sitter thoroughly. He paid the medium two dollars for the sitting. He also paid the medium twenty dollars more, as remuneration for his services wherein the medium agreed to exert his spiritual influence in behalf of the sitter in the before-mentioned trouble.

My friend thinks that the gentleman remains a believer until this day, although he is not personally acquainted with him.

The influence of a medium over a subject is very great when once the subject has been convinced. I know the case of a quite fleshy gentleman who consulted Dr. Schlossenger, (the medium described in my article "[Some Mediumistic Phenomena](#)," which appeared in *The Open Court* of August, 1905,) in regard to reducing his flesh.

Dr. Schlossenger was really one of the most expert mediums I have ever met or of whom I have ever heard. This gentleman was thoroughly converted by the doctor. He consulted him in regard to what treatment he should take for failing health, induced by excessive flesh and other troubles. He was directed to drink no water or other liquid for thirty days. He was allowed to eat fruit, but was to use only a scanty diet of any kind. This gentleman actually followed these instructions. He reduced his flesh some, but I rather think he was weakened somewhat by such heroic treatment. He is a worthy

gentleman, a respected citizen, and a man of some influence. He told me personally that when his thirst became unbearable he used a little fruit, and was thus able to endure his thirst.

I know another gentleman, who while I write this article, is being treated by a fraudulent medium in this city for granulated eye-lids. He has tried many physicians with no success, so perhaps faith will do for him what medicine has failed to do. However, I know positively that this medium is fraudulent.

## V.

SOMETIMES EXPERT professional mediums originate some good trick and successfully guard its secret from the public for years. As an instance of this I will describe one that was originated by a first-class medium some years ago. This medium had many superior tricks at his command, but unfortunately he left the city too suddenly for my friend, the advertising agent, to get a good description of most of them. The medium had greatly bewildered the public; but about this time a brother in the profession succeeded in getting twelve hundred dollars from a confiding person, and as this was about to be discovered, he took his departure. This made such a stir that the medium first referred to also left the city.

This second medium effected this financial *coup de maitre* in the following manner. A lady was in some sort of financial difficulty,— a lawsuit over an estate or something of the kind. She had this money and desired the medium's spiritual aid. He consulted the spirits and did as they directed which was as follows: The money was to be sealed up in an envelope in a certain manner, and the lady was to conceal this envelope in a safe place unopened for a period of thirty days, during which time the charm was to work and the lady to win her suit. Of course, the medium exchanged envelopes for the lady, and she concealed one containing some pieces of paper. During the thirty days which the medium intended to remain in Omaha, the lady happened to grow short on finances, and went to the medium to borrow enough to pay her house rent. This medium was a man of considerable intelligence, but he had poor judgment. He refused the lady this loan, claiming to be short on funds himself. As a result, the lady decided to open the envelope, unknown to the medium, and remove the amount needed. The consequence was that the medium hurriedly left town.

The trick which the first medium originated I will now describe. He called it "The Oracle of the Swinging Pendulums, or Mind over Matter." Briefly, it consisted in the medium apparently causing any pendulum, which might be selected from a number hanging on a frame or in a number of bottles, to vibrate or swing in response to his will. There was absolutely no mechanical or electrical connection to any of the pendulums whatever. Most of these pendulums consisted of a bullet suspended by a piece of hair wire. On a few of them glass marbles of various sizes were used instead of bullets.

When the pendulums were suspended inside of bottles, the bottles were corked shut and the pendulums were suspended from the center of the corks. The bottles used were of different sizes and shapes, and the pendulums were of various lengths, and were painted various colors. In one bottle was a cross from which hung three pendulums in the same bottle. These bottles were standing upon a center table.

In the center of the top of this small table was fixed an upright brass rod about two feet high. There was a cup on its top which contained one bottle. This rod was made steady by guy wires running from its top to the four corners of the table. There was a cross rod near the top of this vertical rod which was probably eighteen inches long. From it was suspended various pendulums some of which hung inside of wine glasses, or goblets, at their lower ends. Others merely had glasses stationed on either side of them so that the pendulums would ring them when swinging. He also had two tripods which were erected from three brass rods and from the center of which hung a pendulum inside a glass goblet. These tripods were to stand on the same table with the cross and bottles. All rods were plated and neatly finished.

The trick consisted in the medium, by the mere power of his will, causing any pendulum to swing and strike the sides of the bottle or glass within which it hung, and answer questions by its taps.

When the company called upon him, he brought the tripods and bottles from a corner of the room, and placed them on this center table. This table was an ordinary light center table with a small cover. There were many pendulums thus in view of the spectators who stood around the table. The medium seated himself at the table and placed his hands lightly upon it, as spiritualists do when summoning the departed.

The medium then requested any one to select the pendulum he desired to have answer his questions. When this was done the medium gazed intently at it, and lo, it slowly began to move! It gained in amplitude at each swing until

it struck the sides of the bottle or goblet within which it hung, giving the required number of raps on the glass.

After this pendulum answered the questions asked, another pendulum could be selected by any spectator. This one to the amazement of all would slowly begin to swing and repeat all the maneuvers of the first one, while the first one would gradually cease swinging. This could be tried any number of times and was always successful no matter which pendulum was selected.

My friend assured me that of all the tricks he had ever witnessed, this one mystified him most; and, in fact, he could discover no clue to the secret of the trick. The room was bare of furniture or carpet, and was well lighted. The center table could be moved about, thoroughly inspected, and the apparatus thoroughly examined for concealed wires, threads, etc. The bottles could be removed and inspected at any time, and even the corks taken out and the pendulums examined; yet all absolutely obeyed the medium's will.

This trick, I believe, is unknown even to dealers in secrets for the use of mediums, and to the best of my knowledge has never become known. Accordingly, I will give the secret to the readers of this article, so that any one with just a little practice can operate the trick. I have constructed the apparatus and worked it very successfully, so that I am certain about the matter.

The idea is very simple, being merely a little scientific principle practically applied. Each pendulum is of a length different from all of the others. As a result each one swings in a different time period. We will illustrate this by saying that one swings one time per second, another two times per second, etc. It is now evident that if an impulse be given to the table supporting the apparatus, all of the pendulums will make a slight vibration, but each one will return at a different time. When any pendulum returns it immediately starts in the reverse direction. Now if any particular one receive a second impulse at the particular instant of returning, its second swing will be slightly increased in amplitude. On its return if it again receive another impulse at the proper instant, it will again move a trifle farther in its swing. This can be repeated until the pendulum will be swinging with a vibration of sufficient amplitude to strike the glass.

Now let us take one pendulum swinging say ten times per minute. It must receive just exactly ten impulses per minute in order to increase the amplitude of its swing. It must also receive these impulses at the proper instant. If more than ten impulses are given, or if they are given in an irregular manner, the

pendulum will finally stop its motion. It is evident, then, that all the other pendulums vibrating in different intervals such as twenty, twenty-five, etc., times per minute, will not be affected by these impulses in a proper manner to cause their vibration to increase. In fact, the impulses given, being out of tune, or rather out of time, with their motions, will tend to bring them to rest. They will dance about, and move a little in an indefinite manner, while the one selected will appear to have life and intelligence; and it will move in a definite manner, as if accomplishing an object or purpose, which in fact it is doing.

The impulses are given by a slight pressure or vibration applied to the table by the medium's hands. He merely watches the pendulum selected and times his impulses with that one's motions. The impulses are very slight and the operator must not become impatient, but must be content to take his time, for if he uses too much force it can be seen by the spectators. With a proper table and a proper apparatus, the merest pressure is sufficient, if repeated at the proper times, to gradually start any pendulum swinging. This pressure must be so slight as not to be observed, and a cover on the table helps to conceal the slight movement of the hands. The hands should be placed *under the cover* so as to come into contact with the wood of the table and establish "proper conditions," the cover thus hiding the movements of the hands. Any one trying this with his hands under the cover and in a careful manner, will be surprised at its effect on those who witness it.

All of the pendulums that are not in tune with the medium's impulses will move about slightly in an erratic manner, but the selected one will start right out and exhibit intelligence and design in its movements, from the moment it is selected. It will be found that all of the pendulums are moving a little all the time; as the vibrations of the building, the movements of the persons in the room, and the jar of setting up the apparatus, etc., prevents their coming to absolute rest. Accordingly, when a pendulum is selected, it is already moving somewhat, although possibly in the wrong direction. The operator merely times his impulses with its movements, and it soon changes its direction to the proper one, and its movements assume definite form.[4] I will state that the longer pendulums require the heavier weights, and bottles of larger diameter.

Another medium had a model of a lady's hand. The room was bare of furniture excepting chairs. The spectators were seated in a circle, and four of them held a large swinging glass plate by four ribbons attached to its corners.

They held this plate so that when it hung down between them, it really formed a level table some six inches above the floor; and it was supported merely by the aforesaid ribbons in the sitter's hands. On this glass table the hand was placed. This hand was evenly balanced so that a slight pressure applied on its fingers would cause it to tilt forward and tap the plate. Now if the sitters sat quietly and asked this hand any questions whatever, it would reply correctly by tapping on the plate.

The medium did not have to ask the questions; neither did the questions have to be timed to suit any internal mechanism within the hand. No particular line of "patter" had to be used. One could simply ask any question he might choose and the hand would answer him. There was absolutely no outside connection to the hand in any manner, and no machinery within the hand. All could be thoroughly examined; and the usual thread, that so many performers use, was impossible in this case, owing to the conditions.

The secret is an old one. Many readers of this paper will remember the "Light and Heavy Chest" of the old-time conjurers. The performer could lift it from the stage, but no committee of the spectators was strong enough to raise it. It will be remembered by those who know this trick, that the chest contained soft iron; that under the floor where it sat was a powerful electro-magnet, through which the performer's assistant turned a current of electricity, causing the magnetic force to be exerted just as the committee attempted to lift the chest. They were thus unable to move it, so strong was the magnetic force. The principle used in operating this hand was the same. In the fingers was soft iron. Under the floor was a powerful electro-magnet. The medium's assistant, from an adjoining room listened to the questions through a concealed tube; and at the proper time he pressed a button, sending into the magnet the current which was strong enough to draw down the fingers and cause the hand to rap.

[4] An excellent article on the principle which this trick illustrates is entitled "The Mechanism of Sympathy," and can be found in *The Open Court* for February, 1897.

## VI.

AN INTELLIGENT AND influential gentleman once told me of a most

wonderful experience that he had in his home town. A lady medium came to the town and began giving the most wonderful tests. It created much talk and great excitement in the town. He finally decided to call on this lady. She was a stranger in the city, had just arrived, and no one had ever seen her before. When persons called on her, she asked no questions whatever, but at once gave them the most marvelous exhibition of her unheard-of powers.

This gentleman accordingly called on her, and he was certain that she could not have known him in any way. As soon as the sitting began, this lady told the gentleman his name, the number of persons in his family that were living, also the number that were dead. She gave him the names of all of them, described his home to him, and told him many of the principal events of his life without any questions being asked. She then summoned the spirits of his dead and delivered their messages to him.

This gentleman, although very intelligent, was so greatly impressed that he thought to test her powers further. He accordingly sent other members of his family to her, and they met with the same experience. The medium immediately told each of them his name and repeated the first performance. This gentleman then had other friends call on the medium, but the result was always the same. The people were very greatly mystified, and the medium's apartments were continually crowded during her short stay. In a few days she left, going to another city.

The principle she used I will explain a little further on. Another medium doing this same work traveled for years in small towns, of from two to three thousand population. The method she pursued was this: She would, on entering town, quietly learn the name of some one who was one of the oldest citizens of the place. She would select one that had always attended all public places and who was thoroughly familiar with every one.

She would then approach this person, explain her business to him and close a contract by which he should have half of the proceeds of the readings; and in return for the same he was to furnish the necessary information, and to guard the secret well.

She always made him sign a written contract which bound him to secrecy, and which would afterwards effectually prevent him from making public his share in the transaction; as his fellow-townsmen would see, if this contract were made public, that he had helped to fleece them.

The medium then engaged suitable rooms, and her assistant was each day concealed at an early hour in the rear part of the apartments. A small hole was

made in the wall and concealed by some draperies, through which the assistant could watch and identify those calling for readings. The medium usually excused herself a moment to get a drink of water or to attend to some trifling duty before giving her reading, leaving the caller waiting for a few moments. During this time she would inform herself fully of the history of the caller.

She sometimes used a couch; and when doing so, she lay on it while in her trances, repeating to the sitter the proper subject matter to place such sitter completely at her mercy.

When using this couch she secretly adjusted a small rubber tube to her ear next to the wall. This tube came through the wall, at a small hole near the floor in the base-board; and it had at its farther end, in the other room, a mouthpiece into which her confederate whispered the information. When she received such information, she of course elaborated on it, and produced it in the labored manner common to mediums, with much additional matter which she could surmise and deduce from the sitter's own conversation.

Her readings were so marvelous and successful that she simply coined money in each town, carrying away several hundred dollars in a few days. Her assistant was so well satisfied with this that he gladly kept her secrets.

The method pursued by the medium just referred to was a variation of this trick. She rented a store building with no partitions in it. She stretched curtains, which made very good partitions, so that the rear of the building was hidden from callers, it being in darkness. However, as the front of the building was lighted from the windows, the confederate behind the curtain could see through the curtain and see the subject plainly.

The medium carried a second assistant who was a telegraph operator. When giving the reading the lady sat near the cross curtain and allowed her foot to extend from under her skirts to a position under the curtain. This could not be noted by the subject; but the traveling confederate behind the curtain was thus enabled to telegraph on her foot all the information, using the regular "Morse code," while the local confederate wrote it down. She was able to give strangers their names and the most marvelous information in the most startling manner. She worked many towns in western Nebraska most successfully.

Another medium used a similar method in large cities; but being unable to have a local confederate acquainted with those who might call, he adopted the plan of remaining behind a heavy curtain himself, while a confederate sat

outside, apparently being a caller waiting his turn for a reading. This confederate would fall into conversation with other callers who were waiting, and would introduce himself in a manner that would call for a like confidence from the caller.

This confederate *would then graciously yield his turn to the subject, as he was in no hurry*. The subject would then be taken behind the curtain to the medium, who retired behind a second curtain for a moment before giving the reading. This second curtain ran lengthwise with the room and met the cross curtain in its center. When the medium was out of sight of the sitter, the confederate passed the information through a slit in the front curtain to the medium in the second rear apartment. The medium had a city directory handy, and thus he could startle the stranger by giving his name, and by giving an address where the sitter then lived, or had previously lived.

Sometimes mediums get information from the hat or coat of a sitter, by having a polite porter receive him and relieve him of his wraps. This porter, as soon as the subject leaves the hall-way, immediately examines the aforesaid articles for a name, letter, etc. The last two methods can not always be relied upon, but succeed often enough to cause much talk and comment on the marvelous powers of the medium; and thus they bring him many a dollar.

[to be concluded.]

## Half Hours with Mediums (cont.)

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David P. Abbott

*The Open Court*, edited by Paul Carus

March 1907, Vol. XXI (No. 3), No. 610, pg. 129-163

[conclusion.]

### VII.

NOT SO VERY long ago I met a friend—a man of wealth, who was a firm believer in spiritualism, and who frequently conversed with his dead wife and daughter. I asked him if he could inform me whether or not there were any good mediums in the city, as I should like to consult one.

He replied that at present there were none in Omaha of any well developed psychic powers; that he was entirely satisfied on the subject and did not require any demonstrations to convince himself of the truths of spiritual science. He informed me that the question was settled beyond all dispute; but that if I were skeptical, there was said to be a medium in Council Bluffs who possessed most wonderful powers.

I accordingly made other inquiries from those who were in a position to know; and I learned that this medium, a celebrated "Doctor of the Occult, Astrologer, Palmist and Spirit Medium," was at that time giving private sittings in Council Bluffs to earnest inquirers only, for the small sum of two dollars.

I was informed that his performances were of the most wonderful nature;

that there was no possibility of trickery of any kind; that he told you whatever you desired to know, without your even asking him; that, in addition to this, he had powers over the elements of nature; and, in fact, I was led to believe that he was a true sorcerer of the olden days.

I determined at once to call on this renowned personage, and try to secure a little information from the unseen world. Accordingly, one Sunday afternoon I took the car that crossed the river, and in due time arrived at the apartments of this wonderful doctor.

I was met at the door by an attendant, who accepted the fee and directed me to enter the rooms of this mysterious person quietly; and if I found him employed, by no means to disturb him, but merely to await his pleasure; that he was frequently conversing with unseen beings, or deep in some astrological computation, and at such times it was not safe to disturb him.

With a beating heart I entered the room where he was to be found. This room was a large one. I did not see him at first. What attracted my attention was a large map or painting on a piece of canvas which hung on a wall space in the room. This painting had a representation of the sun in its center. This could be discovered by the rays which radiated from it in all directions. Around this sun were many stars, and an occasional planet, among which Saturn and its rings were very prominently depicted. There were numerous pictures of animals and men, and of queer monsters, scattered amongst the stars.

Beneath this picture stood a large golden oak table at which sat this delver into the occult, deeply engrossed in a study of this painting; while with a little brush he figured and calculated, in a queer sort of Chinese characters, which he drew on a sheet of paper. He also seemed to be making a strange drawing on the same paper. He was far too deeply engaged to notice my entrance, and continued at his labors for some time, while I stood quietly and watched him. Sitting on one end of this rather large table was a glass globe or vessel, supported by three nickeled rods, something like a tripod. Coming from the wall was a rather large nickeled tube or pipe which curved over above the glass vessel, and continually allowed drops of water to fall into the globe. From the side of this glass vessel there led a small nickeled pipe which evidently carried away the waste water.

Occasionally a little blue flame would appear on the surface of this water, play about, and disappear. When this happened the body of the medium was always convulsed slightly.

After a time he seemed to finish his calculation, and this seer condescended to leave the realms of the stars wherein dwelt the spirits that rule the universe and the destinies of men, and to descend to earth and for a time direct his gaze towards this humble mortal. He turned around and observed me for the first time. He was a large, portly, fine-looking gentleman of middle age, with very long black hair which gave him a strange appearance. He wore a pair of glasses low down on his nose; and from over these he condescended to direct his gaze at me and to study me for a moment as a naturalist might study some specimen that happened temporarily to attract his notice.

He soon informed me that the stars had told him something of my coming and of the question that was worrying me; and he asked me if I desired to consult the stars as to my destiny, to have him decipher it from the lines of my palm, or whether I should prefer to converse with the dead. The last was my choice.

Not far from a window at one side of the room there was a small table on which were a few articles. He directed me to be seated at this table, and handed me a slip of paper of a size of probably three by five inches. He directed me to write the question I desired answered on this paper, and when through to fold the paper in halves both ways with the writing inside. I did so while he walked to his bowl of water apparently paying no attention to me, and then returned.

When he had returned to a position opposite me at the table, he reached to take my writing out of my hand; seeing which I quickly bent down one corner of the paper and gave it to him. He directed one sharp glance at me as I did this, at the same time picking up an envelope from the table with his other hand. He held this envelope open flap side towards me, and slowly inserted my paper into it. As he did this, looking sharply at me, he remarked, "I am no sleight-of-hand performer. You see your question is actually in the envelope." This was the case; for it was close to me and I could plainly see the top of it against the back of the envelope, the lower portions being inserted; and I could see the little corner folded down, as I had bent it, and I was certain he had not exchanged it. In fact he took occasion to use his hands in such manner that I could see there was nothing concealed about them, that he "palmed" nothing, and that he made no exchange. I was entirely satisfied that all was fair, and that no exchange had been made.

Next, he sealed the envelope, and holding it towards the window, called

my attention to the fact that as the envelope was partly transparent I could see my paper within it and that it was actually there. This was really the case. He now took a match, and lighting it, applied the flame to this identical envelope without its leaving my sight; and proceeded to burn the last vestige of it and the paper within it, allowing the ashes to drop into a small vessel on the table.

There was no doubt that he did not exchange envelopes and that he burned all before my very eyes. He now took the ashes and emptied them into the bowl of water on the side table. A little blue flame appeared on the surface of the water after that for a moment, and then disappeared.

He now brought from a drawer a number of slates—about eight or ten small slates with padded edges. They were the smallest size of slates, I should judge; and with them he brought another slate, a trifle larger, probably two inches both longer and wider. He requested me to examine thoroughly or to clean them all to my own satisfaction, and to stack the small ones on the table, one on top of the other; and when all were thus placed, to place the large slate on top of the stack.

While I was doing this he called to his attendant for a drink of water, and incidentally stepped into the hall to receive it, so that his menial would not profane this sanctuary with his presence.

Returning to the table he took a seat opposite me and placed one of my hands and one of his on top of the slates. In due time he took up the slates and we found nothing. He replaced them, and waited a few moments; then seeming dissatisfied with conditions, he took up the top slate in his left hand and with his right hand began writing a message for me. He did this like mediums do automatic writing, with eyes half-closed; and while writing his person was convulsed a few times. He then opened his eyes and read aloud what he had written, asking me if it answered my question. I replied that it did not, as it was entirely foreign to the subject. Then seeming dissatisfied, he moistened his fingers, erased the writing, and replaced the top slate on the stack of slates.

He now placed his hands on this slate again, and after a time examined it; but it was still free from writing. He lifted up some of the other slates; but as there was no writing, he scattered the slates around on the table and asked me to spread a large cloth over them which he handed to me. This I did, and under his directions placed my arms and hands over this. He walked to the bowl of water on the side table, and gazed into it. I watched him; and I saw a rather large flame appear on the surface of the water, dance about, and

disappear.

He immediately informed me that he was certain that I now had a message. He remained at a distance while I examined the slates one by one. Finally, on one of them I found a message, neatly written and covering the entire slate. It read:

"Mrs. Piper is a genuine medium. She possesses powers of a very unusual nature. Her tests given Hyslop and others are genuine. Do not be a skeptic. You are making a mistake, dear friend. It is all plain to me now, and spirit is all there is.—Will."

Now, the question I had written was addressed to a very dear friend who is now dead, and read as follows: "Will J—: In regard to the medium, Mrs. Piper, of whom we conversed on your last visit, I would ask if she be genuine, and if the tests she gave Professor Hyslop and others were genuine. Give me a test."

This was all nicely done, and I am sure would have greatly impressed nearly every one. Being a performer myself, I could of course follow the performance in minute detail, and I am thus enabled to give to the readers of this paper a detailed account of the method used by the doctor. I will state that since that time I have very successfully operated this same test, minus the bowl of water and flame of fire; and that I can assure all that it is very practicable and that it is very deceptive.

When the medium picked up the envelope in which to place my paper, there was within it a duplicate piece of paper folded the same, and of the same size (one inch by one inch and a half) as the one I had folded. He kept the face of this envelope opposite me so I could not see that side of it. On the face of it was a horizontal slit cut with a knife. This slit was about two inches long and was situated about half way down the face of the envelope. The duplicate folded paper was placed vertically in the envelope at its center, so that its center was located against the slit. This piece of paper was held in position by a touch of paste at a point opposite the slit, which caused it to adhere to the inside of the back of the envelope. When he picked up this prepared envelope with his left hand, he did so with the slit side or face in his palm next to the fingers of his left hand. This envelope lay slit side down before he picked it up; so that I did not see the face of the envelope at all, and he kept that side of the envelope from me during the entire trick. The paper within the envelope had been placed far enough down so that its top part was not exposed to my view. The envelope thus appeared perfectly natural, as an

ordinary one with nothing in it.

He thus held the envelope in his left hand, flap open wide, with the back side of the envelope later to be sealed, facing me. Now he really inserted my paper in this envelope with his right hand as he took it from me: but in fact, he pushed it down just behind the hidden slip of paper within the envelope. I mean that he inserted it between the concealed slip and the face or slit side of the envelope; and as he did this *he caused the lower end of my slip of paper to pass through the slit in the center of the front of the envelope*. The lower portion of my slip was thus out of the envelope on its rear side, between the front of the envelope and the fingers of his left hand; although I could see nothing of this. He pushed it down so that the top still remained in view with the bent corner exposed, and then sealed the flap over it.

Holding the envelope towards the window, he called to my notice the fact that my paper was within, and that I could see it plainly. I could see the shadow of the two papers, which appeared as one, and thus his statement seemed correct. Of course he did not show me the rear side *or face* of the envelope, with my paper protruding, which was immediately behind the duplicate, so that the shadow of it was also the shadow of the duplicate.

This shadow also hid from my view the shadow of the slit. The envelope was sealed fairly.

Now with his right hand he moved a small vessel on the table towards himself. Then taking the envelope in his right hand, slit side downward, he held it close to this vessel; *at the same time with his left hand he took a match from his pocket and proceeded to burn the envelope*. This move concealed the trick; and it was very deceiving and cleverly done. As he took the envelope from his left hand with his right hand, he, with his left fingers touching the protruding portion of my slip, caused it to remain in his left hand and to be drawn entirely out of the slit. His eyes followed the envelope as his right hand took it; which naturally caused my eyes to follow it, as his attention seemed centered on the envelope and it appeared to occupy the stage of action. This move was executed in a moment, not requiring any time worth mentioning, although it takes so long to describe it on paper intelligibly. Now while his eyes (and of course mine) followed the envelope, *without pause his left hand went into his left pocket in a natural manner to get the match*. He, of course, left my slip in his pocket with his surplus matches; and when he retired for the drink of water, he read my question.

As to the slate trick, all was fair until he picked up the top slate, wrote an

automatic message, apparently read it aloud to me, and then upon me informing him that the message did not answer my question, he seemed dissatisfied, apparently erased the message, and replaced the large slate on top of the stack of slates. What he really did was to pick up the large top slate, bottom side towards himself, *and at the same time to carry with it a small slate pressed tightly against its under side*. He held the large slate with its under side tilted from me, so I could not see this small slate. There being so many small slates in the stack, the temporary absence of one from the stack attracted no notice.

He kept this small slate next to him out of my view, and really wrote the message *on the small slate which was next to him, and which was concealed from my view by the larger slate*. He did not read aloud what he had actually written but merely pretended to do so, repeating something entirely foreign to the subject instead. What he had written really answered my question fully. When he appeared to erase the message, his movements were but a pretense; and he did not erase it at all. When he replaced the large slate on the stack of slates, he, of course, replaced the small one which was concealed under it, *message side down*.

It must be remembered that the operator, at the beginning of the slate trick, first took up and examined the large slate a time or so for a message; and finding none, seemed disappointed, and finally wrote the automatic message; then on being informed that it did not apply to the case, he seemed dissatisfied and appeared to erase it.

After the message was written and the slates replaced, he examined the top slate a time or so, and even lifted off a few small slates looking for writing, but did not turn them over; then seeing nothing, he scattered the slates around on the table, leaving their same sides downwards; and handing me the cover, he requested me to cover them and place my hands on them.

The trick was now practically done. As the slates had been examined so many times and nothing found on them, *even after the automatic writing*, the majority of persons would testify that there was positively nothing on the slates when the medium left the table. The majority of persons would never remember that he at one time wrote on the large slate and erased it. The message being on a small slate, and these being spread around, few would have known that this message really appeared on the particular small slate that was originally next the top of the stack.

Most people would have certified that they cleaned all of the slates

themselves, that the medium never touched any of the small ones, and that he only laid his hands on top of the stack a few times. Some would even forget that the medium handled their writing at all before burning it.

I am sure that the nicked tube that carried the dripping water into the space over the glass bowl, had a second tube within it; through which his assistant from the adjoining room either blew, or sent by some mechanism, the chemicals (probably potassium) that would take fire and burn on striking the water.

When I perform the slate trick described above, after writing the "automatic" message, apparently erasing it, and replacing the slates, I do not scatter the slates around on the table as this medium did. Instead, I proceed as I will now describe.

We place our palms on the stack, and after a time examine the large slate for a message, but find none. I may incidentally remark that this last examination unconsciously verifies in the sitter's mind the fact that I actually erased what I wrote "automatically."

I now look on some of the smaller slates for a message but find none. When I do this I do not turn these slates over and look on their under sides, but merely take off the top slate to see if there be a message *on the upper surface of the one under it*. I merely remark, "Well, there is nothing on that slate," indicating the second one from the top; and at the same time I drop the top slate (now in my hand) on the table beside the stack. I immediately take off the second slate and repeat this same performance, dropping it on top of the first one. I keep on with this performance until I have removed four or five of the slates, and have them stacked in a second stack beside the first one. Then seeming to grow discouraged, I remark, "I guess there is no message"; and I replace the second stack on the first stack. This places the message slate four or five slates down in the stack; as the bottom slate of the second stack, being the top slate of the original stack, is now the message slate.

I next up-edge the small slates and place a rubber band around them placing them in the sitter's lap. I, of course, place what was the top of the stack downwards when I do so. As the stack is on the side edges of the slates when I first up-edge them, I next bring them upon the end edges, while I put the band in place. It is now easy to place the stack of slates upon the sitter's lap with the top slate down and to attract no notice to this fact. This is because the position has been changed a time or so in placing the band on;

and I then take the stack in my hands by the edges of the slates, and simply place what was the top side of the stack in the beginning, at the bottom.

In due time I tell the subject to make an examination for a message, and of course four or five slates down he finds a message on *the upper* surface of one of the slates.

This seems very miraculous, as the slates have been so repeatedly examined and nothing found. Finding the message on the upper surface of a middle slate, where but a moment before there was nothing, seems to be truly a marvel. The subject having cleaned and stacked these slates himself, and having seen them examined so many times, naturally feels impressed that the message comes by some super-human power.

There is a variation of this slate trick which I consider much superior to it. In the form referred to the automatic writing is done away with entirely. It is really one of the best slate tricks extant for a private sitting, and is being used by a few of the most up-to-date mediums of to-day.

The medium uses nine small slates with padded edges. He also uses one large slate as in the preceding trick. On one of the small slates is a message prepared in advance and written with a soapstone pencil, as this looks more white and startling.

The medium seats the sitter at a small table, and then enters with the slates. He carries them on his left hand and arm arranged as follows: At the bottom, *message side down*, is the prepared small slate, and on top of it is the large slate. On top of the large slate are eight small unprepared slates. The medium stands at the left of the sitter, with the slates on his left hand and arm, and slightly tilted towards the sitter so as to conceal the message slate underneath from his view. The existence of a concealed slate is not suspected. The medium now gives the sitter the small slates one at a time to examine, and as the sitter returns them, the medium places them on the table in a stack in front of the sitter.

Just as the eighth small slate is placed on top of the stack, the medium brings the large slate in front of the sitter, right over the stack, allowing the edge next the sitter to tilt downward at an angle of 45 degrees and rest on the front edge of the stack. *At the same time he attracts the attention of the sitter by giving him a pencil with his right hand, and requesting the sitter to write his name and the date of his birth on the large slate.* The medium says, "Write it right there," pointing with his right fingers to the center of the large slate which he still holds with his left hand. Of course, he has meanwhile

allowed the prepared slate underneath to quietly take its position on top of the stack of small slates. When the medium first enters, the slates being rather heavy, are supported partly on the left arm. As soon as enough of them have been removed to make what remains light enough, they are allowed to slip more completely into the left hand, and be grasped by the fingers. This enables the medium to press the concealed slate up against the under surface of the large slate firmly, and makes it also easier to drop it onto the stack when the large slate pauses over it for an instant.

As soon as the sitter writes as requested, the medium places the large slate in the sitter's lap for him to hold; and taking a large rubber band, he snaps it around the stack of small slates and places them in the sitter's lap upon the large slate. When the stack is on the table before placing the band around it, the top slate has the message on its under side; and the fact can not be noticed that among so many slates one has been added to the stack. The stack is turned on edge to even it up, and as the band is placed in position, the stack is allowed to finish turning over. This must be done gradually as the band is put on and as the stack is placed on the large slate now in the sitter's lap. This "turning" of the stack brings the message slate to the bottom, message side upwards. The sitter is now requested to place his palms on the stack and in due time he finds his message. This is very effective and easy to perform. The slates must not be placed on the table before they are examined, but must be held in the left hand during the examination and cleaning of the slates by the sitter. Should they be laid on the table the effect of the lower slate can be seen.

When the sitter is examining the eight small slates in the beginning, the medium should not stack them up too evenly; for if the stack is very neat, and the message slate should be dropped onto the stack out of position, it would attract notice.

## VIII.

THERE IS A LLADY medium in Omaha who is the wife of a prominent citizen. She is afflicted, being nearly blind. This lady, in her séances, produces large quantities of cut flowers, which she claims to materialize from their "astral forms." Most persons would think that a lady of her standing, and afflicted in the manner she is, would not deceive.

The ladies at her séances are allowed to thoroughly examine her clothing, her cabinet and the room ; and when nothing suspicious is found she enters her cabinet in full light, and as she materializes the flowers she passes them out over the cabinet top.

I have never witnessed one of her séances myself, but I have talked to several who have done so. They are almost all firm believers. The flowers are nature's own production, and have nature's sap within them. They are composed of cells formed by growth, the same as other plants. All of this can be verified under the microscope. The spirits claim to dematerialize these flowers and bring the "astral forms" of them through space; and then through the occult powers of the medium, they are enabled to materialize them again for the benefit of unbelieving mortals.

I have good reason to believe that her flowers are furnished by a greenhouse in Council Bluffs. Some years ago before the medium was afflicted by failing eyesight, and when she was a widow, mediumship was her profession. She was known as Madam —. and had rooms where she held séances for a livelihood. At that time she did not work from a cabinet in the light, but in a bare, unfurnished room, with lights out.

She would allow her clothing to be examined by the ladies, and would then, after the lights were lowered, walk about within the circle and produce flowers, presenting them to different individuals with a suitable message. My friend, the advertising agent, attended some of these séances. He noticed that the medium, after producing a number of flowers, would invariably return to a certain position in the room; after which she would produce some more flowers. She always did this in the same manner; so he began to notice who sat in the position to which she always returned.

He found a lady there who was the wife of a certain sleight-of-hand performer of this city. This lady sat between the servant of the medium and the medium's daughter in all cases. He became convinced that these parties were the confederates of the medium and that the flowers were concealed under the skirts of the middle lady.

Accordingly, one time, in conversation with this confederate, he spoke of her "smooth work," just as if he knew it as a matter of course. The confederate then said, "Did Madam — tell you?" and laughed. She confessed that she had a large pocket under her skirt running around it like a sack, in which were the flowers. When the confederate entered the room the medium invariably began her séance at once, so as to keep any one from noticing the

fullness of the confederate's skirts.

My friend had also noticed that when the spectators were few, flowers were numerous; and that when there were a large number of spectators the flowers were scarce. This first led him to suspect that she had always the same quantity, and that she always exhausted her stock, as the flowers were perishable property.

One day this friend was in the medium's rooms when a messenger boy arrived with a basket of the regulation flowers. They were from Council Bluffs. My friend looked at the medium and smiled. She returned the smile and remarked, "Can you keep a secret?" She was evidently going to confide in him; but just then there appeared a caller for a private reading, and the opportunity passed. When she returned to the room, she seemed to have changed her mind, and nothing was said.

I think she uses no confederate in her present home, as she now works in full light; but I feel confident that a trap could be found in the walls or base board behind her cabinet. It is probably constructed something like the one I described in [my article in \*The Open Court of August, 1905\*](#), through which the spirits were materialized. If this be the case and it be well made, it might be difficult to locate the secret latch that opens it.

I may incidentally mention that the son of this lady confederate afterwards became a medium of some renown. He learned under a traveling professional medium, and grew to be very expert. He is out over the world, now following his profession. I know the town wherein he is now wintering, as a clairvoyant and trance medium.

The lady medium described above, operated in Denver, Colorado, for a long time.

## IX.

IN THE SPIRITUALISTIC part of the realm of trickery, fashion has played a not unimportant role. As soon as the first mediums could induce the spirits of the departed to return to this earth and rap on tables and furniture, the fashion rapidly spread and mediums all over the country sprang up with exactly these same powers. The fashion remains to this day; although there is a book on the market, being a confession of one of the founders of this religion, to the effect that her work was fraudulent. As soon as a leading medium spoke of

his magnetic powers, all of the mediums in the country had magnetic powers, which, strange to say, could act on wood and could also act in ways in which magnetism was never known to act.

As soon as a leading medium started the fashion of having an Indian guide, all of the mediums in the country had Indian guides. Unto this day this fashion is still in vogue. Some mediums now have as many as forty or fifty guides. This is more especially true among the non-professional mediums—those who really can give no tests, as they are not versed in the art of trickery. At some of the materializing séances of a certain medium, as he relates it to me, one of the most amusing features is the frequent disputes and quarrels of this class of persons over certain guides which he materializes, and which each claims as his own.

The next fashion was the dark séance. This always seemed so unreasonable to me, and such evidence of trickery, that I have always been surprised that otherwise intelligent persons could give credence to such performances. I have refrained from describing any of the tricks of this class heretofore, as I did not consider them of sufficient importance to justify any attention. However, a recent occurrence of this kind came under my notice, and I found the effect so great on persons of some education, that I have decided to give my experience of the case to the readers of this article.

One evening, not so very long ago, just as I was about to retire for the night, my door bell rang; and I found some ladies at my door. I knew one of them, and she explained the lateness of the call by saying that a party of friends and herself had been discussing occult phenomena, and that she had mentioned the fact that I possessed a crystal globe for crystal gazing. Immediately all of the ladies were full of enthusiasm, and she could get no peace until she brought them to me.

I found that these ladies had, a day or so previously, called on a couple of mediums in the neighboring city of Council Bluffs; and that they there had had a most marvelous experience. Each of the ladies had a sitting with the lady medium; and as their experiences were similar, I will relate the experience of one, a Mrs. C—, as related to me.

This lady is a business woman of Omaha, is possessed of considerable means, and moves in high society. They had journeyed to the neighboring town for the purpose of seeing the new mediums of whom they had heard, and they went into the presence of these mediums absolute strangers.

The lady medium took this lady into a small room where absolute

darkness reigned, and had a sitting with her under test conditions; that is, the lady placed her toes on the medium's toes, her knees against the medium's knees, and she thought that she held the medium's hands; thus making it impossible for the medium to move without her discovering it.

I should have said that the room was lighted until she and the medium took their positions, after which her friends turned out the lights, and retired to an adjoining room where they faithfully guarded the medium's husband.

Now these ladies had heard of tricks being performed, and were consequently on their guard; and they watched all so closely, that there was absolutely no possibility of trickery.

Soon after the lights were put out, the medium passed into a trance state, while the sitter securely held her. Soon the sitter felt a breeze pass over her face as if an invisible hand had passed in front of it; and then she heard raps on her chair, on an adjoining piece of furniture, and in fact all around her. Next, something touched her on the head and person lightly, and almost frightened her to death. Meanwhile the medium was talking and describing, for the sitter's identification, certain spirits that were present.

Among the things that occurred, there floated into the lap of the sitter a letter C. It was softly luminous, and the medium stated that this was the first letter of the lady's name, which was correct. Numerous soft, hazy lights floated about her; and a tin trumpet that stood close by floated into the air, passing over the sitter's head and giving it a bump, after which voices issued from the trumpet.

Among the most astonishing things the medium did, she informed this lady of an important secret in her past life, of which no one in this city knew. It was one of those family secrets, such as are in many families, and it was deeply buried from the public gaze. She said she had not thought of this secret for a long time, and that this medium gave it to her in the most marvelous fashion. As I suggested that the medium possibly led her to make remarks from which she divined the knowledge of this secret, she was very certain that the medium had done nothing of the kind.

One of the ladies—a writer for a daily paper here—had become greatly frightened during her sitting, and had felt herself leaving her own body; and she could see her body standing by her, and she became so frightened that she discontinued the séance.

I laughed at these stories, and told them of some of the tricks of mediums; and even showed them a screen covered with luminous paint, which shines

beautifully in the dark. They then confessed that the lights which the medium produced, might have been a trick; and when I told the first lady of the artificial hands sometimes used, she was not so positive as to whether she had held the medium's hands or whether the medium had held hers. She, however, was certain that one of them held her hands on top of the others, and that there was no artificial hand used as the temperature was that of a living person. I explained that this might even be the case, if the hand had been concealed for some time in the lady's clothing. She then confessed that she had noticed a button in the front of the medium's dress, which was unbuttoned when the lights were turned up; and that the medium quickly closed it.

She insisted that the inexplicable part of it all was how the medium had discovered her secret. She said, "It must be spirits, or else it is mind-reading." I said I will show you something, myself, if you will step into an adjoining room." I handed her a sheet of paper with six lines drawn across it, and requested her to write a name in each space; all to be names of living persons but one, which was to be the name of a dead person. As soon as she did this, I cut them apart, as described in [my article in the August Open Court of 1905](#), and folded them into billets.

When she placed these in a hollow skull and held them under the table, I directed her to throw them on the table one at a time; and, of course, when she threw the one on which was the name of the dead person, I told her this was the dead one's name, and read it for her without looking at it.

I describe this here for the benefit of readers who may not have read my former article. I also had her write down a number of places and diseases, among which was the place of her friend's death and the disease of which she died. I then told her the correct ones, where and of which, her friend died, this trick being the same as performed by the great medium Schlossenger.

This seemed to dumbfound her; and then I gave her a couple of slates to examine, and proceeded to perform one of several slate tricks with which I am familiar. When she found a message on these slates which had not left her sight at all, and after examining them thoroughly, she concluded that she was not capable of discerning between trickery and genuine phenomena. However, she and her friends insisted that I see this medium when she should later come to Omaha, and still seemed so greatly impressed with her that I readily promised.

A short time after this evening, I received a telephone call from this lady,

announcing that this medium and her husband were in town and were not yet located. I accordingly extended them the hospitality of my home over Sunday, and invited the aforesaid ladies with some others to call that evening.

The mediums arrived at my home in due time, and in looking over my paintings and pictures, ran across a couple of photographs of myself performing a decapitation act. This was their first inkling that I was a performer. Next, they happened to mention the name of a certain dealer in tricks for mediums, but they did not speak of him in this capacity, but in the capacity of a medium instead. I did not know that this gentleman ever traveled as a medium himself, and so stated; but they insisted that he had. Whether they be right or not as to this, I do not know; but I showed my knowledge of him, and the address of his firm, whereupon the gentleman asked me if I had seen his catalogue. I replied that I had it and that I was a performer of many tricks and could give him some valuable instruction if he desired. This put him entirely at his ease and he seemed to regard me as a member of the profession; and from this time on he talked openly of the work, the various tricks, and the tricks of the many mediums over the country whom he knew quite well. He spoke of the "Camp" in Indiana and of the mediums he met there, and told many amusing anecdotes.

We put in the afternoon instructing each other, and he showed me a neat billet and slate test that he and his wife used, and also described his materializing work in a laughable manner. He seemed to have a thorough knowledge of the methods by which two of Chicago's most celebrated mediums produce their spirit paintings, etc., etc. He however all along insisted that although he had this knowledge of trickery, (which he could not well avoid, traveling around in this business as he did), that his wife was a genuine medium. He openly acknowledged his materializing was a smooth trick, but said that to make a living in this business, certain tricks were a necessity. He insisted on the marvelous powers of his wife, however, and it was evident that they intended to perform for me and leave me in the dark on this part of the question.

As soon as it was dark I repaired to a dark room and took a seat with the lady. She placed a slate on her lap for me to place my palms on, and asked me to place the two palms closely together allowing my thumbs to contact each other their entire length. She now said, "Mr. Abbott I will place my hands on yours in this manner." As she said this she placed a palm on each of my hands, and then she said, "If I should lift either hand you could tell it,

could you not?" She illustrated this by alternately lifting either hand. I was sure I could tell if either were removed, and I informed her to that effect.

The lights were now put out and I took my position with the medium's knees between mine, and my palms on the slate. She again placed her palms on the backs of my hands and asked me if I could tell if she removed either one. She illustrated this again by lifting either palm and replacing it. This she did two or three times. I noted this and remembered it. She now replaced her palms, and I was quite sure that she did not use an artificial hand; for I felt the fingers move on the backs of each of my hands in so lifelike a manner as to disprove the idea that either hand was artificial.

She now went into her trance, and first felt the influence of a lady whom she described very accurately. The description fitted my mother very well, and did not fit any other relative that I know who might be dead. However, as my mother is alive, I said nothing and thus did not lead her on. I must confess that my natural impulse was to reply to her statements, *which she gave me with such a rising inflection, as to be really asking me a question*; although the mere words indicated a positive statement on her part instead of a question. I was familiar with this manner of "fishing" and of course I did not respond. I have since learned from my wife that the lady saw my mother's picture during the afternoon, but she was given no information about her.

She soon dropped this spirit and brought up that of a little child; then she introduced a second child, and said that she took them to be my own. There was another rising inflection in this statement, and this time I decided to break my silence, but to remember what I should say. I therefore informed her that I had never had any children. She immediately said, "Then it is a brother;" and I said, "Yes." This statement was pretty safe on her part, for there are few families in which there is not a dead brother.

Had I not been versed in trickery I can readily see how much information I would have given her, for I had to continually guard my own tongue; as her questions, or more correctly *her statements with a rising inflection*, were worded so adroitly and came so rapidly. While this was going on I felt some light touches on my person, face, head, etc.; and not expecting them, I started suddenly when I felt them. The touches were very short in duration, what a musician would call staccato. They were also very light. Soon raps appeared on an adjoining bed, and she proceeded to ask the spirits the questions about me, and the raps replied.

The questions were so worded that I could surmise that it was intended

that I should answer them also. In fact, it is natural to reply to statements given with a rising inflection, and the uninitiated would have done so.

Sometimes I decided to humor her and I made a reply. When such was the case I found that the raps would answer so quickly, with me, or rather after me, as to appear to be simultaneous with me. However, I saw plainly that they followed my own answers; but so very quickly that to the uninitiated they would have appeared to be simultaneous with, or even ahead of one's own answers. This effect is due to the way the answers attract the attention so strongly, coming in such a mysterious manner, that I was tempted to forget I had answered the questions. I am sure persons in general would have forgotten this fact, for they would have been so much more impressed with the performance and startled, that they would have been laboring under strong excitement; whereas I was perfectly cool, knowing it was a trick. There is much difference in the effect when one knows such a thing is a trick, and does not think some supernatural agency is at work.

Meanwhile I saw a soft luminous light floating about, and voices came through the trumpet which bumped about the room. Raps came on my chair and *during all this time she never ceased to "pump" for information.*

Now at first I was a trifle startled, for I felt that she had not removed either hand; but my common sense soon told me that she had, and that her left hand, which was a large one, *rested one-half on each of my hands*; that at the last moment, before starting the tests, she had placed her hand in this position, keeping her right hand free. She had *apparently raised a palm from the back of each hand, by merely tilting up*, the side of her left hand which touched one of my hands allowing the other side of it to remain in contact with my other hand, and remarking, "You can feel when I take this one away, can you?" She then tilted up the other side, making the same remark.

I knew that she was touching me, and making the raps with her free hand; and that she did the talking in the trumpet: and also that the lights were a piece of gauzy silk dyed with a preparation containing "Balmain's Luminous Paint." I was surprised at the illusion to the sense of touch, for it felt precisely as if both her hands rested on mine. If any of my readers will try this on any of their friends in the dark and not explain the secret to them, they will find the illusion is perfect. It only requires boldness. There is no one to whom this is unknown, who can tell in the dark that two hands do not rest on the backs of his hands. The subject must of course place the two palms very closely together, allowing his thumbs to contact each other their entire length.

Having failed to give me any information of a startling nature, owing to her inability to excite me and cause me to unconsciously lead her on, she now told me to ask for any one I desired and she would see if they would come. I asked for William J—, a friend who had died recently. She said, "He is here but I can not see his face plainly. It seems that he passed out suddenly. It seems as if an accident had happened?" This was given with a rising inflection. As I made no reply she remarked, "Anyway, he passed out suddenly."

My friend had died of typhoid fever, after a week or ten days of great suffering. It is true that the disease struck him with great violence in a sudden manner, but I did not get excited and try to apply her remark to the facts of the case.

She next remarked, "He was not a musician." I do not know what prompted this remark, unless it be that she had discovered that I am a musician, and play several instruments. She made this remark in a manner that seemed to expect an answer, but as I made none, she said, "No, he was no musician."

Now, the facts are, my friend was a musician, playing both cornet and piano well. Among my treasures is a phonograph record of a cornet and clarinet duet which we played together at one time. I however said nothing of this that would help her out; but I then fully realized how natural it would have been for the average investigator to have given her pointers enough to prevent her making this error.

She next said, "Yes, he passed out suddenly, and seems to regret something, as if he left it undone, or unsettled." I made no reply and she said, "As if he had left something unpaid, you understand?" I determined to humor her and I said, "Something which he owed me?" I said this as if she had struck a responsive chord, and she said, "Yes, that is it: It was what he owed you. He says this is his one regret."

Now, I will state that I do not believe my friend ever owed any debts; and I am sure that he never owed anything to me, and that he left nothing unpaid. He was a very honorable and upright young man.

I next asked for a young lady, Georgia C—. She seemed to think this was a gentleman; and she spoke of her in the masculine gender and proceeded to call "him" up and remarked on the suddenness of "his" demise. I did not respond and she dropped this spirit. I may mention that the young lady also died of typhoid fever after a long illness.

She next said, "I can see an accident as of a wreck. I see it affects you in some way, and I think others also. It either has happened or is to happen." I made no response and she said, "Were you ever in a wreck?" and as I was slow in replying, she added, "Or anything of the kind?"

I replied, "Yes, I was in something of the kind." In fact I had been in two serious accidents with horses. At one time while riding a bicycle, I was struck by a runaway horse which ran directly over me; and there is yet a slight injury on my breast from it. At another time I was thrown from a buggy in a runaway, and was totally unconscious for half an hour; and then after the return of my reason, was totally without memory for a period of one and one-half hours. I could reason on my condition, but by no effort could I recall my name or by searching my mind find the least glimpse of memory. My reason was perfectly clear, and I plainly recollect my striving to remember who and where I was. I remember that my first thought on the return of reason was the bearing this experience had on the possibility of a future life, after the death of the body. This incident is of great interest to me yet, but is out of place here, so I will not digress further.

I have had other accidents, so I could not tell to which one she referred; but I acknowledged an accident resembling a wreck. She said, "You had a narrow escape?" I replied, "Yes." She then said, "You still have a scar or something on your person as a memento of this?" I replied that I did; however, there is no scar, but there is a slight enlargement over a rib where the hoof struck me. I could easily have said a few words, and she would have given me the details; but I only gave her as many pointers as I herein describe. She said, "I believe this was with horses some way," and I replied, "Yes it was." However she could have inferred this from the surprise in my voice when I repeated after her the words, "A wreck?" with a rising inflection when she first mentioned the accident. All persons have had accidents, and it is only for a medium to start the subject and "pump" out of the sitter the details, after which the usual sitter will think the medium gave the details herself.

I saw how effective her system of "pumping" was; and I saw how most persons would have received much better results than I did, by talking more and by making unguarded exclamations. Systems of "pumping" or "fishing" are an art with mediums, and they grow very expert at it, and do it so naturally that it takes an expert to detect that he himself is giving the medium the information.

Most persons would have regarded this information as most wonderful and would have quickly forgotten the little failures she made. In fact, with most, she would not have carried her failures so far; for they would most naturally have stopped her when wrong, instead of allowing her to mislead herself, as I did.

How many of my readers have ever blindfolded themselves and tried to find a hidden article by touching the tips of the fingers of a person who intently thinks of the article and its hiding-place? Those who have done this will remember the swaying motions of the body in the different directions in the endeavor to find the direction by first discovering the "line of least resistance"; how the subjects resist when the operator is wrong; and while they do not lead one, how they quickly encourage one by not resisting when one starts right. This same principle applies to the art of "fishing." The medium mentions many things on many subjects, and the sitter resists or overlooks the ones on the "wrong track"; and while not intending to lead the medium, *shows by encouragement when the medium is on the "right track."*

After the séance I did not at first tell the medium I had discovered her trick, but I did tell her that I knew how her lights were produced, and this she did not deny. I merely said, "I am puzzled as to how you handled these lights, Mrs. C. tells me that you floated a luminous letter C into her lap, telling her this was the initial of her name." The medium replied, "Did she say that?" I replied that she did. The medium then said, "That shows what a person's imagination will do. I had no luminous letters. I merely moved the luminous cloth so as to describe a letter C, after discovering her name."

She said that when she gave tests to any one, the stories they told afterwards continually grew, and always grew to her advantage. That they grew so that when they came back to her, she could hardly recognize her own work. She said, "It is a fact that believers are so anxious for tests, that they always help one out; and they invariably help out, if they be believers, in the way that the medium desires they should."

I afterwards sat with Mrs. C— and repeated the tests the medium gave her; and she did not discover how I did it, and admitted that I did it just as well and successfully as the medium did. I did not tell her that I had but one hand on her two hands. I have prepared some luminous hands, faces, and forms on silk, which I use in such cases; and I find the effect of these dark séance tricks is on the average just as impressive as are the more difficult feats which I perform in the light.

I may mention that Mrs. C— had a sitting with this medium again on the same evening that I did; and that she insisted to me afterwards, that two hands touched her, one on each side of her face, at the same instant. This shows the average person's lack of memory when describing little details. I asked her if her face were not first touched on one side, and then quickly afterwards on the other; and she admitted that such might have been the case. I will say that when my wife had a sitting with this medium, there was a very dim light in an adjoining hall; and as my wife faced a transom she could dimly see the medium manipulating her free arm. The medium was unaware of the slight light shining through the transom and of the fact that she was between my wife and this light.

At a later date when better acquainted with this medium, she explained to me the means by which she had obtained the profound secret which she gave to Mrs. C—. Mrs. C—'s most intimate friend accompanied her to the first meeting with this medium and had the first sitting. To her own friends, this lady pretended to be an ardent believer. In fact she was a skeptic, but was very anxious to become a medium herself. She accordingly courted the favor of this medium by revealing to her this secret, in the hope of receiving some instruction in the coveted art in return for her kindness.

I am acquainted with a gentleman who in describing a slate performance which Slade gave him, solemnly tells me that he purchased and took his own slate with him, and that it never left his own hands or the light. Further he states most positively that he saw the message in the process of appearing on the slate letter by letter. This man is a traveling salesman for a large firm, a good business man, and honest. Now neither Slade nor any other person ever gave such a performance; and among all the magicians who saw Slade, no one ever witnessed such a trick.

Truly, not much reliance can be put in miraculous tales related second-hand of such performances. One can only test such things by seeing the details oneself.

## X.

AT ONE TIME I knew a materializing medium who was one of the best in the country. He did not use confederates and have them enter through a trap, as is often done by some of the best mediums who materialize in their own

homes in the larger cities.

I may mention that this latter class very often have the trap in the base board behind the cabinet, as I explained in a former article. Sometimes the trap is in the ceiling and it is masked by a heavy border in the paper on the ceiling. In such cases the cabinet curtains extend to the ceiling; and when the singing commences, this trap is opened from the room above and a padded ladder let down into the cabinet. The various "spirits" descend and perform their parts, then return up the ladder, and withdrawing it, close the trap. During this time the medium guards the cabinet; and a few faithful confederates in the front row of spectators see to it that no accidents happen. This is one of the best traps; for the cabinet and walls can be inspected thoroughly, before and after the performance. No one ever suspects the ceiling, which is inaccessible to inspection. A trap through the floor is sometimes used, but this is not so good an idea.

The medium to whom I just referred uses none of these traps, neither does he submit himself to any of the various "rope ties" which are so numerous. He says that doing so only creates suspicion. He trusts entirely to the loyalty of a few confederates and ardent believers, who are seated in the front row and who see to it that "conditions" are not disturbed.

Strangers and skeptics are seated well back. He uses many elegant costumes, all made of the finest silk; and they can all be contained in a very small space. He has one piece consisting of twenty-one yards of the finest white French bridal veiling, which can be contained in a pint cup. It is two yards wide and very gauzy. Such material can only be obtained in the very largest cities and is difficult to find even there.

This is prepared as follows: The fabric is first washed carefully through seven waters, and while damp worked thoroughly and rapidly through the solution given below. It is then tacked on a large wall space and left to dry for three days. After this it is washed with naphtha soap until all odor leaves it and until the fabric is perfectly soft and pliable. Only silk will retain the paint through this washing.

The solution for dyeing is made as follows: One jar of "Balmain's Luminous Paint," one-half pint Demar varnish, one pint odorless benzine, fifty drops of lavender oil. All must be mixed together, kept thin, and the work done very rapidly.

This fabric will, after being exposed to the light, shine for a long time in the dark and appear as a soft, luminous vapor. He uses this piece for the hair,

which reaches to the floor, when he impersonates Cleopatra and other queens.

The silk for his skirt and waist, is ordinary white silk. It is prepared with a most elaborate and beautiful design of vines, leaves, roses, and so forth, painted on it with the *undiluted* "Balmain" paint. This appears many times more brilliant than the gauze. His crown, beads, and jewels are also painted with the pure paint. They are very brilliant. All parts not painted are in perfect darkness. His face can not be seen except when he wears a beautiful mask dimly illuminated, or when he places a piece of the luminous gauze over it, allowing the gauze to shape to, and cling to his features.

It was a beautiful sight in the darkness, to see him in this gorgeous appearing costume, while with his finely modulated voice he impersonated the voice of the Egyptian queen in a "spirit whisper" and in her native tongue.

When made up as an old Indian chief, his costume was fantastic to the degree of barbarism. His head-dress, feathers, etc., were painted with the pure paint, and he wore a dimly illuminated Indian face. It looked grotesque to see him in the darkness "doing" a war-dance for ardent believers, while in his deep voice he chanted in the old chief's native tongue. He was a splendid actor and could modulate his voice from the deepest basso to the fine voice of the best female impersonators.

When he was materializing as Queen "Oriana" I could first notice a small, vapory light near the floor, which gradually grew to the size of a human form. Then a few feet from it another appeared gradually. These waved about as vapory, willowy ghosts. They were the gauze fabric which he had gradually uncovered to our view. Then, gradually, his form began appearing between these, and near the floor; and it grew gradually, to full size, while the crown and jewels shone with a weird brilliancy that almost lighted the room dimly. The two gauzy forms now appeared as the shining hair of the queen reaching to the floor.

When he impersonated a child he seemed to be able to contract his size and shrink down so as to appear as a little child. He could imitate a child's voice to perfection.

He recounted many amusing incidents of his materializations, when talking to me, whom he knew to be in the possession of his secret. He said it was laughable sometimes when he was called upon by some of the class of believers who have "soul-mates," and who desire them to be materialized.

Doubtless some of my readers have heard of some such persons who have studied "occult science" and whose "soul-mates" reside on Mars, Jupiter, or

some other planet. I used to think that these people knew better; but I have met so many of them, that I have about concluded that they are deluded and actually believe in these "soul-mates." Sometimes these persons have considerable means, and pay the medium a goodly sum to materialize a particular "soulmate" for them.

One instance which he related to me was of a lady with considerable means whose "soul-mate" was an ancient king. She gave this medium fifty dollars for a materialization in private. The medium sat in his cabinet while his wife sat with the believer in total darkness. At the proper time the ancient king appeared in the gorgeous costume of a barbaric age. The lady began weeping, and with tears in her voice she cried, "Oh, King! King! you make me so happy!" He replied in the lowest and most solemn tones of his beautiful voice, "Do not weep, your Majesty. Remember how happy you will be with me when you sit by my side on my throne, etc., etc." It was certainly amusing to hear him recount this incident and give the correct imitation of the lady's tearful voice, followed by his own deep melodious tones.

He told me that it was in such cases as this that he frequently made his "best money." He was wearing a beautiful solitaire diamond ring on his little finger. He asked if I would like to hear its history. I said that I would and he gave me the following story.

A certain judge of the Supreme Court of an Eastern state, had a fiancée who was killed in a railroad wreck. This sad accident had occurred just after the judge had purchased this ring for her, and before he had an opportunity of presenting it. This judge was nearly distracted over his loss and visited various spirit mediums. A certain one, a very prominent lady minister of a noted spiritualist church in that state, learned of all this, but was unable to secure the ring from the judge.

She met this medium and in his own language gave him "the dope for this judge." She told him the judge still had the ring and as she could not "work him" for it, she would turn him over to the tender mercies of this medium.

When the judge called one afternoon for a reading, this medium called from the "other side" the judge's sweetheart. During the conversation the "spirit" deftly brought up the subject of this ring; and then said that if the judge would return that evening, she would appear to him, and that he could present this ring to her. She said that she would dematerialize it and take its "astral" form with her into the "realms of spirit."

The medium then worked very hard securing proper make-up material for

the evening. At the proper time the "spirit" of the lady appeared dressed in a most gorgeous bridal costume of the greatest beauty. Her face was in darkness and she spoke only in whispers. She held the most beautiful lilies-of-the-valley in her hands, and her costume was covered with orange blossoms. Some of the flowers were luminous. The sight was so beautiful that the judge was deeply affected and shed tears. The "spirit" walked towards him and held out her little finger, on which the judge slipped the diamond, which the medium now wears.

I asked this medium if he had ever seen a medium who could perform any trick which he could not fathom. He said that he had, and related to me that a certain medium, a lady now in the West somewhere, had a secret for materializations that was very fine. Her husband had been a chemist; and she possessed some kind of a capsule that she could moisten in her mouth and roll towards the spectators in the darkness, when it would rise into a luminous vapor the size of a human form and move about. There was no odor and nothing could be seen if the lights were raised: but on turning them out, it again appeared. He said none of the mediums could get the secret of this trick. The medium at one time offered to sell some of the capsules at one dollar each. One medium bought twenty-five of them; but when she tried to use them they would not work; and she almost tore her hair in anguish to think that she, who had duped so many, should herself be duped.

This medium showed me, in his paraphernalia, a half-dozen books of "dope" which were for persons in various cities he intended visiting. He had secured the information which they contained in various ways, but most frequently from other mediums who had been in these places.

## XI.

AT ONE TIME an acquaintance told me of a wonderful experience that he had with a certain medium. He had called at the hotel where the medium was stopping, and asked for a private reading. The medium, a very dignified gentleman, received him, and proceeded to give him a very interesting verbal reading. He told my acquaintance of many occurrences in his past life, of things that were worrying him, etc. Finally he brought out a number of slates and gave them to the sitter with the request that he select two of them and lay the remainder on the bed. The sitter also cleaned and thoroughly examined

the slates, and under the direction of the medium held them on his own head. The medium merely touched the edges of the frames of the slates with the tips of his fingers, which the sitter particularly noticed contained absolutely nothing. In a few moments the sitter took the slates from his head, and separating them, found on the inside of one a lengthy message addressed to him by name, and signed by the name of his dead mother. The message was devoted to subjects which were at that time affecting the sitter's life, and which the medium could not previously have known as the sitter was a stranger to the medium.

This acquaintance of mine regarded this performance as entirely beyond the possibilities of trickery, and as positive proof of communion with the soul of his departed mother.

There was another told me of this same medium, and he stated to me that he had bought two slates and took them with him to the medium's parlors. That these slates positively never left his hands, and yet he received a similar message.

Yet another told me of his marvelous experience with this same medium. When he entered the medium's parlor, he took his seat at a kind of large table or desk, and wrote on a slip of paper the question he wanted answered, and folded the same and placed it within his own pocket. As he did this the medium was engaged with a book at the opposite side of a large room. When he had finished, the medium began to give him a reading verbally. Finally he had the sitter select two slates and hold them on his own head; and in a few moments he received a message on the inside of one of the slates answering the question he had written, and giving additional information, and this was addressed to his name. This sitter paid five dollars for this reading.

Now, fortunately, I was personally acquainted with this marvelous medium and knew the exact means he employed in these tricks. The principle in each of the slate tests was the same. Had the spectator been a close observer he would have noticed that a large folding bed stood across the corner of the room, also that one side of the head of this bed did not reach to the wall by two feet. Had he looked behind this bed he would have seen an assistant seated on a chair in his stocking feet, with a table, several slates, and some crayon pencils. He would also have noticed that the room was heavily carpeted.

During the time that the medium was giving the first sitter the verbal reading, the concealed assistant was writing the message on subjects which

the medium adroitly hit upon in his conversation, and which he cunningly caused the sitter to admit and discuss with him. Naturally the sitter said many things which he forgot immediately; and the operator being very expert in this mental work, even secured his name in the conversation, by properly exciting the sitter in a certain description of an important event then in the process of occurring in his life. Of course the assistant, hearing all this information, was able to elaborate a message in which all this information was used to very telling advantage.

In his conversation, the operator, at the proper time, spoke certain words, which were a secret cue to the assistant to close the message and be ready.

Now when the sitter selected and cleaned the two slates and placed them together, the operator had him take a seat in a large, strong chair with the back towards the head of the folding bed. The operator now asked to touch the slate edges, during the trial for a message, with the tips of his fingers. When he did so, however, he really first grasped the edges of the ends of the slates holding them together; and he told the sitter to let loose and bring his palms up under, and beyond these slates, and to place his two palms against the surface of the slate which was nearest the medium.

The medium, it must be understood, was directly in front of the sitter with his arms extending forward towards the sitter, and his fingers grasping the ends of the slates by their frames. The sitter's arms were extended towards the medium, passing under the lower edge of the slates *which were held edgewise in a vertical position*, and his palms were pressed against the surface of the slate next to the medium. The sitter's palms thus faced himself, and the slates were held vertically, in a position between his palms and his own face. They were supported at the ends by pressure from the medium's fingers on their edges. It is very important that the reader form a good mental picture of this, if he desires to understand the trick thoroughly.

Now while the sitter was releasing his hold on the slates and changing the position of his hands, the operator deftly slipped the slate that was next to the sitter up about one half inch higher than the slate which the sitter's palms touched.

The operator now held the slates without grasping the edges, by merely pressing on the edges with his fingers, or squeezing his fingers against the edges of the slates. He now moved the slates upwards until above the sitter's head, then backwards until the edge of the forward slate rested on the sitter's head. The sitter's hands followed the slates with his palms remaining in

contact with the front slate. The sitter naturally supposed that the slates both rested on his head; but really his head, and his hands also, *only touched the forward slate*.

The medium now began a very interesting talk to the sitter; and as his assistant quietly slipped out from behind the bed with the prepared slate, the medium's conversation became very animated and almost violent. He also applied most of the pressure of his fingers to the forward slate; and relaxing the pressure on the *upper side* of the edge of the *rear slate*, he allowed it to tilt back an inch at the top. The assistant took hold of it *from behind the sitter*, lifted it out and substituted the prepared slate in its place, immediately retiring behind the bed with the discarded slate. The medium now grew more calm; and bringing the slates forward from the head of the sitter into the sitter's lap, he placed his own palms on them for a time and then asked the sitter to examine them for a message. When the sitter remarked that he did not believe the writing was his mother's, the medium stated that his guide did the writing at the dictation of the sitter's mother.

In the second case I described, wherein the sitter purchased and brought his own slates with him, the same tactics were followed except that the assistant could not prepare the message in advance of the writing experiment. He, of course, gathered the information and had a rather short message mentally prepared. It took considerably more time to perform the trick, but the operator made it so interesting for the sitter that this was not noticed. The assistant had to slip out at the proper time, take the rear slate, retire and write the message, bring it back and replace it, and then again retire.

The sitter was positive that his own slates never left his touch; but the fact was that the rear one on his head did, and he overlooked the fact that he was for a time merely touching one slate. Of course he never dreamed of a third person in the room.

In the last case I described, the only additional thing was the means by which the assistant secured a copy of the question which the sitter wrote and concealed. This large desk or table the medium carried with him. One leg was hollow, and it stood over a hole in the floor. As the table was very heavy, no one ever moved it. The top was prepared by first covering it with a very thin piece of white silk, placing a carbon sheet on this; and then some thin, slick, black cloth was placed over all and this cloth was tacked in place.

Paper and pencils lay on the table. The medium directed the sitter to go to the table and write his question, and sign his own name to it. As soon as he

did so, the medium told him to place it in his pocket, and then called him to the center of the room and began the reading. Now a strong cord which ran under the floor from the assistant, and passed up the hollow leg of the table, was securely attached to the corner of the white silk on the table under the carbon sheet. Of course, at the proper time, the assistant drew in this piece of silk and read the carbon impression of the question the sitter had written. In this trick the sheet of carbon should be slightly larger than the silk, and should be tacked to the table on the side opposite the hollow leg.

Another medium performed this slate trick in a slightly different but very effective manner. He usually did it as I shall now describe, when the sitter came with his own slates.

He gave the sitter a slip of paper on which to write his question, and requested him after writing to retain it in his pocket. He next gave the sitter a large rubber band to fasten the two slates together. When this was done, he took the slates in the tips of the fingers of his right hand, and placed them on the sitter's left shoulder just back of his range of vision; while with his left hand he grasped the sitter's two hands and looked into his eyes. He now gave the sitter an interesting verbal reading, after which he brought the slates into view and gave them to the sitter to unfasten and examine. When this was done, the sitter, greatly to his own mystification, found on the slates a lengthy message covering the two sides of the slates that were together, answering the question, and signed by the spirit to whom it had been addressed.

The secret was very simple. The slip of paper which the medium handed to the sitter had been rubbed over on both sides with white spermaceti wax. This was done while the paper rested on a smooth surface. Some pressure was applied, and the paper well rubbed, until it was coated with the wax. This could not be detected by one inexperienced. The medium saw to it that the sitter placed this slip on his (the sitter's) own slate while writing. This left the question transferred to the slate with a slight coat of wax. This was hardly noticeable. Now the rubber band was put around the slates, and the medium placed them in the position described above. While he entertained the sitter properly with the verbal reading, his confederate slipped out and took the slates, leaving two others in their stead which the medium now allowed to rest on the sitter's shoulder.

The confederate took the slates behind the bed, opened them, dusted common talcum, or toilet powder on the slates, shook it around, and as the powder adhered to the wax, he read the question and name. He now cleaned

the slates, wrote the message with soft crayon, closed the slates, slipped out behind the sitter and made the second exchange.

## XII.

I CAN NOT BETTER bring this paper to a close than by describing a very novel séance which I attended recently. It was a dark séance; but the most unusual part was that the work was really billet work, and it was performed in the most complete darkness.

This trick is but little known at present and the effect is simply beyond description. We called at the medium's parlors, and were each given a small white card and an envelope. We were instructed to write on the cards the questions we desired answered, to address them to our spirit friends, and to sign our own names, as is usual in such cases. We were also advised to let no one know what we had written, and to seal the cards in the envelopes. Wax was furnished, so that those who desired could seal their envelopes in this manner as an extra precaution. A number of the guests took advantage of this offer.

As soon as the questions were sealed, the medium entered the room and the lights were put out. The most complete darkness reigned. We sat around the room holding each other's hands, and the medium felt her way around in the darkness and collected our sealed missives in her hand.

She next took her seat opposite us in the room, and gave each person the most marvelous test. She did not read the questions word for word, which would have detracted from the effect, but gave the tests after this manner: "I feel the influence of cold, chilly water, and I hear the splashing of the waves of the sea. I see a great storm raging, and I get the influence of one who was a brother. He speaks the name of Harry, and says, 'Ella, do not worry about me. I am very happy now and know neither sorrow nor pain. All is brightness and joy over here.' Miss Smith, your brother is in the realms of bliss over there."

The question from which this test was given read as follows:

"Brother Harry: Did you suffer much agony when you were washed overboard and drowned?—Ella Smith."

These tests were all given in the most complete darkness; after which the medium requested that some committee come to her and receive the unopened envelopes in the darkness, before the lights were lighted. This was

done.

After this the room was lighted; and each guest selected his envelope by a slight mark which each had been requested to place on it, and received the same unopened and unaltered from the hands of the committee.

The effect of this séance can well be imagined. The guests did not write on any object that could receive any impression of their writing. The medium could not use odorless alcohol in the darkness; and in fact no one could read any question, even were it not sealed, in such darkness.

The secret is a simple one. If a person take a thin, white card and write on it, this can be sealed; yet the writing can be read easily in the darkness, if a small electric pocket flash-light be held behind the envelope. It could not be done in a lighted room, but in the darkness the writing appears very plain and legible. The small pocket-light can be concealed in the pocket of the medium; and the medium also has a large hood or sack made of rubber cloth or some cloth impervious to light, which is long enough to cover the upper portion of the person, including the head and hands. This sack is secreted in the pocket of the medium. After the envelopes are collected, the medium takes her seat near two confederates who prevent accidents; and in the darkness she withdraws the sack from the pocket, placing it secretly over the upper portion of her person.

She now takes the flash-light out of her pocket and proceeds under cover of the sack to read the questions and give the tests. The room being in total darkness, the subjects never know what the medium has done or is doing, but consider that she is in a partial trance.

After the tests are given, she takes off the sack, replaces it and the light in her pocket, and calls for the committee to receive the envelopes before the room is relighted.

The credit for the invention of this fine trick belongs not to a medium, as might be supposed, but to a magician,—Mr. Henry Hardin (E. A. Parsons) of New Haven, Conn. This gentleman is the originator of many subtle tricks used by both mediums and magicians. Many of his secrets are catalogued and sold by the dealers; and a number of the effects published in Professor Hoffman's *Later Magic* are of his invention, although the credit is given to certain dealers. This can be verified by referring to the old files of the magician's journal, *Mahatma*, wherein he first gave their secrets to the world. The trick just explained was advertised in *Mahatma* some years ago under the title of "The Trance Vision."

A medium once told me that the public never know half of the money that is gathered by the mediums. He said that they are continually "playing for big stakes" as this is where the "big money" is secured.

He also said that it is not the common people who are the best patrons of mediums, but doctors, lawyers, merchants, teachers, and the more intelligent class of persons. He said that scientific persons make the best of subjects, because they are in earnest and give the best attention; which fact is of the greatest importance for the success of any trick.

He said that really mediums do not care for performing for spiritualists so much, as they expect so much for their money; and if given a fine piece of work, they accept it as a matter of course. Mystery, he said, has become commonplace to such people. It is the more intelligent class, who call themselves "investigators," that are willing and able to pay "good money" for a medium's services.

He told me that he had known many other mediums and that the foundation of nearly all of their work is some variation of the principles of reading a billet written by a sitter, or some form of a slate or paper-writing experiment.

He said that he had never met a medium or other performer in all his experience, except an Indian magician, but who would talk openly of his tricks the moment he made himself known and gave the performer to understand that he was "posted" and that he had no interest in exposing him.

He said that usually mediums can perform only one or two tricks; but that they perform these so often, and become so very expert, that their tricks are almost undetectable.

Indian conjurors are, as a rule, of this class, and simply excel in just one or two tricks which they know to perfection. Like the mediums, they claim that their tricks are a genuine performance; and this lends the charm of mystery to their work, which more than doubles its effect.

# Correspondence Concerning "Half Hours with Mediums"



*The Open Court*, edited by Paul Carus  
May 1907, Vol. XXI (No. 5), No. 612, pg 318

## A SPIRITUALIST'S VIEW

TO THE EDITOR OF *THE OPEN COURT*:

I have been reading with interest in your magazine Mr. Abbott's "Half Hours with Mediums." These papers are excellent and needed to put people on their guard against imposture and will no doubt be welcomed by all true spiritualists.

What Mr. Abbott has elsewhere said upon the subject of spiritualistic phenomena I do not know. But in these articles he discusses the subject only upon one plane, that of magic and jugglery. And to conclude from these expositions that the sound of no footfall on the other side of the border has ever reached us would be a great mistake.

The experiences that justify the paramount claim of spiritualism are widespread and multiform. Spirit manifestation is not wholly foreign to the Old Testament, and something very like it holds an important place in the New. Many a family to-day has its border-land secret to reveal confidentially. What my parishioners told me of these mysterious occurrences in their own homes led me to study spiritualism. I will briefly state some of my experience.

I was standing in the hall of a large building in Chicago with a medium, and absolute stranger to me. He remarked: "You somewhere either over a store of a bank officiated at the funeral of a little black-eyed girl." I had done so a few months before, over a bank in a village in Colorado. The medium claimed to be clairvoyant and to see the little girl holding a wreath of flowers for me.

A medium in Denver described to me very minutely a deceased lady relative of mine whom I had only seen twice and in her childhood and girlhood. The description included peculiarities of form and face, color of hair, eyes, and of the clothing she had worn. I knew nothing whatever of these details, but learned afterward that the description was very correct. I am completely colorblind, having never perceived any color whatever.

In their home on an aristocratic avenue in Boston, I was in conversation with a first-class physician and his wife who was a medium. They jointly informed me that they had had many materializations in their own home, that they frequently occurred unsought, and became such a nuisance that they had to be discouraged.

In Cherokee, Iowa, a gentleman and his wife informed me that after their daughter died, they could get no comfort from minister nor professional medium, that they then set apart a room in their own house in which to receive communications, that their circle was composed of only members of their own family and a few intimate friends, and that they were abundantly blessed with varied manifestations, including the frequent materialization of their daughter.

My consciousness and whole being has been filled almost to suffocation with the unmistakable presence of a dear friend some months deceased, who had promised me to return if possible.

On a still summer morning, in an upper room, in my own house, on paper curtain of the window near me, I have heard a series of loud raps repeated as if for recognition. I was sole occupant of the house, and had been for nearly forty-eight hours.

These are facts. And I feel it my duty to give them publicity.

S. R. H. Biggs  
South Lincoln, Mass.

## Spirit Portraiture



Communications from Mr. C. W. Bennett  
with Replies by Mr. David P. Abbott  
*The Open Court*, edited by Paul Carus  
May 1907, Vol. XXI (No. 5), No. 612, pg 306-318

MR. BENNETT TO THE OPEN COURT.

TO THE EDITOR OF *THE OPEN COURT*:

I am deeply interested in the articles by Mr. Abbott about spirit mediums, because I have been investigating in that line myself, and am now writing to ask you to have Mr. Abbott explain a performance that is done in Chicago. A man in this city went to a Mr. B., a trumpet and also clairvoyant medium of Chicago, (he has been here and is one that I have criticized), and in a séance his mother's spirit urged him to get her portrait taken, as she was anxious for him to know how she looked now. The medium told the man of a lady in Chicago that could take spirit portraits, and he called on her. He says he wrote on a sheet torn from a new tablet that he carried with him asking his mother if she would come and sit for her portrait. This sheet he folded, and with two other blank ones torn from the same tablet, put into an envelope and held it under a book on the table. He had done all this by instructions from the lady, but she sat all the time clear across the room from him. She talked several minutes on other topics, then told him his message was ready. On opening the envelope the two blank sheets were written full, and with ink.

His mother consented to sit. So the medium brought out a canvas about 18 by 30 inches stretched on a frame, and hung this on the wall near the man and in front of him. Then the medium retired across the room. Soon colors began to develop on the canvas, and he says in just twenty minutes by his watch the portrait was finished, all the colors developing from a clean, white canvas before his eyes, and no other person near. When he first touched it the paint, or what not, was still green and he blurred it. So he had to leave it a few days to dry before having it sent home. When it arrived it so pleased him that he sent the medium's price, \$40.00. He says it does not resemble his mother when she died, (an old lady), but thinks it resembles her when she was about 35, and she assures him that it looks like her as she is now.

I have seen the picture, and should call it an oil painting of a very good looking woman of about 35.

The medium who encouraged this man had met him in this city, and also twice in Chicago at the medium's home or office, and of course he posted the artist medium by telephone or otherwise as to the man's name, his mother's name and other matters. I think Mr. Abbott has already explained how the writing is done in the envelope. But how do they develop what appears to be an oil painting from a clean canvas right before the purchaser's eyes?

There is another portrait in this vicinity executed by the same Chicago medium in the same way, but I have not seen that. But I am told it is a fine oil painting. Now I wish you would have Mr. Abbott explain this portrait painting, and expose these frauds that are being perpetrated on innocent people in your big city.

C. W. Bennett  
Coldwater, Mich.

### MR. ABBOTT TO THE OPEN COURT.

TO THE EDITOR OF *THE OPEN COURT*:

Your letter enclosing one from Mr. Bennett came duly to hand. I think I know the name of the medium or mediums to whom he refers, as I have heard of their work from other sources. I may be mistaken as to this, as there are possibly others producing spirit portraits; but at least I have heard of only one "firm" doing this style of work.

Now I have never witnessed the production of one of their paintings, and to do so would be quite expensive; so I could hardly tell the exact means they use. However, I am familiar with some secrets which are doubtless the same, or about the same, as those that they employ.

I will first give a short account of the evolution of the "art" of producing spirit portraits. Like all good tricks, the secrets have been developed by a process of experiment and gradual evolution.

At the beginning when mediums were able secretly to secure pictures of the departed friends of some of their subjects, they would first secretly prepare the pictures and then produce them at a séance with very striking effect. At this time a cabinet was used in the production of the pictures. The medium would allow the cabinet to be very thoroughly examined; and, if a lady, would also allow a committee of ladies to examine her clothing. Her attendant would then hand her a blank canvas fastened onto a frame.

The medium would now exhibit this canvas to each spectator at close range, showing both sides of it, and would remind the audience that there were no appliances in the cabinet or in her clothing. She would then retire to the cabinet for a few moments, after which she would come forth with the canvas still on its frame, which could have been and frequently was marked; but on this canvas was now a portrait of the "dear one" of one of the spectators. This portrait was yet hardly dry.

It is needless to say that this always made a great impression with ardent believers. The secret was very simple. The painting was first prepared on canvas. This canvas was then placed over a clean canvas, and the two were tacked to a frame. The clean canvas underneath kept the paint from showing through, and from behind, this appeared as an unpainted canvas. Next, the medium tacked a clean canvas over the picture and did it so neatly that no one could detect the deception. This was the canvas that she exhibited to the spectators.

Now, on entering the cabinet, she simply pulled off the top canvas, removed the few tacks that held it, and secreted the same in a pocket under her dress. As she had already had her clothing examined, she need not submit to a second examination afterwards. Now, under her clothing, around her waist, was a belt next to her skin, this had a tiny pocket in it containing a small phial of poppy oil. This escaped detection on the examination, for the reason that the medium appeared rather "modest" and the committee did not make too close an examination of her underclothing. Now, after removing the

top canvas she secured this poppy oil and rubbed it over the painting. Then, concealing the phial, she came forth from the cabinet with the painting still damp.

Some mediums merely covered the painting with a solution of zinc white and water. This effectually concealed the picture, if only exhibited from a short distance. This could be removed by the judicious use of a damp sponge.

After this certain mediums invented a way to put portraits on a slate, and then by adroit substitution, to introduce this prepared slate into a stack of examined ones; they could thus sometimes get for a sitter a portrait of a departed relative instead of a message, or they could produce both. Some mediums use a very clever system of substitution of canvases, and I have heard somewhere of a mechanical easel designed especially for substituting them.

Now there was quite a demand for spirit portraits that the subjects could see appear on the canvas before their very eyes. *Believers are never satisfied and are continually looking for stronger and stronger tests.* The mediums are thus ever forced along the road of improvement in their methods.

Mediums now began experimenting with chemicals, to discover those that could be put on a canvas and that would remain invisible until developed. A number of chemicals were found; and the pictures formed did not resemble those made with oil paints, for they were really mere chemical stains. They thus appeared to be more "spiritual."

I will give the names of a few chemicals that have been used in this manner. If a canvas of unbleached muslin have a portrait painted on it with the solutions given below, it will appear to be unprepared, as the chemicals will be invisible when dry. If sprayed with a weak solution of tincture of iron, the picture gradually appears. Sulphocyanide of potassium is used for red, ferrocyanide of potassium for blue, and tannin for black.

If preferred the following solutions may be used: Sulphate of iron for blue, nitrate of bismuth for yellow, and sulphate of copper for brown. In this case spray with a solution of prussiate of potash.

Originally, when these were used, a canvas was first exhibited and shown to be apparently free from preparation. This canvas was then dampened and placed on an easel in front of a cabinet. A light was placed at such an angle back of the canvas as to enable the spectators to see through it. The other lights were then lowered, and the music started, while the medium entered the cabinet back of the canvas. Then through a tiny hole in the cabinet curtain,

the medium, from behind, using an atomizer, secretly sprayed the canvas with the developing solution. The portrait gradually made its appearance before the spectators' eyes. The atomizer had to be kept screwed up tight, and the music covered the slight noise which it made.

A case is reported to me wherein the medium, after sitting for a time without results, proposed to hurry up the appearance of the portrait by making magnetic passes over the canvas. This he did; and at the same time he secretly sprayed the canvas from an atomizer concealed in his sleeve.

Before giving my ideas of the methods employed by the Chicago mediums, I will quote an extract from a letter I have received from a gentleman in Tacoma, Washington. This gentleman has an uncle who obtained a portrait of his little girl who is dead. The passage reads as follows: "My uncle is certain that there was no fraud used in the production of the large wall portrait which he secured of his little girl, as he and other members of his family saw the picture gradually appear on the canvas, which was placed in a window. There was no possible chance of fraud, he avers. He has shown this picture, which is quite artistic, to many prominent persons, and before some local literary bodies. The portrait is a reproduction of a cabinet-size photograph which he had with him at the time, but to further mystify him there are some slight changes in the picture. Although he is very intelligent, he says that this picture was never made by mortal hands, or with paint or brush."

It is to be regretted that this description is so meagre of details. I should like to have known what opportunity there might have been for secretly photographing his picture or copying it; whether he had more than the one sitting or not; if the photograph were shown to the medium or left the sitter's hands at all; how soon after his arrival with the photograph he received the portrait; whether the portrait appears to be in oil paints, or is merely chemical stains, etc. It is, however, doubtful if one who was not familiar with the importance of these points would have noticed these things at all, to say nothing of remembering such apparently insignificant details.

In some of the advertising matter of the mediums to whom I refer, I have seen some statements the substance of which follows: They do not care to "pander to the caprice of carping skeptics"; they desire to give their services to honest investigators, and prefer to have an appointment made in advance either by telephone or otherwise when a sitting is desired; they desire to know, also, beforehand, what is the nature of the sitting required of them. All

of this is perfectly proper for the convenience of the parties, but the latter part of it is certainly suggestive of preparation.

They also state that, originally, some dozen years ago, when they began developing this phase of mediumship, they had to produce the portraits in a closed cabinet, or in a dark box; but that of late they have become so *highly developed* that the portraits are produced in the daylight; that now the subject selects the canvas and the same is placed in the window with the top leaning against the window sash; the blind is then drawn down to the canvas top, and the *draperies* are arranged so as to let in no light except through the canvas; all other light is excluded from the room. Now, it is quite evident that the canvas might be sprayed from a concealed mechanism in the window casing. If so, the sitter could have no idea of what is employed, for under such conditions one could see through the canvas but faintly.

Let us suppose that in the window casing, concealed by the wood, are some tubes connected to a pressure tank of the developing chemical. Let us suppose that a number of tiny nipples are located along these tubes and almost penetrate the wood of the casing; that then there are some pin-holes in the wood over each nipple; that each nipple is set at the proper angle to spray the canvas at the proper places. Now when a concealed confederate turns on the pressure, it is evident that the picture will gradually appear. Other mechanisms may be used. The lower part of the window casing, known as the sill, may have a revolving trap that revolves behind the canvas, bringing up into position a spraying mechanism; or more probably, that is merely pushed up out of the way, so as to allow the tiny nipples which are trained on the canvas like miniature guns, to begin operating.

It is also possible that the mediums dampen the canvas before the experiment, with a sponge saturated with the developer, under the pretext of rendering it transparent, or of causing the "spirit paints" to adhere. In such case a developer might be used that would act very slowly, and then no spraying mechanism would be required.

It would be easy for the artist to prepare several canvases all alike before the sitting, so as to give the sitter free choice of canvases. The prices charged, viz., forty dollars, would justify the expense.

Naturally, mediums following this work as a profession and doing nothing else, would do much experimenting, and would greatly perfect their methods. They would doubtless learn to use many chemicals, and could thus produce the beautiful tints in which the pictures are now made. It is even

possible that no spraying mechanism is used at present, but that they have discovered *chemicals which develop under the daylight which enters at the window*. The last would be the ideal method. To learn just what chemicals they use, an analysis of the painted canvas would be required.

Now, in the aforesaid advertising matter, I find a statement the substance of which is this: Spirits continue to develop on the "other side," therefore the portraits do not always look as the persons did in life; that when a perfect likeness is desired, it is well to bring a photograph for the sitter to look at during the sitting, and upon which to concentrate his psychic powers. This is to establish proper conditions so as to enable the "spirit artist" to make a good reproduction.

Now, suppose that when the sitter comes with a photograph, while he is holding it and looking at it, a secret "snap shot" of it be taken; or that the artist (mortal) view it through a small telescope from some concealed position. It is evident that after a short time the canvases could be brought in for the sitter to select one, and the sitting could begin. It might be necessary to make a failure at first, and then make a second trial for a portrait later, as such expedients are frequently resorted to in mediumistic work.

In case no photograph is brought, then the mediums doubtless adroitly get a good description of the departed, and the portrait looks "as the spirit does now in spirit life"; so that there is but a very faint resemblance. I know a medium who told me that he was personally acquainted with the "fine artist" who prepares these canvases. He told me the artist's name and said that he had talked with him frequently. The artist is of national fame, and could not afford to have his name known in connection with this work. Unfortunately, I neglected to write down the name, and have forgotten it.

In the aforesaid advertising matter, I saw some statement about leaving the portrait to be completed after the sitting. It will also be noticed in Mr. Bennett's letter, that the portrait to which he refers was "green" or damp, and was left to dry and be called for later. How easy it would be in such case for the artist to copy the picture in oil on another canvas, or even to go over the original canvas with a coat of oil paints. This may be done in some instances. It will be noticed that Mr. Bennett says the canvas was hung against the wall. A spraying mechanism could have been concealed in the wall as easily as in the window casing; or there might even be a sliding panel in the wall. In the case Mr. Bennett mentions, the fact that the coloring material was yet "green," would indicate the use of a spraying chemical.

The reader may rest assured that the coloring matter on the portraits was not created by any "spirit" especially for the occasion, but that it was in existence before the sitting, that it was applied to the canvas, not by a spirit, but by secret means, which is very simple and commonplace when understood. If one will but view such things without superstition, it will be much easier to realize that they are simply clever trickery.

David P. Abbott  
Omaha, Neb.

MR. BENNETT TO MR. ABBOTT.

DEAR SIR:

After writing to you the first time I heard of two other spirit pictures in this vicinity, and the weather moderating I have been able to go and see them. I tried to learn all the points you requested me to notice, and I am frank to say that, with these two there are several features your explanation to *The Open Court* will not explain. The mediums claim they do not know what the paint is, but they say a wet sponge will wipe it all off, leaving the canvas white. If that is so(?) of course it cannot be oil. It will be tedious for me to tell you all the details, but that is the only way I can make it plain to you.

The picture I had seen when I first wrote you was owned by a Mr. M. in this city; a portrait of his mother, not as he knew her but *as she looks now*, and that left a margin, as did most of the other things, so that your "reply" would be sufficient. But now Mr. M. has a picture of a daughter that died at birth. It is not only a beautiful work of art, as I judge, but it is angelic in form and features. But the picture looks like a girl of fourteen, while the child was born little less than nine years ago. The mother sees this error, but says spirits develop faster.(?)

The child had come to M. in several sittings, I am not sure if with other mediums or not, (he and his wife and little son have all developed as rapping writing and planchett mediums within the past year), but think it did. It told them they could get its picture. So he went to Chicago again this winter, taking a well-known business man with him. At the hotel M. took four leaves from a common note-sized tablet that lay on the office table, folded them and put them in an envelope with hotel card on the top corner, sealed it, put a one

cent stamp over the seal, and then ran a pin through the corner so as to mark the sheets. I will say here that two of the sheets have no pinhole, and M. says he presumes he did not fold them exactly even, and the hole was made very near the corner edges and so missed two. He put the envelope in his pocket and the two men went to the mediums where, by their directions, he put the envelope on a slate that lay on the table, then put another slate over it, and held them together about ten minutes, the mediums not being near, and conversing on other topics in the mean time. Then one told him his message was ready. He took the envelope and put it in his pocket, without opening, though the mediums protested, wanting to know themselves what was in it. But he said he was not going to open it until he got home, as his wife was skeptical, and if there was anything in it worth while he wanted her to see it.

M. then told them he wanted a picture of his dead daughter taken by the side of his living son, now about twelve years old. They told him they could not include the boy without having his photo or having him present; but the photo need not be shown but kept in his pocket—only so it was in the room. So they agreed on a less price for that picture, and later he is going with his son to have both painted together at a reduced rate. Now mark the frailties of human testimony: M. says his friend selected at random the canvas from a large pile lying in a corner of an adjoining room, all stretched on frames of different sizes, each person selecting the size he wants to pay for; and that his friend put the canvas on a window sill, and then they both sat down, and in ten minutes the picture was completed, the mediums not being near them. His friend tells me (separately) that M. selected the canvas himself and put it in the window. He did not say anything about the mediums, but when I asked him if they did not sit on each side of the picture, he at first said, "No," and then he said, "Perhaps they did!" Now in the other picture to be described later they sat on each side of the canvas, each holding it by one side, and the window shade was pulled down to the top of the canvas, "so as not to blind the eyes of the observers." And this is the way they picture it out in their catalogue which illustrates and explains their methods and terms.

When M. told me about his mother's picture he said they hung it on the wall, and that caused you to ask me several questions. But now M. tells me they put it in the window, and they sat one on each side holding it. See how he varies.

In the former case they kept the picture a few days to dry, and that gave you an idea that they could repaint it. But in this case they immediately

delivered it to M. and he brought it home. He had requested that a flower be included in the hair of the girl, and that her name that has been given her since she passed over, be on the picture. Neither were on it and he complained. They told him it would be all right when he got home; and sure enough when he unwrapped it at home two white spots were in the hair, (golden locks hanging in curls, the flower being just over the right forehead), and about two days afterwards as the mother was looking at it the name gradually developed, in capitals about a quarter inch tall, *Jesemine*. Note the spelling. When he arrived, M. was surprised to find his son lying on a couch not well enough to go to school. He gave the envelope to the boy to open, and all the four sheets were written full on one side with ink. (I forgot to say that they put a small tin cover on top of the top slate with a little ink in it.) The first sheet was signed "Jesimine." (Two i's.) Among other things she said, "Do not worry about Ira's sickness, (the boys' name) he will have a short run of fever, but get well soon if you take good care of him." Now when M. left home the boy was well, and he did not know he was sick until his return—hence he says the mediums could not have learned it from him by mind-reading. And he had not told them the boy's name. Next followed a longer letter from one signed "Fulton," who told him several things about his business and patents. M. has invented a drying kiln, and made several patented improvements, and not having sufficient money to do it all and manufacture, took in some partners in Cleveland, where it is manufactured. He is having some trouble with these partners and this Fulton gave advice about that. He says this Fulton (he believes it to be the steamboat man) has told him all he knew about his invention from first to all the improvements. He says he has never told the mediums about his business nor about this Fulton. A third letter was from his mother, but signed "Per E. D. G." as all her letters are, but he does not know himself who E. D. G. is. They say the girl has taken the name of the flower, Jasmine, but the mother noticed that it was spelled differently in the letter from the picture, and neither right if meant for that flower. There are only two spires of the flower in the picture, just two white leaflets pointing outwards from each other. But the picture is very handsome, and an ornament to the room, even though fictitious. The difficulties in my mind in this case that you do not explain are that the canvas is selected at random, so they could not prepare it in advance; they delivered it at once, so they did not have a chance to paint it afterwards; and the things told in the letter about the boy's sickness, etc., which W. says he kept in his

pocket all the time.

The other case is a Mrs. B., whose son, sixteen years old, died last April from measles, followed by pneumonia. She is a Baptist and had no belief in spirits, but so grieved about her loss that some friends advised her to consult a medium, which she did. Among them was the one from Chicago, that I mentioned to you before, and who I believe is a "runner" for the artist mediums. Some one advised her to go and get his picture and *in one sitting the boy told her he would go with her so she could get an exact likeness*. She arrived in Chicago on a Saturday and told them what she had come for. They told her there were so many ahead of her that if she did not have objections to come next day, Sunday. She consented, and then *they suggested that she ask for a letter from the boy*, and she tore two leaves from a blank tablet they had, and they gave her an envelope in which she placed them, and then she placed them between the two slates, and they had her to put two large rubber bands around them, one each way. She asked why they did that, and they replied, so if she was a skeptic she could see that they did not do the work. On Sunday she went as agreed, but they were still having more that were ahead of her (she says), and after visiting some time she left. She assures me she did not tell them anything about her boy, his name, description, etc., at any of these interviews. On Monday she went and they not only got the picture but also gave her another long letter, (I think six note sheets written on one side) the paper being taken from a tablet as before, and put into an envelope, sealed, put between two slates, etc., as before. I have seen both letters. The penmanship in each is the same, and very similar to that in M.'s letter signed "Fulton." In these letters he says, among other things, "Do not mourn because I did not see sister before I died. I immediately went and saw her after I passed out of the body. And I am near you all and see you every day. I am also pursuing my studies just the same as when in school, only it is not so hard now for me to learn my lessons." Now, just before he died he asked to see his sister who was also dangerously sick in another room, but the doctor forbade their carrying her to him, and he died without seeing her. How did the mediums know of that incident? Again he says, "Goldie is past suffering now. She is here with me all the time; we are soul-mates now, and very happy together." Now Goldie was a little girl sweetheart of his when the family lived in another state some years before. The day before the boy died the girl got burned, and after much suffering died in June; the boy died in April. The mother assures me that not even any of the neighbors knew of this

girl friend, nor of her tragic death—much less could these mediums have known it. Again, "Do not worry over that money. Use it for something that will be useful to you, and remember it as a present from me." Now, for several days before his sickness he left school to work for a neighboring farmer", and the mother thinks that work helped to cause his death. So she has kept the money he earned in his pocket book just as he left it. She says none of the neighbors knew she was keeping it, much less the mediums. These are the most peculiar features of these letters.

When the picture was finished she told them she was sorry that he did not write his name on it, and immediately the name "Harry" appeared on his coat sleeve. Then she was sorry that she did not ask that some pin or jewel be put on his neck-tie, and immediately a little yellow crescent developed in the knot of his tie. She says the tie, collar and clothing are just like what he wore when in best dress. She tells me that the picture is a good likeness of her boy, and that all the neighbors think so too. She carried to Chicago a photo of this boy with his sister and brother, a group of three, Harry being the oldest, but all taken when he was twelve; but she did not take that photo from her pocket, she says. I noticed that in that on the photo Harry had his hair parted on the left side, while in the spirit picture it is parted in the middle. His mother said that for the last four years he had practiced parting it in the middle. So the mediums did not imitate the photo she had with her, whether they saw it or not. Now "Harry" was the name that developed on the picture, and it was the name signed on both the letters written before the picture was made. She is positive she did not tell his name.

I will not longer weary you, but do not see how I could describe what I have seen much briefer. To be more explicit in replying to your questions: The canvas is selected by the applicant, and so it does not seem apparent how they can be prepared in advance for each applicant, as in these cases one was for a child that died at birth, and the other a boy at sixteen. If the canvases were prepared with chemicals beforehand, the applicant might select one that was prepared for an old person, etc. The canvas is set in a window, the mediums sitting on each side, each holding to one side of it. The window shade is turned down to the top of the canvas. The canvases are not dampened before the sitting. How do these mediums find out names and conditions so as to make them appear in letters and on pictures, and tell such things as about the sweetheart Goldie?

These people here tell me that scientists and chemists have tested those

pictures, and analyzed the paints, and been unable to find what they are. The mediums of course tell them this;—they do not know it from chemists themselves. The mediums say they do not know what the paints are themselves. It is done by the spirits, of course, and how should they know what material the spirits use( ?)!

I really hope you will succeed in exposing this feature of spiritism, and that I shall be able to give the results to my readers not far in the future. If I can in any way be of farther aid to you command me.

Yours for truth,  
C. W. Bennett  
Coldwater, Mich.

#### IN A SUBSEQUENT LETTER

IN REFERRING TO A TRUMPET MEDIUM, MR. BENNETT SAYS:

"I want to call your attention to the fact that it was the same B. of Chicago that I had mentioned as the one I believed was a "runner" for the portrait mediums. This helps to confirm my suspicions. This man has been here several times since that time M. met him, and had ample opportunities to get all the information he needed about M. to enable the mediums to make his two pictures. It was B. also that first suggested (by spirit talk, of course) to that woman to get a picture of her boy."

#### SECOND LETTER FROM MR. ABBOTT.

TO THE EDITOR OF *THE OPEN COURT*:

I am in receipt of this second letter from Mr. Bennett, and I can but say that it only confirms me more strongly in my opinion that my explanation is the correct one. This letter introduces some new features to be explained. One is the slate and billet test. Another is the means by which the mediums secured the secret information, These I will treat separately.

Now first in regard to the portraits. I am now quite certain that a spraying mechanism is used and that it is concealed in the window casing. Believers

will acknowledge that the coloring matter is applied while the canvas is in the window. I agree with them. The difference is this, the believers think that it is created for the especial purpose and applied by an invisible, immaterial, spirit artist, who devotes most of his time to the business so as to enable some mediums to make a living, and also to convince more strongly than ever good believers. I think the coloring matter is manufactured by mortal man, and that a portion of it is applied to the canvas in an invisible spray while in the window. I think that part of it is applied beforehand by a mortal artist in secret, and that it is invisible until developed.

The portraits furnished Mr. M., who did not have pictures to be reproduced, do not resemble the spirits when in life. These canvases could be selected from the stock canvases, which are always on hand ready prepared. He would not have to wait for his sitting. The canvases from which he selected need not all have the same picture on them. Each one of the stock from which he selected could have on it an invisible portrait of a girl of about the right age, and it would make little difference which one he should select; for he could not tell, anyway, how his daughter would look when nine years old. Doubtless, the stock canvases contain portraits of girls of varying age, and the confederate in placing a number of them in the adjoining room, would naturally use some bearing portraits of girls of not quite the right age. This evidently took place, and the gentleman happened to choose one of a girl of about fourteen years of age. This made little difference, for the credulity of believers always supplies a ready explanation for such variations. The same explanation will apply to the gentleman's selection of a canvas for the portrait of his mother.

In the lady's case, the portrait must resemble a boy who recently died, and must resemble him nearly enough to be recognized. In this case a picture must be taken to the medium's house with the sitter. Now notice that this lady is not given a sitting until her third visit. I am quite sure that the "special canvases" had to be prepared for her, and that the artist had not completed them when she made her second visit. Also notice, that when the portrait for the lady was finished, she expressed regret that her son's name was not on the picture; after which it appeared. Then she regretted that there was no pin in his tie, whereupon one immediately appeared. Notice also that in the case of the gentleman, he had requested that a flower appear in the hair of the girl, and that her name appear on the picture. He was disappointed that they were not there, and they also subsequently made their appearance. Thus in each

case these sitters were given special "after effects" in response to their spoken wishes.

How very obliging this spirit artist is! How very convincing is his work! Is it not strange that he will not permit a subject to bring his own canvas? Does not this similarity in the mode of procedure in each case tell a story to the rational reader? Did any of my readers ever see the same sleight-of-hand trick performed over a few times, and note the absolute similarity in the mode of operation? Is it not a fact, in the language of the profession, that "this is in the game"? It is just such little improvements to a trick performed by a medium that, in the language of the profession, "makes the work strong." For myself, I am quite sure that these special effects were prepared on the canvases in advance, with a more slowly acting chemical; that by *suggestion* in the conversation, the mediums adroitly caused their subjects to request these little after effects. In performing tricks myself I have frequently resorted to just such expedients, and have thus sometimes made my work appear almost supernatural.

In the case of the gentleman, he requested these effects in advance before the sitting. His canvas was a stock picture, but the assistant in the adjoining room quickly applied the special effects to the canvas with the slow chemical. On reaching home the flower was found to have developed, but later the wife of the sitter saw the name appear before her. Possibly it was visible as soon as the flower was, but that she overlooked its location. Then when she did discover it, the psychological effect was as though it had suddenly developed before her eyes.

In the case of the lady, I think the conversation was so manipulated as to cause her to express her desire, a short time before the chemicals had time to develop. I am quite sure that two persons from the same town would not each, independently, if uninfluenced by suggestion, have asked for *special after effects of such similarity* to appear on the portraits. This feature is evidently considered pretty "strong" by these mediums, and is "worked in" very frequently.

It will be noticed that the gentleman selected a canvas and got his picture very readily; but that when he requested his living son's portrait to be made on the same canvas, this could not be done without a *second sitting, and the presence of the boy or his photograph*.

Next in regard to the means by which the mediums secured the secret information. When high grade mediums do a big business, it is very common

for them to employ a "traveling person" as I have stated elsewhere. Is it not natural to suppose that these mediums do this, and that the medium B., who solicits (or has his spirit voices solicit) trade for them, receives part of the proceeds? Would this not partly explain the high prices charged? Honest spiritualists will tell most any one, that mediums as a class always greatly depreciate the work of other mediums, and are continually crying "fraud" against them. Many believers have expressed their regret to me of this frailty in the character of this class of persons. It is very unusual for a medium to advise a sitter to visit and spend money with another medium. To me it is as plain as day. The medium B. had been in the home city of these sitters many times. All believers, and those who were on the way to become believers, evidently had sittings. One of this medium's voices advised this lady to get this portrait. This proves that the lady discussed the matter either with this medium or his voices. Evidently, this lady in her conversation and questions (written or otherwise), revealed to these spirit voices or this medium, all of the secrets (including the manner in which her son had lately worn his hair, etc.), which afterwards were used to such telling advantage. She has no doubt forgotten most of her conversations with this medium, and could not relate one thing in ten that passed between them. But it is a medium's business to write down and remember these things. It is also a very prevalent custom for mediums to exchange information thus secured.

I feel sure that this medium secured the lady's son's photograph, either with her consent for the purpose of "magnetizing it," or of getting *en rapport* with her son; or else that he secured it at some gallery secretly, and that he copied it with a kodak. How frequently do subjects take some memento as a lock of hair or a photograph of the dear one to a medium! How easily can a medium manage to have this done long before his voices ever advise a spirit portrait!

There can be no doubt that he furnished the lady mediums all of the vital information, names, etc., which these mediums afterwards used to such telling advantage. The reader need not doubt the fact that mediums obtain a complete knowledge of the little secrets, connected with the dead of their sitters. These things prey on the minds of those who are in grief, and are revealed to mediums in one way or another in private sittings.

I wish my readers could see a collection of written and signed questions which is in my possession. These were written by many persons who thought that they saw them burned before their eyes. They reveal all of the innermost

secrets of their writers. Each writer believed that the medium never saw his writing, and in some instances report that he never touched the cards on which it was. If another medium were to appear and reveal this same information to these persons, they would undoubtedly certify that no one at all knew of these secrets. These were presented to me by a medium of my acquaintance, who is quite friendly with me.

As to the sickness of the boy, (whose name was probably furnished by B.), I should think this a mere prediction which would apply to any growing child; that, had the boy not been sick on the father's arrival, like most children he would at some later time have had an unimportant sickness; and that in such a case this prediction would have been applied by the gentleman to the event. On arriving home the boy happened to be sick, which accidentally made an immediate fulfilment of the prediction.

And now in regard to the slate test. I have elsewhere dealt very completely with these tests. I will not take up space here in doing so. In an article of mine, appearing in the *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* I explain a test where, from some slates, possession is secretly obtained of a sealed envelope. This could be opened with steam, and the writing done, after which the envelope could be again sealed. In *Suggestion*, of September, 1901, there is an exposure of this same trick, or nearly the same trick, as that which these mediums performed.

It is quite evident that these sitters received information or instructions from some source in advance, which caused them to prepare the sealed envelopes. In the gentleman's case he prepared his at the hotel. Now the lady did not come with one prepared, so the mediums had her prepare a sealed envelope in *exactly* the same manner. What a strange coincidence! This shows that this is a stock trick of theirs and is performed for most subjects. *The mode of operation is exactly the same in each case.* This fact alone shows that it is a trick.

It will be noted that one letter was signed, "per E. D. G." The recipient does not know any one whom these initials would indicate. Had the mediums' notes of information been more complete, or had they accidently hit upon other initials, this might have been cited as a most convincing test.

I will not take up further space with my explanations; but I simply assure my readers that if any of them will take their own canvas with them, and *never let it out of their hands or sight*, they will get no picture.

David P. Abbott  
Omaha, Neb.

# The History of a Strange Case



David P. Abbott

*The Open Court*, edited by Paul Carus

May 1908, Vol. XXII (No. 5), No. 624, pg 257-283

## A STUDY IN OCCULTISM.

### I.

IS SPIRITUALISM all deception and illusion? Is there no grain of truth to be found under the great mass of fraud and trickery with which a vast army of charlatans have disgraced it? Are the efforts of the Society for Psychical Research to prove fruitless? When all of the fraud and deception is cleared away, will nothing remain? These questions I have been asked time and again. What will the answer be?

Do no whisperings of hope from the great beyond ever echo down the infinite corridors of darkness? Will the pale vanished faces of our loved ones, that haunt the shadowy mists of memory, ever again stand before us in the bright sunlight of day? Will we ever again hear the dear voices that have long been stilled? Must we, with tottering steps supported only by blind faith, go down the hillside of life into the infinite darkness of the eternal valley? Is there no turning aside—no escape? Must we face the inevitable annihilation of the unity of self? When science lifts her torch and peers into the surrounding darkness, is there no gleam of hope to be seen? Will a new dawn ever break, with its countless songs of gladness bursting from the throats of

the twittering love-birds of joy? Oh, beautiful Nature, how thy children adore thee! Oh, infinite Power, that animates and directs the great All, why this insatiable longing for immortality in the hearts of thy children!

I have been asked again and again, if, in all of my investigations, I have found nothing that I could not explain: if all has been perfectly simple and commonplace as soon as I witnessed it: if all of the mystery and romance disappear upon investigation. I have finally removed certain difficulties to publication, and shall now give to the public an account of the most remarkable case that it has ever been my fortune to investigate. Among all the cases of my investigation, it stands unique and alone, entirely in a class by itself; still to a certain extent shrouded in mystery, with some features which I have not yet thoroughly explained satisfactorily to myself. The memory of this remarkable experience, and the weird and dramatic effect of what on the surface appeared to be the voices of the dead talking to me and exhibiting an intimate knowledge of my family history, will remain with me through life.

## II.

ON MARCH 7, 1906, the carrier left at my door a letter that was destined to disturb my peace of mind, and to furnish me much material for thought for some time to come. Shortly before this I had published in *The Open Court* an article entitled, "[Some Mediumistic Phenomena](#)". I had vaguely wondered if this would not indirectly bring to my notice some accounts of strange phenomena from remote places in the world. Such was this missive.

This letter was written by a gentleman in New Haven, Connecticut; and in it he described a strange case that he had witnessed in a remote village one year before. The writer, Mr. E. A. Parsons, was unknown to me; but he introduced himself as a magician. He stated that having read my article and noted my knowledge of trickery, he desired to lay this case before me, in the hope that I might be able to explain it. I here quote from his letters:

"I will describe an experience which I had with an elderly lady in a little town in Ohio last year. She uses two tin horns or trumpets, each fourteen inches long, and two and one-half inches in diameter at the large ends, tapering to one inch at the smaller ends. The large end or bell of one horn is so made as to slip tightly into the large end of the other. On the smaller or outer ends of this double trumpet are soldered saucer-shaped pieces large

enough to cover a person's ear. The trumpet is empty and can be examined by any one.

"Her *very marvelous power* is this: The sitter takes one end of this trumpet and places it to his ear, while the lady does the same with the other end, placing it to her ear. At once the sitter plainly hears whispers in the trumpet. These purport to be the voices of the spirits of his dead friends and relatives. They reply to any questions which he speaks out loud. During this time the lady's mouth and lips are tightly closed, and she makes no motions of the throat or lips. She will, instead of holding the trumpet to her ear, hold her palm against it; or allow him to place one end of it against her back. She will, if preferred, permit two spectators to each hold an end, she merely touching the center with her fingers. In either event one hears the whispering just the same. Now this is done in broad daylight, anywhere, even out of doors. I investigated this phenomenon seven hours altogether, giving it every possible test, but could obtain no clue to it. I found that it was not ventriloquism, as the voices were really in the trumpet; besides, ventriloquists can not speak in whispers. I proved beyond question (as have many others) that the voices were really in the-trumpet.

"The information which I received from the whispers was correct in every case. I had never seen the lady before, nor had I been in Ohio previously. Now the production of intelligent language inside this trumpet in daylight, three or four feet away from the medium, I regard as more wonderful than anything I have ever known. I now have the trumpet, having purchased it. Can you tell me how the whispered words were produced?"

In a subsequent letter he said: "The description I gave you was not overdrawn in any way. The lady is the wife of an humble farmer and resides in an obscure country village. She has resided there all of her life and has reared a large family of children. She has never been over twenty miles from her home and has but little education. She is, however, very intelligent. She gave her sittings for a long time free of charge, and later began charging ten cents. She now charges one dollar, but does not insist on anything.

"She can use a glass lamp chimney or any closed receptacle in place of the trumpet; and I have heard the voices just as plainly coming out of the sound hole of a guitar that lay upon the table. The guitar has also played in my presence, independently, but faintly. There was no music box in it, as is generally the case. She has also caused music to sound in the trumpet, and raps to sound on the outside of it.

"Three of my most intimate friends have seen her several times. Two of them were with me at my investigation. I have known of this lady for six years; and finally, having heard so much about her, I journeyed six hundred miles to see her in January, 1905. The lady was at many times talking with persons in the room at the same time that I was listening to the voices. I noted this with great care. Sometimes two different voices would whisper at the same time, as if one were trying to get ahead of the other.

"Of course we know how mediums usually gather information, but this lady had no means of knowing anything about me; and yet the voices told me, correctly, many things of my own private life. Among those who talked with me were my mother, my daughter (dead twenty-two years), and my grandfather. My daughter told me where I lived, what kind of a house I lived in, what her living brother was doing, where she was buried, etc. An old music teacher of mine, of whom I had not thought for ten years, announced himself and said that he would like to play for me. Then I actually heard faint but distinct sounds of piano-playing in the trumpet, and my friends in the room also heard it. The sounds were like they would be if one were listening to a piano over a telephone. My father and my father-in-law spoke to me; as did also an uncle of whom I had no knowledge, but whose existence I afterwards verified. My mother gave her own name completely, but failed to give my middle name. She gave it as 'Albert,' when in reality it is 'Augustus.'

"At one time I heard an open voice in the trumpet for a moment. I also listened at her mouth and throat when voices were speaking, but could detect no sounds. I found the positions of the voices in the trumpet would vary, sounding at one time nearer to one end, and at another nearer to the other end. I had noticed the varying strength of the voices, and the lady told me of this change of position. I verified it by listening outside the trumpet when others held it, and found the voices to vary one foot and a half in location. *I was particularly impressed with the openness of the lady, and with her perfect willingness for me to test her powers in any manner that I desired. She afforded me every opportunity to make such tests, giving me seven or eight hours of her time.* I suppose this thing to be a trick; but with over forty years study of magic, and with the acquaintance of all the great magicians, I was entirely unable to even surmise how it could be done. It is either a trick or it is the work of His Satanic Majesty.

"Now I believe I have discovered a medium as good as Home, and I hesitate about making public her name and address. You understand, any

medium possessing this secret would think his fortune made. I am no medium, but I certainly want the secret. If this prove to be a trick, I do not want its secret given to the world, but desire to keep it for private use. If you see fit to sign a contract binding yourself to respect this desire, and not to reveal the secret of the performance without my consent, I will be pleased to furnish you the name and address of the lady. I shall expect you to give me the fullest results of any investigations which you may make."

On receipt of this letter I immediately signed and returned the required agreement to Mr. Parsons. I received in return the coveted information. Being now at liberty to reveal all of the details, I shall state that the lady is Mrs. Elizabeth Blake, of Braderick, Ohio. This is a little village of a few houses, on the banks of the Ohio, just across the river, north, from Huntington, West Virginia. The place is reached from Huntington, most directly, by a row-boat ferry.

After receiving this information, I decided to try to learn from other sources if the case were really as described by Mr. Parsons. About this time I learned that the latter gentleman is well known in the world of magic under the nom de plume of "Henry Hardin," and that he is a dealer in magician's secrets. Had I received this account from other sources, I should have given it but little credence, inasmuch as I have investigated so many other cases, and have invariably found nothing but trickery. But here was a strange report from a man versed in the arts of trickery; an expert himself, and one not easily deceived. Surely, this, at least, warranted investigation.

I had always been very skeptical, never believing in spirit communion, telepathy, clairvoyance, or anything of the kind; and as to physical phenomena, I had found everything very commonplace and devoid of mystery when I had an opportunity to see it myself. I could not help wondering and pondering; and asking myself if, after all, it were possible for a being to exist on this earth with any powers out of the ordinary; or with any faculty not common to the rest of the race. Decidedly, I could not believe such a thing possible, and yet, how could an expert magician be deceived with such a thing? I felt greatly puzzled; and although I had no faith in spirit communion, decided to investigate further.

I wrote a letter to the professor of science in the schools at Huntington, telling him that I knew of a strange case of psychic phenomena in his vicinity, and proposing to engage him to investigate it for me. I was a member of the Society for Psychical Research and I offered to furnish him

with proper credentials, etc. I enclosed a stamped envelope, but he did not even condescend to reply. Next, I wrote directly to Mrs. Blake, and invited her to visit my home. I told her I was a business man of Omaha, and offered to furnish references as to my standing. I also offered to defray all expenses of her journey.

Mrs. Blake did not reply in person; but I received a letter from a gentleman of very high standing, whom I shall call Dr. X—, as he does not desire me to use his name. This gentleman happened to be her physician. He informed me that Mrs. Blake had fallen from her chair at some previous time, rupturing the ligaments of her ankle; that this had resulted in blood poisoning and had left her crippled; that since that time she was compelled to go about on crutches; that inaction frequently resulted in attacks of acute indigestion; and that she was thus in such a state of health as to prevent her making any journey. He thanked me in her name for the invitation.

Now, this gentleman seemed to be accommodating; so I took the liberty of again writing him, asking for a report from him on the powers of his patient; for his own opinion of the case, etc. This he kindly gave me; and this was followed by several letters, going into great detail of what he considered the most important case in the world.

His report corroborated all that Mr. Parsons had written me; but I noticed that he attached greater importance to the information given by the voices, than he did to the phenomenon of the voices themselves. This was just the reverse of the estimate of the case formed by Mr. Parsons, for the latter regarded the phenomenon of the voices as the greater mystery.

Dr. X— stated that at his first sitting he was completely "taken off his feet, so to speak," and considered spirit communion as proven; but that upon subsequent occasions, he was sorry to state things had occurred to lessen this belief. He related many marvelous incidents of conversation with the voices, and stated that he had taken many friends to the lady under assumed names; *yet he had never failed to hear the voices call these persons by their right names, etc.* He also stated that the information furnished by Mrs. Blake's voices at times had seemed so marvelous that he had seriously contemplated referring her case to the Society for Psychical Research, in order that he might have an authoritative statement with regard to what her powers really consisted of. I quote a few extracts from many in his letters:

"Twenty-two years ago this summer, my father took me to Virginia for the purpose of entering me in college. I was an only child, had not been away

from home a great deal, and was quite young; therefore he accompanied me to Blacksburg, Virginia, introduced me to the president of the school, and otherwise assisted me in getting started. It was a military school, and every new-comer was called a 'rat,' and this was yelled at him by the older students in chorus until it grated upon his nerves to a considerable extent.

"As my father and myself walked up towards the college buildings over the broad campus, the word 'rat' was yelled at us with depressing distinctness. We went across the campus and on beyond to a large grove of virgin forest, where we sat down upon a large log; and here my father gave me some paternal advice. He was going to leave the next morning and I felt very sad and lonely; and it was with great difficulty that I kept back the tears that in spite of myself would now and then trickle down my cheeks. At all of this my father laughed and said that I would be all right in a few days.

"When conversing through Mrs. Blake's trumpet with the supposed voice of my father, the following conversation with the voice occurred. I had previously written out the questions and I have since added the answers of the voice:

"Do you remember the time you took me off to college?' I asked.

"Yes, as distinctly as if it had been yesterday,' the voice replied.

"When we walked towards the buildings, what was said to me by some of the students?"

"They yelled "Rat" at you.'

"Spell that word,' I requested, as I desired no misunderstanding.

"R—a—t,' spelled the voice.

"Where did we go after leaving the campus and college buildings?' I next asked.

"We went to a large grove near the college buildings and sat down upon a hickory log,' responded the voice.

"What did I do and say while sitting on this log?"

"You cried because I was going to leave you and go home,' answered the voice. All of this was wonderfully accurate, but I do not know whether or not the log was hickory."

In another letter he says: "On one occasion a voice supposed to be my grandfather's talked with me, and I asked it what had caused him to depart this life. Just previous to asking this question the voice had been full and strong; but upon asking it the voice became indistinct, and I concluded that my question had 'put the lady out of business.' To my surprise, in a few

minutes my grandfather commenced to talk again; and I reminded him that he had not answered my question. He replied by saying that I knew perfectly well what had caused him to depart this life, and that it was not necessary to ask such unimportant questions.

"I replied by stating that I wanted the question answered, in order that I might be convinced as to his identity; and also to know that he had sufficient consciousness and intelligence to reply. He then stated that the immediate cause of his death was a fracture of the skull.

"How did this happen?' I asked.

"By falling down a stairway,' answered the voice.

"In what town and house did this occur?'

"In Galliopolis, Ohio, in my son's home,' again responded the voice. All of this was correct.

"I next asked my grandfather's voice if he remembered what he used to entertain me with when I was a child. He replied that he did; and that he had made little boats for me, and had floated them in a tub of water. I asked how old I was when this took place, and he replied that I was five years old. This was correct, and had occurred some thirty-four years ago."

Again Dr. X— says, "In addition to her daylight work, Mrs. Blake gives dark séances. At these, the voice of her dead son Abe usually opens the meeting with prayer, and some hymns are sung by all present. During this time, numerous little blue lights flit about the room; the guitar is frequently floated over our heads, etc. After this, voices speak up in various parts of the room and address those present. I attended one of those night meetings recently.

"In addition to others present, I took with me Clara Mathers Bee, who had formerly been my stenographer, but whom I had not seen for five years. She was a total stranger to the others present, and resides at a remote point in the interior of the state. Mrs. Blake does not keep in touch with the whole state of West Virginia, and knew nothing of this lady.

"Mrs. Bee had recently lost a young lady cousin, and was very anxious to communicate with her. She even went so far in her inexperience as to call for this relative on several occasions, giving her name in full. This, however, brought no results, although Mrs. Blake could have made use of the knowledge thus acquired. Finally, during an attempt to communicate with this relative, a child's voice spoke and said, 'I want to talk to my Aunty Clara.' It was some time before any one answered and no one seemed to understand

for whom this was intended. Presently Mrs. Bee said, 'Do you want to talk to me?'

"'Yes, you are my Aunty Clara,' the voice replied.

"'What is your name?' asked Mrs. Bee.

"'My name is Stinson Bee,' answered the voice.

"'How long has it been since you died?'

"'Six months.'

"'What caused you to leave this life?'

"'I was burned to death; and I want you to tell my papa that I want to talk to him,' responded the voice.

"In explanation I will state that Stinson Bee, who was a nephew of Mrs. Bee's husband, was burned to death six months before the time of this sitting. Mrs. Blake could not have known anything of this, as it happened in a remote part of the interior of the state; and as intimate as I am with the family, I did not know of it.

"Just at this point my father's voice broke into the conversation and said, 'How do you do, Clara?'

"'Do you know who this is that you are talking to?' I asked.

"'Yes, it is Clara Bee,' responded the voice.

"'That is correct, but what was her name before she was married?' I asked.

"'Don't you think I know Clara Mathers?' the voice replied."

These are but few of many incidents which Dr. X— has related to me in great seriousness. He is a well educated and highly respected gentleman, of the highest standing in his community. There are reasons why he does not desire his name used, and this is why I omit the name; but it can be had in private. In one letter he informed me that during the daylight sittings, Mrs. Blake first seats herself beside the sitter, each allowing the trumpet to rest with its ends in their adjacent palms. Soon the trumpet begins to grow heavy, and then finally, one end of it seems to attempt to move upward to the ear of the sitter. This means that conditions are right and that a voice desires to speak.

He further stated that close friends of Mrs. Blake who were in a position to know, informed him that of late Mrs. Blake was rapidly losing her powers; and that they were not nearly what they had previously been. He suggested, in case I contemplated an investigation that I make it as quickly as possible, for he said that her health was such that any sudden attack was liable to

terminate her earthly career. He also suggested that I write nothing further to Mrs. Blake, and in no way let her know that I contemplated making such an extended journey to see her; as he had found results much better when she did not think she was being especially investigated.

He thought I should simply act as if I had been passing and had merely stopped off on my journey.

After receiving these reports, I determined to investigate this case if possible. I wrote to Prof. James H. Hyslop, Secretary of the American Society for Psychical Research, and detailed the case to him, asking if he would assist me. Meanwhile I wrote Mr. Parsons, and secured his permission to lay the matter before Professor Hyslop. I did not tell the latter the name or location of the lady but explained that it was within one hundred miles of Cincinnati. Also, I wrote to Dr. X— that I would like to be informed if Mrs. Blake were at home and well, as I wished to come. He replied, informing me that she was at that time visiting in the mountains; but that immediately upon her return, he would notify me. This he did; but she was suddenly taken sick on her return, and this prevented my making the journey. Dr. X—, however, stated that he would instantly inform me on the recovery of Mrs. Blake's strength, as soon as such should enable her to give sittings. He again urged me not to delay, if I desired results of value, stating that undoubtedly her powers would soon be gone.

Meanwhile, Professor Hyslop met a lady from that section of the country, who told him of "a wonderful medium, a Mrs. Blake near Huntington, West Virginia." Professor Hyslop then wrote me that he thought he had discovered the identity of the lady, and asked me if this were she. I wrote in reply that it was. I mailed the letter from Omaha to Professor Hyslop, who was then in New York at Hurricane Lodge on the Hudson. In just two days after mailing the letter, I received a telegram from Professor Hyslop, saying, "I start for Huntington to-night."

Now, I did not desire any one to arrive on the scene ahead of myself; for I wanted to thoroughly satisfy my own curiosity. I therefore immediately telegraphed Dr. X— at Huntington as follows, "Professor Hyslop wires his starting. Shall I come?" In an hour I received this reply, "Just as well now as any time." During the wait I called up by telephone, my cousin Geo. W. Clawson of Kansas City, Mo., to whom I had previously described the case, and induced him to accompany me. So far I had not revealed to him where we were going, except that it was beyond Cincinnati. Mr. Clawson had a

short time before lost a daughter whose Christian name was Georgia Chastine, and was very greatly grieved over her demise. It was the hope of obtaining some proof of a future life through communication with her that caused him to yield and to go with me.

The next morning I took the train for Kansas City, where I was joined by Mr. Clawson; and we started on our one-thousand mile journey. I asked Mr. Clawson to choose a name to travel under, and to keep his real name secret, as I wanted no possibility of deception in my investigation. The name he chose was "C. E. Wilson," that of a friend of his. He made the journey under this name and registered under it at the Florentine Hotel.

I had resided for a few years in Omaha, but was not generally known there. My parents reside at the village of Falls City, Neb., and are well known there. I knew that, should my friend Dr. X— desire to do so, it would be possible for him to employ some one in advance to obtain information in regard to my relatives and family. *I regarded him with far too much respect to think such a thing would happen;* but in order to *remove all possibility of fraud*, I desired to take with me an unknown person under an assumed name. This was why I decided on Mr. Clawson. I did not reveal my intention to any one.

I had previously written to Dr. X— that I was liable to bring an unknown person with me, but I gave him no idea of who this person would be. I did not think that any one would be able to reach out through space one thousand miles and read my mind, discover whom I intended taking, and then look up his history in advance. I considered Mr. Clawson a desirable person to go with me, as both of his parents were dead ; and also on account of his great desire to communicate with his dead daughter, if such a thing were possible. He also had a brother by the name of "Edward," who had died when quite young, and a son who had died within a few days of birth. However, these last two instances I did not know until after our sittings. The reader should remember these facts and names, on account of what is to follow. I did not expect results of much consequence myself, owing to the fact that I have no immediate dead, with the exception of two baby brothers, my grandparents and some uncles and aunts. I therefore could not expect to receive results of much importance, whatever the power of the lady might be. We journeyed continuously for two nights and a day, arriving at Huntington in the early morning hours of Monday, July 23, 1906.

### III.

ABOUT EIGHT O'CLOCK that morning I telephoned to Dr. X— that I had arrived with a friend. The Doctor resided in a beautiful park a short distance in the country. He soon arrived at our hotel with his carriage; and I introduced my friend, Mr. C. E. Wilson (Mr. Clawson, under his assumed name), to him. The Doctor then drove us to his residence for a short time. He showed us a copy of a letter to Mrs. Blake which he had dictated a few days before, and which stated that he expected two friends from New York to visit him; and that he wished to take them to see her, and he hoped she would receive them and do the best she could, even if not entirely recovered from her recent illness. He did not give any names in his letter; and he assured me that, since the time of answering my letter to Mrs. Blake at the beginning of our correspondence, he had never mentioned my name to her.

To the Doctor himself, I was a total stranger, with the exception of what he had learned of me in my letters to him, and also what information he had gleaned from my article, [Some Mediumistic Phenomena,](#) before referred to. The Doctor had in his possession one of Mrs. Blake's double trumpets. We examined this thoroughly; and taking it we drove to the Ohio River, and crossed in a row-boat to Braderick, Ohio. This village consists of about one dozen cottages situated along the river bank. It was about ten o'clock in the forenoon, and Professor Hyslop had not yet arrived, the night boat on which he journeyed down the Hudson having been delayed. We went up the bank and turned to the left to Mrs. Blake's cottage. The ferry landing is close to her house, and most of its patronage seems to come from her visitors.

Mr. Blake was sitting on the porch and he received us. He informed us that he had just turned away a number of persons who desired sittings with Mrs. Blake, and that she could not receive us professionally. However, we were not to be dismissed in this manner, and we refused to leave without at least seeing her. Mr. Blake then told us we might enter, while he remained outside to turn away visitors. We entered the little parlor; and Dr. X— stepped through the open doorway and spoke to Mrs. Blake, telling her he had his two friends with him whom he wished to bring in. She readily consented and we entered.

She was sitting in a large rocker by the window in her little room. Her crutches were by her side, and she seemed a very pleasing, though elderly and frail lady. We were introduced merely as "friends," and we conversed

with her for a few moments. She said she was born and had resided all of her life within two and one-half miles of her present home. She explained that she had possessed her power since a child. She said that as a little girl she had heard voices in her ears, and that some gentleman had experimented with her. He found that a closed receptacle confined the sounds and made the words clearer. After this, the present trumpet had been devised, but she could use any closed receptacle. She said that since her sickness, she *had lost her power*, so that she could "get nothing satisfactory any more." She said that her power was declining so rapidly that she felt she would have to give up the business entirely. She expressed her willingness to try, but stated that she could not satisfy any one now like she used to do when her health was better. Meanwhile, her husband kept coming in and going out, as if he were watching her closely to prevent her giving a sitting. She, herself, seemed very accommodating; and I felt assured that, but for him, we could conduct some interesting experiments. Finally Dr. X— went out and talked to him, and succeeded in securing his consent for a short trial.

Mr. Clawson now seated himself beside the lady, and she instructed him to take one end of the trumpet in his palm, while she did the same with the other end.

In a moment Mr. Clawson remarked, "How heavy that is getting!" and as he did so, I thought I heard a faint whisper in the end of the trumpet that Mr. Clawson was holding. It was, however, so faint that I could not be certain of it. It was more like a single syllable, the drawing of a breath, or like a hissing sound, but it was very indistinct. In a moment the trumpet began to rise toward Mr. Clawson's ear, and the lady said, "Some one wants to speak to you, sir; place the trumpet to your ear." He did so, and she placed the other end to her ear.

Whispered voices in the trumpet now began to address Mr. Clawson, but from the outside I could not understand what was said. Mr. Clawson seemed unable to do much better, and it appeared that the sitting would prove a failure on this account. Mrs. Blake now spoke and said, "Please try and speak plainly, dear friend, so that the gentleman can understand you." The voice now seemed to become more distinct, and Mr. Clawson asked the question, "Who are you?" He did not appear to understand the reply; for he repeated his question a few times, as one does at a poorly working telephone. Finally I heard him say, "You say you are my brother Eddie?" Mr. Clawson seemed confused at being unable to understand the many whispered words in the

spoken sentences; and turning to me, he said, "You take the trumpet and see if you can understand any better."

I may here remark that up to this time I did not know that Mr. Clawson had a dead brother "Edward," and that I supposed this to be an error until afterwards. During the time that the voices were speaking, Mrs. Blake's lips were tightly closed, and there was no motion of them. She appeared to be listening intently to the voices, and trying to follow the conversation.

I now took the trumpet. A voice spoke a lengthy sentence or more, which was so inarticulate that I could not understand it. Finally I heard the words, "Can't you hear me?"

"Yes. Who are you?" I replied.

"I am your brother and I want to talk to mother. Tell her....," responded the voice, the last words becoming indistinct.

"What shall I tell her?" I asked. The voice then took the tone of a child's voice, low, and almost vocal, and said, "Tell her that I love her."

The only dead brother that I have, who was old enough to talk before his death, was named "Thomas." He was two years older than I, and three years old at death. I now said, "Give me your name." The voice then repeated an inarticulate name many times, but I could not understand it. It appeared to sound like "Artie" or "Arthur." In fact it sounded first like one, and then like the other would sound, were I to try to whisper them in an inarticulate manner. I did not repeat these names, and the voice gave up the attempt. I now handed the trumpet to Mr. Clawson, and the voice kept repeating, "I want to talk to my brother," so he gave the trumpet back to me.

"Whom do you want to talk to?" I asked.

"I want to talk to my brother Davie—brother Davie Abbott," responded the voice. I could hear the name "Abbott" repeated several times after this, and then the voice finally ceased.

Mr. Clawson now took the trumpet. I may remark that although Mr. Clawson's parents, and also a little son who was never named, were dead, his whole heart was set on obtaining a communication from his daughter Georgia, who had recently died; and unless he could do this, the whole sitting was a failure as far as he was concerned. This daughter had been very affectionate, and had always called her mother by the pet names of "Muz" and "Muzzie." She also generally called her father "Daddie," in a playful way. She had recently graduated from a school of dramatic art, and while there had become affianced to a young gentleman whose Christian name is

"Archimedes." He is usually called "Ark" for short. Mr. Clawson had these facts in mind, intending to use them as a matter of identification.

A voice now addressed Mr. Clawson, saying, "I am your brother."

"Who else is there? Any of my relatives?" asked Mr. Clawson.

"Your mother is here," responded the voice.

"Who else is there?"

"Your baby."

"Let the baby speak and give its name," requested Mr. Clawson.

This was followed by many indistinct words that could not be understood. Finally a name was pronounced that Mr. Clawson understood to be "Edna." He had no child of that name; but in what followed, although his lips addressed the name "Edna," his whole mind addressed his daughter, "Georgia."

"Edna, if you are my daughter, tell me what was your pet name for me?" he asked.

"I called you Daddie," the voice replied.

"What was your pet name for your mother?"

"I called her Muz, and sometimes Muzzie," responded the voice.

"What is my name?" asked Mr. Clawson, but the reply was so indistinct that it could not be understood.

I now took the trumpet, but received nothing satisfactory— merely inarticulate words. Soon I was quite sure that I heard a voice announcing, "This is Grandma Daily." My grandmother on my mother's side was Mrs. Daily; but as she had always called me "Davie" as a child, and as the names "Daily" and "Davie," when whispered, sound very similar, I decided that possibly the voice had whispered, "This is Grandma, Davie." I did not wish to misinterpret sounds and thus aid the lady, and I desired to be very certain of all of my tests; so I did not repeat the name "Daily," as most persons would have done. I waited, expecting the voice to pronounce the name unmistakably.

A number of inarticulate sentences which I could not understand were now spoken. However, among the words I heard first the name "Harvey," and then "Dave." After this I heard the name "Dave Harvey." Next, I heard the initials "J. A.," and I also heard a name that seemed to be "Asa." I have an uncle who is dead, and whose name was "Richard Harvey." The name of his son who is now living is "David Harvey." An uncle of mine who is dead was called by the name of "Asa," but his name had been given in my article

referred to before. I have a living brother whose initials are "J. A."

Mr. Clawson now took the trumpet and attempted to talk to some inarticulate voices. Finally a voice said, "I am Grandma."

"Grandma who?" asked Mr. Clawson. I could not understand the reply; but I heard Mr. Clawson repeat, "Grandma Daily?" with a rising inflection. He then turned to me and said, "That is pretty good. The voice says that Grandma Daily is here."

At this point Mrs. Blake terminated the sitting, claiming that her strength was leaving her. It had lasted probably twenty minutes. At one time Mrs. Blake had turned her back to me so as to use her other ear. At this time her face was next to the wall, and I could not see her lips; but I thought I detected a twitching of the muscles of the throat. The sounds were really in the trumpet, and there was no doubt that they did not issue from the nose or mouth of Mrs. Blake.

A few times during the sitting she took the trumpet from her ear, allowing it to rest in her palm. This would be for an instant at a time. During such time there was no cessation of the voices in the trumpet; but the fingers of her hand that were over the end of it seemed to be separated. At such times the voices seemed to originate at her hand, and were not so distinct as usual. When the trumpet was at her ear they seemed to originate there.

After the sitting, we told Mrs. Blake that we had a friend who would arrive on the next train. We stated that we very earnestly desired him to meet her, and finally she agreed that we should bring him and return in the evening. Then we presented her with a neat sum (as we desired her best services), and took our departure.

We crossed the river, returned to the home of our friend Dr. X—, and then sent a driver to the train to see if Prof. Hyslop would arrive. Mr. Clawson went with the Doctor's driver to the train. In a short time they returned, bringing Professor Hyslop with them. Immediately after noon we dictated to the Doctor's stenographer a concise account of our morning sitting. It is from these records made at the time that this account is taken. Each of us dictated separately all that he could remember. We then compared our reports and corrected them.

A little later in the afternoon, we drove to the river again and crossed to Mrs. Blake's cottage. We were received, and had quite an interesting conversation with her. During this time Professor Hyslop questioned her minutely about the history of her case. We desired a sitting, but she declined

to give us both a daylight and a dark séance; so we waited a few moments, as it was rapidly growing dark; and we then had a dark sitting, intending to have a daylight sitting the following day if possible. Mrs. Blake agreed to this, and said if her strength did not fail her, she would give us a sitting the following morning.

It now became quite dark, and we arranged ourselves around a small table. We were conversing at the time; and having my mind intently on her work, I thoughtlessly said to Mr. Clawson, "Mr. Cla—, take this seat." The others were talking at the time, I was not speaking loudly, and I discovered my error in time to omit the last syllable. I was quite sure that it was not noticed at the time, but this fact must be remembered.

Mrs. Blake sat on my left, and Professor Hyslop sat on her left. At the opposite end of the table sat Dr. X— and his brother-in-law who had just happened to come in. Mr. Clawson sat at one side of the room, holding the hand of Mr. Blake. Professor Hyslop and myself declined to hold the hands of Mrs. Blake, as we cared nothing whatever for physical manifestations, but desired only *mental phenomena* which would be of the same value whether given in darkness or in light.

We sat a very long time, and it seemed that nothing was to occur. Finally a blue light floated over the table between us, and another appeared near the floor close to where Mr. Clawson and Mr. Blake were sitting. The trumpet on the table was also lifted up over my head and dropped to the floor by my side.

Finally, the deep-toned voice of a man spoke. It appeared to be about a foot above and behind Mrs. Blake's head. The voice was melodious, soft, low in pitch, and very distinct. This is the voice that is claimed to be that of her dead son, Abe. There was a note of sadness in it, and it spoke these words: "My friends, I am sorry to say that owing to my mother's weak condition, it will be impossible for us to give any manifestations that will be worth anything this evening. We deeply regret this, but it is beyond our power to give you anything of value, as she is very weak."

It is hardly necessary to say that we refused to take this statement as a dismissal, but continued to remain. In a short time we heard a man's voice of a different tone entirely, which Dr. X— recognized as the voice of his grandfather. These voices were open, —that is, they were in no trumpet and were vocal. The tone of this last voice was that of a very old man, and the conversation was commonplace. Soon a much more robust and powerful man's voice spoke, and said: "James, we will give way to the others." This

voice Dr. X— recognized as the usual voice which claimed to be that of his father.

A lady's voice now addressed Professor Hyslop, and some little conversation was carried on, but with no satisfactory results. I now reached down to the floor, and taking the trumpet, placed one end to my ear and gave the other end to Mrs. Blake. The voices issuing from it could be heard by the other persons present. The first voice appeared to be that of a girl, so I handed the trumpet to Mr. Clawson. The voice said, "Don't you know me, Daddie?"

"Who are you, Edna?" asked Mr. Clawson.

"Why, you know me Daddie," answered the voice.

"Are you Edna Jackson?" asked Mr. Clawson. This was the name of a dead friend of his daughter.

"You know I am not Edna Jackson," responded the voice.

"If you are my daughter, tell me where mamma is."

"At home."

"Yes, but where?" insisted Mr. Clawson. The reply to this was inarticulate, but resembled "Kansas City," which was the correct place.

"Is she in St. Louis?" he asked.

"You know she is not," the voice replied.

"Is she in St. Joe?"

"No, no. She is in ," replied the voice. The first words were given with great energy and were almost vocal, but the last words were inarticulate. The latter, however, resembled "Kansas City." I then asked the voice to repeat the name, but it grew so weak that I could not distinguish the words. So far, everything was entirely unsatisfactory, and we were greatly discouraged.

I now took the trumpet. That the reader may fully understand what is to follow, I shall state a few facts. My Grandmother Daily, in the latter part of her life, resided in the country in Andrew County, Missouri. There my mother grew up. My grandmother died thirteen years ago. My mother's maiden name was "Sarah Frances Daily." She was always known to all as "Fannie Daily," and where she now resides is known to every one as "Fannie Abbott." Even Mr. Clawson did not then know her correct Christian name. My eldest sister, Ada, who is now Mrs. Humphrey, was residing in the village of Verdon, Nebraska. She and I as children, used to visit our grandmother, Mrs. Daily, and we were great favorites with her. She always called my sister "Adie," and myself "Davie." This was many years ago.

A voice in the trumpet now addressed me, claiming to be that of my

grandmother, Mrs. Daily.

"Well, Grandma, what do you wish to say?" I asked.

"Davie, I love you, and I am all right. It is all right Davie, it is all right; and I want you to tell your mother that you talked to me, and tell your father, too," said the voice.

"You want me to tell my mother and my father that you talked to me?" I repeated, hardly knowing what to say.

"Yes, Davie, and tell Adie, too," replied the voice very plainly. "Tell whom?" I asked, being greatly surprised, as this came upon me like a gleam of light out of a chasm of darkness.

"Tell Adie, too," the voice again repeated. It certainly seemed incredible that this voice could manifest such intimate knowledge of my family's names, one thousand miles away. I thereupon decided to further test this knowledge.

"Grandma, what relation is Ada to me?" I quickly asked.

"Why, sister Adie, Davie. Tell sister Adie. You know what I mean—tell sister Adie." This had come so suddenly that I was for a moment dumbfounded; but I quickly decided to ask a test question that I did not think the voice could answer.

"Grandma, now if this is really you talking to me, you know my mother's first name. Tell it to me," I said.

"Sarah," answered the voice, quick as a flash. It was so quickly answered that the name "Sarah" had not entered my own consciousness at the instant. I had asked the test question so very quickly, that I had given all of my thought to the question, and none to the correct answer; and I had dimly in my consciousness only the name "Fannie." Thus the name "Sarah" really momentarily surprised me, and I had to think a mere instant before I realized that it was correct. I did not repeat the name for fear of a misinterpretation of sounds.

"What do you say it is?" I again asked.

"Sarah," again the voice plainly responded. There could be no mistake, but I did not repeat the name as most would have done.

"Mrs. Blake, what do you understand that name to be?" I asked, turning to her.

"Why, it sounds like Sary," she replied. I then conceived the idea of having the voice give the first names of Mrs. Daily's other children, but it here disappeared. I ask the reader to substitute himself for the writer, and for the names "Ada," and "Sarah," to substitute names in his own family; and

then to go over the foregoing dialogue, using these substituted names; to imagine himself in a strange country among strangers, and then to note the peculiar effect upon himself. He will then understand the peculiar subjective effect that this had upon the writer. A gentleman's voice now spoke inarticulately.

"Let my uncle come," I said.

"Let our mutual uncle come," spoke Mr. Clawson. This question, conveying within itself our relationship, being spoken, I now said, "Yes, let our mutual uncle come."

"Well, I am here," spoke a man's voice near the table top in a few moments.

"If you are our uncle, give us your name," I requested.

"Dave, I am Uncle Dave," now spoke the voice. We had an uncle whose Christian name was "David Patterson," and who was dead.

"If you are Uncle Dave, tell me your second name," I requested. The voice pronounced a name that resembled "Parker." It began with the letter "P," but we could not understand what followed.

"Dave, you were named after me," continued the voice.

"What is your last name?" I asked. This was "Abbott"; but the voice replied with an inarticulate sentence, in which we distinguished the name "Harvey." My uncle Richard Harvey and the uncle whose voice this purported to be, were quite intimate many years ago.

One remarkable feature of the voice which claimed to be that of my uncle David, was that it resembled his voice when alive, to an extent *sufficient to call to my mind a mental picture of his appearance*; and for an instant to give me that inner feeling of his presence that hearing a well-known voice always produces in one. *I said nothing of this at the time.* I may say that during all of our sittings, *no other voice bore any resemblance to the voice of the person to whom it claimed to belong*, so far as I was able to detect. As this uncle had died only a few years before, I have a vivid remembrance of his voice.

At this point Abe's voice spoke and said, "Gentlemen, you will have to excuse my mother for this evening. Her strength is exhausted."

We now asked permission to return the following morning. Mr. Blake agreed to go to a telephone on the following morning, and to "call up" Dr. X — and to inform him if Mrs. Blake were well enough to receive us. We now took our departure. When crossing the river in the darkness I asked Professor Hyslop if he had heard my "slip of the tongue." Dr. X— spoke up and said

that he had, but that he thought that Mrs. Blake did not hear it. Mr. Clawson now incautiously spoke and said, "Well, it doesn't matter. I do not care who knows who I am. I am George Clawson of Kansas City, and there is no use to conceal it." He was so disappointed at getting nothing definite from his daughter "Georgia," that he forgot his discretion. While still on the river Mr. Clawson spoke to me and said, "Did you notice how that voice sounded like Uncle Dave's when it first spoke?" I replied that I did, but that I had thought it to be partly my own imagination. The other parties in the boat will remember this conversation.

The following morning Mr. Blake telephoned our friend, and announced his willingness to receive us. As soon as we had dictated our reports of the previous evening, Professor Hyslop, Mr. Clawson, and myself started for Mrs. Blake's house. Dr. X— did not accompany us, but remained at home to attend to other duties. We arrived at the cottage in due time, and found Mrs. Blake in excellent spirits and much improved physically. A little granddaughter of Mrs. Blake's was playing in the street and entered with us. This pretty little child was but four years of age and seemed a great favorite with her grandmother.

Mrs. Blake informed us that this child was developing a power just like her own. We asked for a demonstration. Professor Hyslop took the little child on his lap, and I gave her one end of the trumpet. Immediately whisperings in the trumpet could be heard, but I could understand nothing except the question, "Can you hear me?"

Mrs. Blake now took the trumpet. She and I allowed its two ends to rest in our palms for a few moments. Soon it rolled on our palms one-half of a revolution. I now heard a syllable of a vocal voice which appeared to originate near the end of the trumpet in Mrs. Blake's hand. I placed the trumpet to my ear, but could understand nothing. In a short time the inarticulate voice seemed to have changed to the whisperings of a lady. Finally, Mrs. Blake said, "I believe they want to talk to you, sir." This remark was addressed to Mr. Clawson, whose identity, so far as we knew, was entirely unknown to Mrs. Blake. She makes it a rule to ask no questions, and apparently scorns being given any information, even to the name of her sitter. Up to this time Mr. Clawson had been standing very close to Mrs. Blake and intently watching her. I noticed this and feared it would embarrass her. I now surrendered the trumpet to Mr. Clawson. I seated myself so that I could hold my right ear against the middle of the trumpet, and I faced Mr. Clawson, thus

carelessly turning my back upon Mrs. Blake.

Instantly the voice appeared exceedingly loud and strong, and I could understand the words from the outside with perfect clearness. I will mention the fact that from this time forward, in about one-half of Mr. Clawson's tests, I could understand the words from the outside of the trumpet and thus assure myself that he did not misinterpret the sounds. In his other tests I had to trust entirely to his sense of hearing and his own discretion.

"Who is this?" asked Mr. Clawson.

"Grandma Daily," responded the voice.

"How do you do, Grandma? I used to know you, didn't I?" asked Mr. Clawson.

"How do you do, George? I want to talk to Davie," responded the voice. "I can hear you from here, Grandma," I said from my position beside the trumpet.

"He gives her strength; that is why she speaks so much stronger now," said Mrs. Blake, indicating Mr. Clawson.

"Keep your position. I can hear her from here," I said to Mr. Clawson.

"Grandma, tell me the names of some of those big boys of yours," requested Mr. Clawson. Here some inarticulate words could be heard, but could not be understood.

I must state that I have a living aunt by the name of Mrs. Benight, who is a daughter of my Grandmother Daily. She resides in the country in Buchanan County, Missouri, and is not known far from home. Practically all of her life has been spent within a radius of a few miles from there. Her first name is "Melissa," but she has always been known by the name of "Lissie." At the time of this sitting Mr. Clawson did not know of this aunt, but he did know of her dead sister, Mrs. Cora Holt. This he had learned from my *Open Court* article referred to before. It was this last name that Mr. Clawson had in mind during what followed.

"Grandma, tell me the first name of one of your daughters," requested Mr. Clawson.

."

The reply I could not understand from the outside.

"Lizzie?—Lizzie?—You say Lizzie?" asked Mr. Clawson. I could hear the reply between each of these questions, but could not understand it. After the sitting when crossing the river, I asked Mr. Clawson about this incident. He said that the name seemed undoubtedly to be "Lizzie," but that the letter "z" seemed to have more of the sound of "s." Up to this moment, strange to

say, the name "Lissie" had not occurred to me; but when he spoke of the sound of the letters, I immediately thought of this aunt and informed him of her. I then learned that he did not know of her.

"What is the name of Dave's mother?" now asked Mr. Clawson.

"Sarah," answered the voice.

"Yes, but she has another name. What is her other name?" asked Mr. Clawson.

"Daily."

"That is not what I mean. Give me her other name," continued Mr. Clawson.

"Abbott," answered the voice.

"That is not what I mean. She has another name. What do I call her when I speak to her? I call her by some other name. What do I call her?" insisted Mr. Clawson.

"Aunt Fannie. Don't you think I know my own daughter's name, George?" plainly spoke the voice, so that I could understand the words outside.

"I know you do, Grandma, but I wanted to ask you for the sake of proving your identity," continued Mr. Clawson.

"I want Davie to tell his mother and his father that he talked to me, that I am all right, and I don't want him to forget it. Davie, I want you to be good and pray, and meet me over here," continued the voice, speaking plainly so that I could hear outside.

When I used to visit my dear old grandmother many years ago, upon parting with me she would invariably shed tears, and say, "Davie, be good and pray, and meet me in heaven." These were the last words she ever spoke to me.

As I write these lines there comes before my eyes a vision. I am looking back through the vista of the years. I see an old fashioned homestead in the hills of Missouri. There is a grassy yard and the great trees cast their shadows on the sward. The sunlight is glinting down through the leaves, and an aged lady stands at the door. Her form is stooped; and her withered hand, which trembles violently, is supported by a cane. The tears are streaming down her cheeks, for she knows it is the last time she will look upon the youth who stands before her. Before the lady lies but the darkness of the approaching night. Before the youth stretches the waving green fields of the future, lighted by the sunlight of hope. Each knows it to be the last parting on earth, for the lady is very feeble. Her trembling hand clings to mine, while with tears

streaming down her aged cheeks she says these words: "Davie, be good and pray, and meet me in heaven." I turn from her, a choking sensation in my throat, and I hurry to the old-fashioned gate. I can not trust myself to speak; but I look back at her, and she is watching me as far as her dim eyes can see. Then she slowly totters back to her lonely room.

The vision has vanished. It lingers but in the mists of memory. The dear old grandmother sleeps these many years in the grave-yard; the youth has grown to manhood, the snows of approaching winter already glisten in his hair, and the fleeting years are hurrying all too quickly.

With the exception of the words "over here" in place of the word "heaven," these last words spoken by the voice were the identical words which my grandmother spoke to me the last time I ever heard her voice. But I must not write this article to express sentiment, neither must I permit it to interpret facts. I must merely report what occurred with sacred accuracy.

Just after the last words spoken by my grandmother's supposed voice, the loud voice of a man broke into the conversation. It was vocal in tone, low in pitch, and had a weird effect.

"How do you do?" said the voice.

"How do you do, sir? Who are you?" asked Mr. Clawson.

"Grandpa," replied the voice.

"Grandpa who?" asked Mr. Clawson.

"Grandpa Abbott," said the voice and it repeated, hurriedly, a name that sounded like "David Abbott"; and then the voice expired with a sound as of some one choking or strangling, as it went off dimly and vanished. "David" was my grandfather Abbott's Christian name.

The lady now laid the trumpet down in her lap and said, "Let it rest in our hands until we regain strength." In a few moments she turned her chair so as to face the opposite direction, and said, "I will use my other ear; my arm is tired."

Now, while they were resting, I determined to offer a suggestion to the lady indirectly, and to note what the effect would be. Turning to Mr. Clawson, but not calling him by name, I remarked, "It is strange that those we want so much do not come; that your daughter, to whom you would rather talk than to any one, does not speak to you. You have evidently talked to her, and she seems to identify herself; but is it not strange that she does not give her name correctly?" I said this in order to convey to the lady the fact that the name which appeared to be "Edna" was not the correct name of the

gentleman's daughter.

When next he raised the trumpet to his ear a whispered voice said, "Daddie, I am here."

"Who are you?" asked Mr. Clawson.

"Georgia," replied the voice.

"Georgia? Georgia, is this really you?" asked Mr. Clawson, with intense emotion and earnestness.

"Yes, Daddie. Didn't you think I knew my own name?" asked the voice.

"I thought you did, Georgia, but could not understand why you would not tell it to me. Where do we live, Georgia?"

"In Kansas City," responded the voice, and then continued, "Daddie, I am so glad to talk to you, and so glad you came here to see me. I wish you could see my beautiful home. We have flowers and music every day."

"Georgia, what is the name of your sweetheart to whom you were engaged?" now asked Mr. Clawson.

." The reply could not be understood.

"Georgia, spell the name," requested Mr. Clawson.

"A—r—c, Ark," responded the voice, spelling out the letters and then pronouncing the name.

"Give me his full name, Georgia," requested Mr. Clawson.

"Archimedes," now responded the voice.

"Will you spell the name for me?" asked Mr. Clawson who wished to prevent a misinterpretation of sounds.

"A—r—c—h—i—m—e—d—e—s," spelled the voice.

"Where is Ark, Georgia?" now asked Mr. Clawson. The reply could not be understood, but an inarticulate sentence was spoken ending with a word which sounded like "Denver."

"Do you say he is in Denver, Georgia?" asked Mr. Clawson.

"No, no," responded the voice loudly and almost vocally, and then continued, "He is in New York." This, Mr. Clawson afterwards informed me, was correct; but he thought the gentleman was at the time out of New York City, though somewhere in that state.

"Daddie, I want to tell you something. Ark is going to marry another girl," now continued the voice.

"Georgia, you say Ark is going to marry another girl?" asked Mr. Clawson.

"Yes, Daddie, but it's all right. It's all right now. He does not love her as

he did me, but it is all right. I do not care now. I would like to talk to Muzzie," continued the voice.

Here a voice, vocal in tone and of the depth of a man's, broke into the conversation. Mr. Clawson, who could not restrain his tears, owing to the intense dramatic effect of the recent conversation, stepped for an instant into the adjoining room to obtain control of his emotions and to recover his self-possession.

I placed the trumpet to my ear and the man's voice said, "I want to talk to Davie. Davie, do you know me?"

"No. Who are you?" I replied.

"Grandpa Daily, Davie. Tell your mother that I talked to you, Davie."

"You want me to tell my mother you talked to me?" I asked.

"Yes, and tell your father, too," responded the voice. Mr. Clawson had by this time returned to the room; and, impetuously seizing the trumpet from my hand and placing it to his ear, exclaimed, "Hello, Grandpa! I used to know you, didn't I?"

"Of course you did," responded the voice.

"Who am I, Grandpa?"

"Oh, I know you well. You are George Clawson. I know you well." This response of the voice was just as loud and plain as if a gentleman were in the room conversing with us.

"Grandpa, tell us the name of that river we used to cross when we went over to your house?" now asked Mr. Clawson.

The voice answered inarticulately; and although the question was repeated several times, no response could be obtained that could be understood. The river is known as "The Hundred-and-Two." If a correct answer had been given, we should have considered it quite evidential. The voice gradually grew weaker; and then a lady's voice spoke and apparently addressed Professor Hyslop. The latter gentleman took the trumpet; but the words were weak, being mere whispers, and nothing definite could be understood.

Mrs. Blake then said, "We can't understand you. Now please give way to those who can speak more loudly." I now took the trumpet and a gentleman's voice addressed me in vocal tones. I asked who was speaking, and the voice responded, "Grandpa Abbott." I now asked the voice to give me my father's name. This it was unable to do. However, it pronounced an inarticulate name that resembled "Alexander." The first two letters were certainly "A" and "L,"

but we could not be certain of that which followed. Mr. Clawson tried to get a response, but could do no better, and the voice grew weak. My father's full Christian name is "George Alexander." Mr. Clawson knew his middle initial; but until after all of our sittings, did not know for what it stood.

Here another loud, vocal, gentleman's voice spoke and said, "Gentlemen, you will have to excuse my mother. Her strength is exhausted." This voice was identical with the one of the evening before, which claimed to be that of her son Abe.

During the sitting, at one time, when the trumpet lay in the lap and while Mrs. Blake was conversing in her natural tones, the short guttural syllable of a gentleman's voice spoke, at what seemed afterwards to be the same instant that she was speaking. I noticed that her own voice ceased instantly as if she had been interrupted. I was not expecting this, and could not be certain whether the two voices spoke simultaneously, or whether the illusion was produced by the rapid alternation of the voices coming unexpectedly. This occurred again in the afternoon of this second day.

Mr. Clawson now walked out upon the porch with Professor Hyslop, where he shed tears. He remarked, "I feel just as I did the day we buried her; and I have surely talked to my dead daughter this day."

I remained inside to try and induce Mrs. Blake to cross the river that afternoon, and visit our friend's office. She seemed well enough; and I told her candidly that I desired to have a photograph taken with her in the group, and that I expected to write an account of my experiments for some publication. This seemed to please her and she readily agreed to go, providing we would send the carriage, and also if we could secure the consent of her husband. This we now did. The latter was away at the beginning of this sitting, but had just returned. He consented, although the ride must be for several miles, as it was necessary to drive down the river to a large ferry.

[To Be Continued.]

## The History of a Strange Case (cont.)

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David P. Abbot

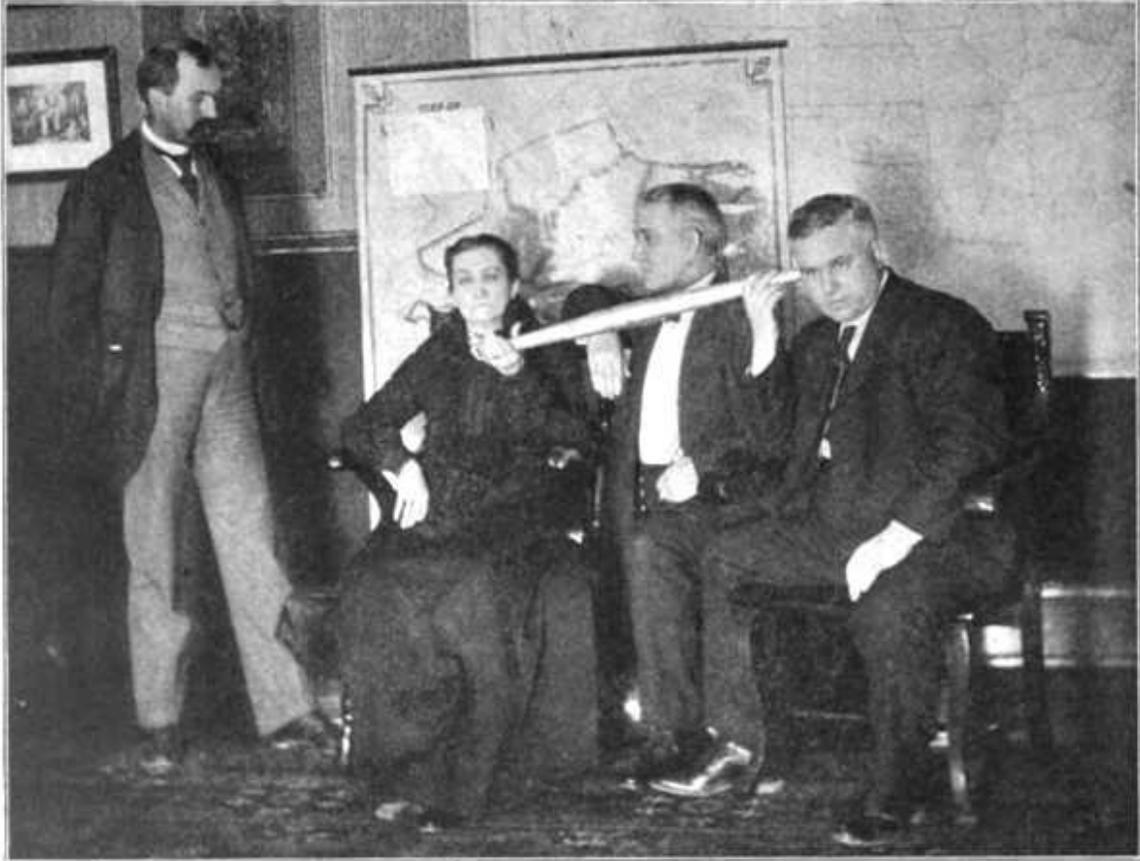
*The Open Court*, edited by Paul Carus

June 1908, Vol. XXII (No. 6), No. 625, pg 340- 358

### A STUDY IN OCCULTISM.

[concluded.]

WE NOW RETURNED to the house of our friend. Immediately after noon he sent his driver after Mrs. Blake, while he went to the train to meet some guests for whom he had telephoned during the forenoon. Soon after this, Mrs. Blake arrived; and we took her arms and assisted her to the Doctor's parlors, while we carried her crutches in our hands. After she had rested for a while and as soon as a photographer arrived, to whom we had telephoned, the accompanying photograph was made. During the exposure, whispered voices were in the trumpet, but I could not understand the articulation. Professor Hyslop is standing, the writer holds one end of the trumpet to his ear, while between him and the medium Mr. Clawson appears on one knee.



I will mention that Mr. Clawson rode to the city with the driver when he went after Mrs. Blake; and upon the latter's coming, he rode from the city to the residence of our friend with her. I was not with him, but he assured me that he gave her no information during this fifteen minute drive.

Soon after the photograph was made in our friend's office, we retired to his parlors, where we seated Mrs. Blake by an open window in a large arm-chair. Here we conducted the most successful experiment of our entire visit. The voices were mostly vocal or nearly so, and the responses came instantly. To all appearances, the ride and the excitement of sitting for a photograph, seemed to have stimulated Mrs. Blake to a great extent. One of the supposed gentlemen's voices echoed so loudly, that it could have been heard one hundred feet out on the lawn. This voice was conversing with the governor of a state, who happened to be present. I am not at liberty to give his name. As far as I could infer from the conversation, it seemed to satisfy the sitter.

Mr. Clawson first took the trumpet and addressed what he supposed to be the voice of his dead daughter. He said, "Georgia, give me your second name."

"Chastine," responded the voice.

"Repeat that again, please," asked Mr. Clawson.

"Georgia Chastine," responded the voice this time.

"Spell the name," Mr. Clawson now requested.

"C—h—s—t—i—n—e," spelled the voice.

His daughter had boarded with a lady whom she called "Aunt Burgess," while going to school in Wellesley Hills, Massachusetts. Before this lady had married Mr. Burgess, Mr. Clawson had known her as "Aunt Tina." It was this last name that he had in mind, when that which follows took place. His daughter at this time had a favorite schoolmate by the name of "Nellie Biggs"; and also, when she went to school in Kansas City, she had another school-girl friend whose first name was "Mary." Of these facts I was in ignorance at the time; but I heard a good portion of the answers given in the following conversation, though at the time I did not know whether or not they were correct.

Mr. Clawson now asked, "Where did you board when you went to school in Wellesley Hills, Massachusetts?"

"With Aunt Burgess," responded the voice.

"Tell me the name of your schoolmate friend," Mr. Clawson asked.

"Nellie Biggs," instantly responded the voice.

"With what friend did you go to school in Kansas City?" asked Mr. Clawson.

"Mary," responded the voice. It then continued, "If you will wait a minute, I will give you my pet name for her." However, this the voice did not do, and in a moment Mr. Clawson asked, "Georgia, which grandmothers are with you?"

"Grandma Abbott and Grandma Daily," responded the voice.

"Is there not another one?" Mr. Clawson asked.

"Do you mean my mother's mother, my own grandma?"

"Yes."

"Yes. Grandma Marcus is here," responded the voice. I will say that Mrs. Marquis had died but recently, and that her grandchildren always pronounced her name as if spelled "Marcus."

"Daddie, I want you to tell Ark that I want to talk to him before he gets married. I am so anxious to talk to him and to tell him something," spoke the voice.

"Is there any medium in New York that he can go and see?"

"I do not know of any. Bring him here and have Mamma meet him here," requested the voice.

"Georgia, don't you want to talk to Cousin Dave a minute?" asked Mr. Clawson.

"Yes, Daddie," spoke the voice. I now took the trumpet.

It was here that the loudest voice of all spoke and desired to converse with the governor whom I mentioned before. The voice first spoke apparently in Mrs. Blake's lap, just as I was placing the trumpet to my ear. The voice was very deep-toned, and reverberated over the large room so loudly that Professor Hyslop, who had stepped out, our friend's stenographer, and others entered and stood around the walls listening. When this conversation ceased I again took the trumpet.

A voice now addressed me, saying, "How do you do, David?"

"Who are you?" I asked.

"I am Grandma Abbott, and I always loved you, David, the best of all," responded the voice.

I will state for the information of the readers, that my father has always been quite skeptical as to the life after death, the inspiration of the Scriptures, etc.; and that in his younger days he used quite frequently to engage in arguments in support of his position. This seemed to grieve my grandmother greatly; and I have a remembrance of her frequently asking me, as a child, never to read the writings of Thomas Paine. I also now quite plainly remember (as does also my eldest sister) my grandmother saying to my father during the arguments referred to, these words, "Oh, George, don't be a 'doubting Thomas'!" According to our best remembrance we, as children, heard this expression many times. At the time of this sitting this had completely passed from my mind, and only after some months has it come into my memory clearly.

I now asked the voice, "Grandma, have you any message to send to my father?"

"Yes, tell him I am all right, and tell him not to be a 'doubting Thomas'."

"Grandma, that I may convince him that it was really you who talked to me, tell me his name."

"George Alexander Abbott," spoke the voice, instantly and distinctly, so that all could hear.

"Grandma, do you remember the summer that you spent at our home long ago?" I asked.

"Very well, David, and I always loved you." replied the voice.

"Grandma, can't you tell me something to tell my father, some little thing that will convince him that it was you who talked to me?" I asked.

"Yes, ask George if he remembers the last day I spent at his house — — — ." The word "house" was followed by a number of indistinct words, in which I thought I heard the words, "had for dinner." Mr. Clawson said that he understood that it spoke of something "making her sick," but I can not be sure of this. Then the voice revived from its weakness and said, "Don't forget to tell George that I talked to you, and that I want him not to be a 'doubting Thomas' any longer and to pray." Our friend here spoke and said, "That is the first time I have ever heard that expression used at any of Mrs. Blake's sittings." Here a whispered voice spoke, asking to talk to its "papa." No one seemed to know for whom this was, and finally Mr. Clawson took the trumpet.

"I want to talk to you. You are my papa," said the voice.

"Where were you born," asked Mr. Clawson.

"I can't remember," replied the voice.

"What is your name?" asked Mr. Clawson.

"Papa, I never had any name. Tell mother I am here with sister and am getting along fine," responded the voice.

I then took the trumpet and said, "I shall ask for a person who does not come without asking. I want to talk to my father-in-law, Mr. Miller." After this we sat with the trumpet in our laps, waiting, as Mrs. Blake had just encouraged me to ask for any one I might desire. Mr. Miller had resided in Beatrice, Nebraska. His wife is now living. Her first name is "Hannah." The first name of my wife is "Fannie," and one of his sons has a wife whose first name is "Lody."

Soon a gentleman's voice seemed to speak in Mrs. Blake's lap, and we placed the trumpet to our ears.

"Who are you," I asked.

"I am Mr. Miller," responded the voice. It continued, "I want to send a message to my daughter. Tell her I am all right."

"Mr. Miller, to prove to my wife that it was really you who talked to me, tell me, what is her first name?" I said. The voice then repeated a word that did not seem to bear any resemblance to my wife's name, and followed this by a number of inarticulate words; until finally, I heard a name repeated a number of times that sounded like "Fannie," and I was quite sure that it was,

but it could have been "Annie." Mr. Clawson, who was listening at the outside of the trumpet, seemed to consider the answer correct beyond any dispute, and repeated the name "Fannie" with a rising inflection. After this the voice said, "I want to talk to Fannie." Mr. Clawson, who thought my wife's mother was dead, said, "Ask for her mother." I then said, "Is Fannie's mother with you?"

"No, Dave, you know she is living, and I would like to talk to her."

"Tell me her first name, Mr. Miller," I then said.

This was followed by some inarticulate sentences in which we heard the word "Dody" repeated a number of times. I know of no one by that name, and Mr. Clawson did not know of my wife's sister-in-law whose first name is "Lody."

I started to straighten this matter out; but Mrs. Blake wearily threw down the trumpet and smilingly said, "You would talk to the spirits all night. I can go no further."

I conversed with her pleasantly for a little while after this. I said, "Mrs. Blake, there are those who would call this ventriloquism."

She replied, "I would not care if the greatest van-triloquist in the world were here right now," then lowering her voice with the intense earnestness of conscious power, she continued, "he could not tell you your dead mother's name."

I did not reply, but I was thinking. Certainly in all of my experience, I had never met ventriloquists with such powers; neither had I ever before heard such a wonderful exhibition of voices. I told Mrs. Blake that I desired to keep as a memento the trumpet we had used, and I still have it. I had a little visit with her at the end of this sitting, and found her very intelligent. However, her education has been neglected. Were a critical observer to inspect certain specimens of her chirography which I possess, he would conclude that were she able to correctly spell such names as "Archimedes" and "Chastine," this would be a phenomenon on a par with her other achievements.

I, however, found her quite intelligent, and I enjoyed listening to her spiritual philosophy. The intense earnestness with which she apparently portrayed an absolute knowledge of the "hereafter" was very refreshing.

We now assisted Mrs. Blake to the carriage; and placing her crutches by her side and thanking her, we bade her good-bye. Professor Hyslop expected to remain for some days and to conduct his investigations in private. That evening Mr. Clawson and myself returned to our homes.

I have been asked by many, what results Professor Hyslop obtained. This he must answer for himself. But I have reason to believe that his results were similar to ours. Any number of apparently marvelous incidents, illustrating Mrs. Blake's power, can be collected in the vicinity.

Prof. Hyslop took the written statement of Mr. Killgore, a business man residing in Kentucky, in regard to the following: Mr. Killgore deposited all checks in a bank. Mrs. Killgore kept all the currency in a safe, she alone having the combination to it. When her husband desired cash she furnished it to him. At her death all knowledge of the combination of this safe was lost. He tried to open it for some hours but had to give it up. Two months after his wife's death, while visiting Mrs. Blake and conversing with his wife's supposed voice, the latter told him to take a pencil and paper, and it would give him the combination. This he did, and on arriving home unlocked the safe within one minute's trial, using this combination.

Shortly after our return Dr. X—, together with his wife, a Mr. L. S. English and a Mrs. Humphrey Devereaux, conducted an experiment and reported it to me, both Dr. X— and his wife attesting to its truth in writing. The Doctor took eight O. N. T. spool boxes, packing in each, wrapped in cotton, a different article which had belonged to his father. Rubber bands were now placed around each box, and the latter thoroughly mixed and stacked on the Doctor's desk. His bookkeeper was now brought into the room and requested to draw a box at random from the stack, while the Doctor turned his back. The object was to select a box the contents of which the doctor would not himself know. The selected box the Doctor placed in his coat pocket. He then placed in another pocket his father's pocket book, and the four started for the séance.

On the way the Doctor gave the pocket book to L. S. English. During the séance the supposed voice of the Doctor's father spoke. Dr. X— then said, "Father, can you tell if we have anything with us that formerly belonged to you?"

"Yes, you have," answered the voice.

"What is it?"

"My pocketbook."

"Who has your pocketbook?" the Doctor asked.

"L. S. English," replied the voice. The voice then resumed a previous conversation with Mrs. Devereaux. During this time the Doctor requested his wife to ask the voice what was in the former's pocket.

"Colonel, can you tell me the contents of the box James has in his pocket?" she asked. [5]

"Yes."

"I am very anxious to have you do this so that I can report it to Professor Hyslop, and if you say so I will take the lid off the box to enable you to see better," spoke the Doctor.

"That is not necessary. I can see the contents as well with the lid on as with it off," responded the voice.

"Well, what is in it?" asked the Doctor.

"My pass I used to travel with," replied the voice. The Doctor's father used to have several annual passes. Some of them he never used, but one he used almost exclusively. Upon examining the box it was found to contain this pass.

Shortly after our return, I received a letter from Mr. Clawson. He stated that he had just received a letter from the fiancé of his dead daughter, and that in it the writer stated that he was contemplating marriage with a certain lady. This letter bore date of some time previous; and with it was an additional note of a later date, stating that the writer had supposed the letter mailed, but that he had just found it in his pocket and that he now hastened to mail it. This letter was therefore already written at the time of our sittings.

After this, at Mr. Clawson's request, this young gentleman journeyed to Huntington, where he met the wife of Mr. Clawson, and the two carried on an investigation. They expected much from the supposed voice of Mr. Clawson's daughter, but received very little. In fact, they received so little that they considered the journey a failure.

However, in looking over their reports (which I have), I find that they each received from other voices information partly on a par with what we received. A number of correct names were given, including such as "Arista," and also the name "Hyer." The latter is that of an acquaintance who, it was thought, had committed suicide a couple of weeks previously. To repeat these is but to multiply instances. It is, however, remarkable that, from the supposed voice of Mr. Clawson's daughter, they did not even receive the information which previously had been given us.

[5] "Colonel" and "James" are substituted names.

## IV.

IN AN ATTEMPT to solve in a manner satisfactory to myself the problem presented to me by this marvelous exhibition, I have divided the phenomena into two parts,—the physical, and the psychical or mental. The former includes the phenomena of the voices, light and heavy trumpet, floating trumpet, and lights. The latter includes merely the correct names and information furnished by the voices.

In regard to the floating trumpet at the dark séance, I will say that I attach no importance to this whatever. The trumpet lay upon the table in front of Mrs. Blake, and *there was nothing whatever to prevent her lifting it and dropping it*, as is done by the many mediums of the land. As to the lights, they were in appearance exactly similar to those produced by dampening the finger and then touching the dampened portion with the head of a sulphur match. The light that floated over the table was at no time further from Mrs. Blake than she could reach. The light on the floor near Mr. Blake appeared to be about where the toe of his shoe was situated. This phenomenon did not in any way differ from that of the many other mediums producing it. As to the light and heavy trumpet, I noticed the position of the fingers of Mrs. Blake with reference to the flange or ear-piece in her hands. When the end of the trumpet which the sitter held showed a tendency to move upwards, these fingers were so placed, that in case a slight pressure of some of the fingers were applied on the flange, it would give the trumpet this tendency. Such pressure could not have been detected by the eye. I noticed that when the tendency of the trumpet was downward, the position of the fingers was reversed. I find it quite easy to reproduce this phenomenon by this simple means. The trumpet can be caused to roll or turn on the hand by slightly tilting the latter. I also find that the merest slipping of the finger on the trumpet while under slight pressure makes very good raps upon it, but we heard no raps at our investigation.

This leaves in the first division the one important thing, the phenomenon of the voices, to be considered. Strange as it may seem to many, I will lay it down as a fact beyond any dispute that all of the articulated words, whether vocal or mere whispers, *came out of the ears of Mrs. Blake*. Before my journey I was confident that sound waves could not exist unless they were first produced by the vibration of some material thing. I was also satisfied that intelligent language if not produced by a phonograph, could only

originate in the vocal organs of some living human being. The question with me was, where was this person located and by what means were the waves conducted to the trumpet?

As soon as I saw plainly that there was no assistant and no mechanism in the building, I was confident that the words originated with Mrs. Blake herself. In fact, this was the simplest way out of the difficulty. I next noticed that, although voices were in the trumpet when it was removed from her ear for a moment, at such times they were not so loud; *and that in no such case could the articulation be understood*. If one desired to understand whispered words, it was absolutely necessary to place the trumpet to the ear of Mrs. Blake. They then came out plainly. When the trumpet was in the hand, I noted that the ear was slightly turned towards the opening in the trumpet, and at such times a listener at the other end of it would hear sounds in the trumpet instead of out of it. I have since verified this by experiment. The trumpet gathers and concentrates the sounds. One, on listening to this, would afterwards remember the sounds while the trumpet had been in the hand, and would forget the fact that this was but for a mere instant, and that he could not at that time understand the words. The illusion would thus be produced in the sitter's mind that the voices were able to speak in the trumpet, whatever its position.

Mrs. Blake practically acknowledged that the sounds came out of her ears, when she stated that as a little girl she heard them in her ears, and that she discovered that the use of a closed receptacle confined the sounds, making them plainer and enabling others to hear them better. When whispered words were spoken, it was far more difficult to locate their origin than when the loud and deep vocal tones of gentlemen's voices were speaking. During the latter, I frequently stood very near Mrs. Blake's head. I could plainly hear the voice emerging from her ear; that is, from the outside I could note the mellow effect of the tone in the trumpet, while I could at the same time detect what I call a "buzzing" of the tone near the ear, as a part of the vibrations escaped outward. I had done much experimenting for many years with phonograph horns, and various reproducers, and this training enabled me to detect these things very quickly. I could also at such times hear a third sound that was not nearly so loud as the voices. This was a species of "clucking"—at least, so I call it for want of a proper word to describe it. This seemed to be within her head, and I think came out of the nostrils. This was particularly noticeable when the voices were very loud. It seemed that the

production of loud, vocal words, without the use of the mouth or lips, resulted in this secondary effect. This sound was independent of the words, and did not belong to them except that it accompanied their production.

For a long time I marveled that Mr. Parsons could not have readily discovered the origin of these voices; and that he should not have done so seemed a great mystery to me, until I remembered I that he heard only whispered voices, and also that he was at such times generally using one ear at the trumpet. This effectually prevented his making this discovery.

Now if these voices come out of the lady's ears, the question arises, "Where do they originate?" I am satisfied that the whispered words originate in her throat, and that the vocal voices are produced lower down in the chest. These sounds I believe are conducted from the throat through an abnormal Eustachian canal, to a point close to the tympanic membrane. The office of this membrane is to transmit sound waves; so that once they are there, the sound waves are easily transferred into the outer or auditory canal. How these sounds can be guided into either ear at will, and how the nostrils can prevent their exit, I can only surmise. The low, guttural, single syllables that were apparently in the lap, I believe were merely heard inside the chest or abdomen. As to the sounds Mr. Parsons heard when the trumpet was to the back, I can not say, unless they were heard somewhat like the pulsations of the heart are heard in a physician's stethoscope when it is placed against the chest.

When the little grandchild used the trumpet, we could plainly see the workings of its throat, although the most innocent look was in its pretty eyes. Mrs. Blake noticed our close scrutiny and remarked, "I do not know but that they may use her vocal organs." This remark was intended to explain to us that the use of the child's vocal organs was automatic, or rather directed by spirits of the dead, and not by the will-power of the child. It is natural to suppose that both she and the child use the same methods. Any one observing the junction of Mrs. Blake's throat and chest closely, will notice an extraordinary fullness indicating an abnormal development/ within it.

Since my journey, I myself, have done considerable experimenting in this line. I can now produce whispered words in the trumpet so that they may be understood as well as this child did, but of course I have not the natural gift possessed by Mrs. Blake. While upon the subject, it is well to remark that I have learned that a few miles out in the country Mrs. Blake has a friend whom she visits very often; that this friend gives demonstrations the same as

does she ; but I am informed that the words are not nearly so plain. My informant states that it is very patent to an observer that the sounds are produced in her vocal organs. Now it is but a reasonable conclusion that if these ladies are quite friendly, both use the same means in producing these voices.

Readers of my book, *Behind the Scenes With the Mediums* will remember an account of a séance described in the Appendix, which was furnished me by a gentleman in Oldtown, Kentucky. This was where in the twilight a trumpet floated out of the door and up into the branches of the trees. This gentleman also wrote me in reference to Mrs. Blake, stating that he had known her all of his life, and that he "fought through the War of the Rebellion with Mr. Blake." He also informed me of this same medium friend of Mrs. Blake (of whom I had previously been informed), and he seemed to attribute equal and genuine powers to both. He described a dark séance which he attended, where, in his own language, "Both of these old ladies were present, and the séance was one grand hurrah of voices from start to finish."

I may state that I noticed the workings of Mrs. Blake's throat on some occasions, but that her lips were always tightly closed. That any one could reach such marvelous perfection in producing voices in this abnormal manner seems incredible, but it is certainly a fact. How Mr. Parsons heard the sounds of piano-playing I can not imagine, unless the lady possess a very perfect power of mimicry such as I have heard at times. He described the sounds to be as if one were simply running arpeggios. This would indicate that he heard but one tone at a time.

I should also mention that there are two ladies in Omaha, who produce the phenomenon of "Independent Voices." One of them gave sittings professionally for some years; but having more recently married a Catholic gentleman who disapproves of such things, she has discontinued such exhibitions excepting in private before a few intimate friends. I am informed that these voices speak up suddenly when unlooked for, while the lady is conversing. They appear to come out of her chest. One lady informs me that there is no doubt upon this point, as she was permitted to lay her ear against the lady's chest and listen. This former medium now claims that she, herself, does not understand this phenomenon, or what causes it. Being now so closely connected with the Roman Catholic Church, she can not well claim that it is done by spirit agency.

The other lady's voices seem to come in the form of a kind of "whistle,"

and seem to come out of the nostrils. I am told that in neither case do these voices give correct information.

This now brings us to the consideration of the problem presented by the mental or psychical part of what we witnessed. I frankly say that I have not yet found a solution of this problem to my own satisfaction.

That spirits of the dead, if such exist, should be a party to deception of any kind, I positively can not believe. Knowing the origin of the voices beyond any question, I never can believe that I communicated with the dead. And yet, if Mrs. Blake's intelligence directed this conversation, from what source did she secure her accurate information?

It was suggested to me that possibly the dead caused these voices to sound in the seat of Mrs. Blake's hearing as a mere subjective phenomenon, and that she but repeated what she heard subjectively. That is, it was supposed that she did not perceive actual sound waves, but that she was caused to experience the same subjective sensations, that such sound waves would have produced. This is ingenious, but one with my natural skepticism could not accept it.

It was also suggested to me that possibly Mrs. Blake did not control her own vocal organs at the times when voices were speaking, but that spirits of the dead controlled them; or that they acted automatically, as it is claimed is the case with the hand of Mrs. Piper when executing her famous writings. Had Mrs. Blake made such claims as this openly, it would certainly have strengthened her case, but would have lessened the dramatic effect. I, however, could have no faith in this solution. For many reasons which I shall not take space to recount, I am quite sure that the will power of Mrs. Blake controlled her own vocal organs.

*At the time*, it seemed irresistibly borne in upon me that Mrs. Blake did receive subjective mental impressions from some source. I am by nature as skeptical about anything of the nature of so-called telepathy or mind-reading, as I am about spirit communion. And yet, *at the time*, I could not avoid the inner feeling that she possessed some kind of a "freak power"; that something in the nature of mental flashes would at times come to her, and that certain names or facts would be impressed upon her mind, or rather make their appearance there; that she, herself, possibly did not know the cause of this, but by uttering what then came into her consciousness, she had found that it agreed with facts; that she was thus possessed of some freak mental gift, and that possibly she, herself, did not understand it.

Whether this was in any way connected with those around her I did not decide; but it seemed that it was, for otherwise tests could be given to those at a distance. As I could not believe that her information emanated from spirits of the dead, it seemed that she must draw her inspiration from those around her. And yet there was some evidence of knowledge being imparted, which was not in the minds of those about her. Could she have discovered this freak power, and as a child have come by degrees to claim that such information came to her from the dead? Could she, for instance, when with playmates, have said to one, "Your grandmother says so and so," naming the latter, and to another have made similar statements? She would then have noted the startling effects of such things as this, and this might have induced her to continue such experiments.

She then might have adopted gradually a means of using her own voice as if it were the voice of the dead, and have had this voice give directly the information she received in these flashes. She would have been liable to have tried this on account of the more startling effect of such a thing; and she might thus have learned to speak with her lips closed. The conversations that such experiments would induce, would naturally reveal to her many secrets, of which use could then be made. The great interest such things would excite in average persons, would be a sufficient inducement to cause a person to continue such experiments, thereby becoming very expert.

These things I considered, and this seemed a natural mode of evolution for the development of such peculiar gifts. In fact, it seemed that some cause for a slow development of such a gift must be predicated. To assume that any person would suddenly begin the development of such an un-heard-of gift as the ability to speak through the ear, with no reason to believe that success could ever be achieved, seems very improbable. It certainly seems more plausible that such development was gradually reached by previous experiments conducted under other stimuli. I asked myself again and again, Could any person be gifted with two such abnormal gifts as these, one physical and the other psychical?

It certainly seemed to me that it was the decline of the psychic power that now caused her to refuse sittings, or when giving one to suddenly terminate it. In the matter of the voices there was certainly no decline of power, and I could only ascribe what she called weakness to the loss of this supposed psychic gift. According to Mr. Parsons, there was no hesitancy on her part in former times, and all were then afforded every opportunity for investigation.

At the time, all of this seemed to me to be the most reasonable conclusion. [6]

After the lapse of time and much consideration of the mystery, I find that I should much prefer what I would call "a rational explanation." I feel that I should remember the lesson that my own previous investigations have taught me. As Dr. Carus has said, "When one stands before something which he can not explain, he should not conclude that it is inexplicable and attribute it to supernatural causes." I fully agree with the Doctor in this. The problem presented by the psychic part of this investigation, is by its nature very difficult of solution. But it surely does seem that if a rational explanation were possible one could find some evidences of it.

I have gone over my record, test by test, to see if I could find plausible possibilities of trickery connected with them. The following suggestions I do not in any way assert to be facts. I merely suggest them as possibilities to be considered in a search for a rational explanation.

First, it is well to state that I am positive that no information about myself was catalogued in any "Blue Book" prior to the time of this investigation. I had at that time attended but one public meeting of spiritualists, and two public séances. I was afterwards on very friendly terms with the mediums conducting these and was well informed as to what secrets they possessed and used. I need not go into other details explaining why I am sure of this, as I believe readers of my articles will be satisfied that I am critical enough to be certain on this point. It would be easy to attribute these things to something of the kind, and thus appear to have disposed of the problem. But truth and facts are what we wish to arrive at. No one knows better than a performer who has looked on from behind the scenes, the possibilities of "Blue Book" information. Also, no one knows better than he the actual limits of it in practical use, and the extent to which it is used at the present day.

Such being the case, the only other means of which I can conceive is either that information was secured in advance by some one employed for that purpose, or that it was extracted from us at the time by some cunningly contrived means. As to the first, I found very much difficulty in my endeavors to secure information relative to Mrs. Blake in advance. I must expect any effort on her part to secure information about myself, equally difficult at such a distance. I would consider such as utterly beyond Mrs. Blake's powers of correspondence, as would others, could they see the chirography before mentioned. [7]

I am aware that strangers reading this article, and not being personally

acquainted with my friend, Dr. X—, will naturally think of him in this connection. I emphatically state that he is of the very highest standing and possessed of the highest personal honor. Knowing him, I could not believe it possible for him to contemplate such a thing. Then again, the only motive that he could have for such action would be to prove to me that the lady's powers were as he had represented. On the other hand, his motive for fairness would be that he was deeply puzzled himself, and that he greatly desired a solution of the case. *For myself, I can not consider such a possibility*; but by a generous use of money, information could have been obtained about my family in Falls City, Nebraska, my childhood's home. In a small place like this, however, had any one furnished such information, it would be truly a miracle if such a fact had not reached my ears ere this. But it being a possibility, we must grant for the sake of fairness, that, by some means Mrs. Blake had secured information in advance in regard to myself; but we are still forced to admit that such a thing was utterly impossible with reference to Mr. Clawson, when no living person knew I would take him. Even he did not know until the last moment.

This brings us to the consideration of some means of securing information from us at the time. Now *at our first sitting* when the voice attempted to pronounce the name which sounded like "Artie" or "Arthur," I made the discovery that these voices would sometimes pronounce a variety of names in an inarticulate manner. The sounds would first resemble one name, and then another. Nevertheless, the sifter could not conclude a wrong name had been pronounced, as he could not be certain of the name. If, on the other hand, the name sounded like the correct one, he would naturally in attempting to get it correctly, repeat it with a rising inflection.

That this system of "fishing" is quite frequently successful, I must conclude; but my quick discovery of it absolutely prevented its being so in my case. As evidence of this, I remind the reader of my refusal to repeat the names "Artie" and "Arthur"; and also the name "Grandma Daily" when I first heard it, lest the latter should have been "Grandma, Davie," instead. That misinterpretation of the sounds was a possibility with Mr. Clawson at the first sitting, must be considered. Otherwise we must conclude that here was some very extraordinary guessing. That the name "Brother Eddy" was a guess is quite improbable, but of course could be possible; while it would have been a possibility for the name "Grandma Daily" to have been secured in advance. If we do not accept some of these possibilities, then we are unable to advance

any rational explanation. After this sitting, I cautioned Mr. Clawson on the above point; and as I could understand probably one-half of his tests thereafter, the possibility of this system being used in *these* cases, and in my own tests, can not be considered.

In regard to the pet names, "Muz," "Muzzie" and "Daddie," given Mr. Clawson at the first sitting, only the possibility of a misinterpretation of sounds can be suggested. The names given me, "Dave Harvey," "Asa," and my own name, belong to those that could have been secured in advance. This may also be said to be the case with this statement of my supposed brother, "I want to talk to mother." Had the lady, in sending this message, merely guessed that my mother was alive, there was one chance in two of failure. In the two statements to Mr. Clawson, "Your mother is here," and also "Your baby," there certainly seems a good chance of error, if this were mere guessing. Out of fairness I must call attention to these points. I also do so to illustrate how carefully I have analyzed every little occurrence. I must reiterate that Mr. Clawson was absolutely unknown at this first sitting.

We pass now to the tests given at the second sitting. It was here that I secured the names "Sarah" and "Ada," together with the correct relationship of the latter. There was no misinterpretation of sounds. These names belong to those that it would have been possible to have secured in advance, but at the time I was so thoroughly convinced that such was not the case, that I was greatly startled.

The tests given Mr. Clawson at this sitting may be neglected, as they were somewhat indefinite; and the use of the false name, "Edna," just about offset anything that he received. That a mutual uncle's name should be given when asked for, instead of the name of some of my other uncles, must be attributed to lucky guess work, if we assume that the name was secured in advance; for although Mr. Clawson's question revealed our relationship, there was nothing to indicate that he was my cousin through my father's family. There was one chance in two, that a name from my mother's family would have been given instead. As to the resemblance to my uncle's voice, I think that as we both noticed it separately, it was a genuine resemblance: but I can only attribute this to accident, for I am positive of the origin of the voice.

We pass now to the more remarkable tests given at the morning sitting of the second day. That Mr. Clawson's name and residence were given at this sitting, loses value as evidence, when we remember his statement in the boat the evening before. The boatman seemed too stupid to remember anything,

especially when conversation in his presence was continuous; yet we must remember that his assistance was one possibility to be considered.

The names "Lizzie" or "Lissie," and "Aunt Fannie," given Mr. Clawson at this sitting, are among those that could have been secured in advance. As to the names "Georgia" and "Archimedes," with the latter's correct location at the time, together with the correct spelling of his name, I can offer nothing satisfactory; for I do not think there was any misinterpretation of sounds. The tests given me at this sitting need hardly be considered, for my grandmother's parting request may be a phrase generally used by the voices. It will be noticed that the supposed voice of Mr. Daily used one of the same expressions that the supposed voice of Mrs. Daily used. Therefore, some of these expressions are doubtless "stock phrases" of the lady's. The imperfect manner in which the voice attempted to give my father's correct name was very unsatisfactory. I may state that this was supposed at the time to be our last sitting, and that had the lady secured information relating to my relatives in advance, it is strange that my father's name was not given then.

We now pass to the still more remarkable sitting given in the afternoon of the second day. Here, the names "Chastine," "Aunt Burgess," "Nellie Biggs," "Mary," "Grandma Marcus," my father's correct name, and also my wife's first name, were given. In addition to this was the name "Dody," the request for my father "Not to be a 'doubting Thomas,' " and the statement that my wife's mother is alive. Some of these things Mr. Clawson did not know, and a number of them I did not know. We must, however, consider as a possibility that he might have imparted certain information to Mrs. Blake during his fifteen-minute ride. He assured me that he did not, and he is certainly sincere in his statement. Yet he at that time considered all of our sittings as finished, and might have forgotten his discretion. I know that he had visited a medium recently, securing certain tests from her. This he enjoyed relating, and he might have related some of these things to Mrs. Blake. In case he did so, the matter evidently passed from his memory very quickly, for he was positive that such was not the case. As to the peculiar request sent my father I can only suggest accident.

One point should be noted. While the voices could generally talk very plainly on non-evidential matter, as soon as a test name was asked for, in a number of instances, the voice immediately became weak, or another voice would "break in" to the conversation. However, this can not be said of all of the tests, for in many instances the names came rapidly and accurately.

However, the fact remains that we arrived in that community unknown, or at least Mr. Clawson was; and I had good reason to suppose that I was. Nevertheless, when we returned, Mrs. Blake had in some manner secured quite a minute history of our relatives regardless of all our precautions.

Some have asked me why I did not make this journey alone and entirely unknown. I answer that had I done so, I should have risked making my journey for nothing, as the lady might have been away or ill. Also there would have been no testimony but my own as to what occurred. I thought the other plan best.

I may mention that I have recently sent a gentleman, a partial believer in spiritualism, to visit Mrs. Blake, under the assumed name of "Douglass." She tried to avoid a sitting, claiming weakness. He, however, obtained one, but received no results, other than that a fictitious "Grandma Douglass" conversed with him. There had never been such a person. I have recently received word that Mrs. Blake has about lost her psychic power, and that it is now seldom that a sitting is given that I would regard as evidential.

While I am by nature very skeptical, I have tried to treat this case with perfect fairness from all sides, and to avoid taking sides myself. I have given all incidents with great care, no matter where they tended to lead. In doing this I have not considered my friendly feelings for the lady who was certainly very kind to us, and who was wholly unlike the professional "grafters" known as mediums whom I have heretofore met.

That I have not fully solved the problem does not prove that I could not have done so, had my opportunities been greater; or that others could not have done so.

I will not assert that any fraud was used in giving the correct information; for unless I could substantiate such a statement and defend my position, it would be an error to do so. I can only suggest possibilities as I have done, and I must still leave the case to a certain extent shrouded in mystery. Anyway, I have faithfully reported to the reader all of the important details of what to me seemed, on the surface at least, to be one of the most marvelous appearing performances ever given on earth.

[6] I had promised a daily paper a brief account of this investigation at the time it was made. This I furnished with such limited explanations as I was then permitted by my contract to publish. The paper published the article,

omitting without my knowledge some pages containing explanatory matter. This cast somewhat different an aspect on the case than I had intended. This account reached Dr. Isaac K. Funk. He wrote me, stating that he desired to include this account in his book, *The Psychic Riddle*. I wrote, requesting him not to do so, as I did not wish this case to be given to the public in exactly that form. I supposed that this ended the matter; but upon the appearance of his book, I found a partial account that varied somewhat from the original newspaper article. This explanation is offered to those who may have read the Doctor s book.

[7] Here I must own that the Editor of *The Open Court* does not agree with me and thinks that I am as likely to be found in the Blue Book as Mr. Clawson who has frequently attended séances. At any rate he is convinced that after having started the investigation under my own name, Mrs. Blake had had opportunity to obtain information, which she did not utilize until after she was able to identify us.

## New Marvels in Magic



David P. Abbott

*The Open Court*, edited by Paul Carus

August 1908, Vol. XXII (No. 8), No. 627, pg 506-263

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. I wish to call your attention to some recent astounding advances in magic which have taxed my curiosity, for I find myself at a loss how to explain them. I mean the living skull, the automatic card riser, the enigmatic cube, and other contrivances of Joseffy. In each case this man seems to perform what other magicians have only dreamed of accomplishing. With his card riser the spectators may bring their own packs, choose the cards freely; no threads are used nor is there any visible connection with the goblet that contains the pack, and yet any card will rise at Joseffy's command at any time. The "living skull" is made of copper and may be placed on any article of furniture. There is no thread or outside connection yet it carries on conversations with its master by clicking its teeth the required number of times when asked a question.

The enigmatic cube is first a one-inch cube which Joseffy produces from

the air, and it is then seen to grow while in his hands to a two-inch, a four inch and a nine-inch cube. 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. The master 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 a gigantic bouquet of real roses, which are plucked and distributed to the audience.

When such apparent marvels 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.

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 claim to the supernatural.

# **Independent Voices, Movement of Objects Without Contact and Spirit Portraits (excerpt)**



David P. Abbott

*Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research,*  
edited by James H. Hyslop

April 1911, Vol. 5 (No. 4), pg. 276-288 [b]

PROFESSOR HYSLOP HAS asked me for a description of the latest achievements in producing the above phenomena by trickery, and I here give the same to the reader; though for reasons which I explain as I go along, I do not at present make public the secret methods by which these results are obtained.

While a knowledge of the secrets may be very much desired, yet, when there are reasons why these cannot be made public, a description of what has been achieved should still be of value to the honest investigator.

The reader who may have read my work, "The History of a Strange Case," published by The Open Court Co., will remember the unusual phenomenon of the mysterious voices. After this experience, I devoted much thought to devising some means by which I could produce independent voices in some receptacle which could be held by a sitter. About this time a friend of mine was experimenting along the same line. I designed a means of producing the voices and he did the same. However, I did not put mine into actual practice, but he did. Nevertheless, in his case it was quite evident that

he was using some considerable apparatus. In my mind this ruined the effect of mystery; so at his death, I combined his ideas with my own; and by making some slight improvements, I succeeded in producing something which so far has mystified all who have seen it, including my magician and mediumistic friends.

I present the act, usually, in my parlors at my home when my friends call. I usually recite to them a story of a journey I made into Egypt, and of finding the mummy of a most beautiful Egyptian girl. This mummy I brought to my home but for certain reasons decided to cremate it. This I did; cremating the body, but preserving the skull. The ashes of the body I have placed in an urn. I here show the urn, and state that after placing the ashes in it, I was passing by and thought I heard a voice. I thereupon decided that it was the spirit of the mummy attempting to converse with me; and I decided that, if I could make some receptacle into which I could cause this spirit to be confined, and that had a suitable spout or tube to convey the sounds to my ear, and at the same time to concentrate them, I should be able to converse with this spirit.

I next state that I, accordingly, designed and made a little teakettle, which I then exhibit. This kettle looks just like an ordinary small one, with bail, spout, and lid. I remove the lid and invert the kettle over the top of the urn. I then call out to the spirit in the urn as follows; "Pentaur, make ready. When I blow, pass up into the kettle." Then I blow lightly into one of the holes in the side of the urn, and remove the kettle and place the lid upon it. I then remark, "I shall see if I got her"; and placing the spout of the kettle to my ear, I ask, "Pentaur! Are you there?" Upon the voice in the kettle answering in the affirmative, I pass the kettle to my friends, instructing them to hold the spout to the ear and to converse with the voice on any subject, or in any manner they may desire.

This is done. Each person in the room takes the kettle upon his own hand, and holding the spout to his ear so that he can hear the voice inside, carries on any conversation he may desire, just as he would with a person. When completely baffled, he passes the kettle to the next person, who repeats the experiment, and so on until all present have conversed as much as they desire. Sometimes I leave the room during the conversation, in order to more thoroughly prove that it is no species of ventriloquism; and at such opportunity the guests usually quickly remove the lid from the kettle, and gaze and feel inside of it. Of course it is perfectly empty. If I do not work it this way, I invite them to examine the inside thoroughly.

I made the kettle of papier-mache, the walls less than an eighth of an inch thick, and the bottom but a disk of paste-board pasted in place. This I smoothed up and enameled an earthen color, so as to give it a neat appearance. The kettle weighs but a few ounces; and, some one suggesting that the bottom was double, I punched a hole through it so he could see it was but one thickness of ordinary pasteboard. The voice is quite dim and spiritual in tone, and can be heard dimly a couple of inches in front of the spout; but for some, who cannot hear well, I place a small rubber tube an inch long in the end of the spout; and this they can place in the ear, to convey the sounds more plainly. The voice, though dim, is clear-cut and natural, and not like a telephone or phonograph, there being no false sounds; but there is, on the contrary, an unusual softness and naturalness to the voice. The spectators may walk about while conversing, if they desire, and I do not need to be near. In fact, I, or any of my household may leave the premises entirely, and only the spectators remain and converse, if desired.

After using the kettle for some time, I then bring forward the skull of Pentaur. This is a genuine human skull. I place the spout of the kettle to the ear-hole of the skull, and order the spirit of Pentaur to pass into her skull. The skull can then be passed about, and the voice heard at the mouth and conversed with. If it seems too dim, the little tube for concentrating and conveying the sounds may be placed between the teeth. In this manner I pass her back and forth from kettle to skull and vice versa, until all are thoroughly satisfied. Then all bid Pentaur good-bye; and holding the kettle over the urn, I order her to return to her abode and remain there until I shall again summon her.

The voice need not speak the English language only, as it is possible for it to speak any other, though I have not so far had it do so. Some magician suggested that the only thing he could think of was that it might be in the nature of wireless telephony; but it was only necessary to remind him that this art or science rather, is yet in an experimental stage; and that so far, the receiving end of any wireless apparatus must necessarily have a ground wire or ground connection, besides consisting of a large amount of apparatus; while my kettle contains nothing, is connected to nothing, and touches nothing but the sitter himself. The voice cannot be heard in the intervening space, surrounding the kettle, but it originates actually in the kettle.

Naturally there are certain conditions necessary for this experiment; but so far none of the experts who have seen it can surmise what they are; for I

have been able to effectually conceal the means from every one entirely. Naturally, a creation of this kind, while it is a new thing and unknown, possesses such a monetary value among magicians and mystery lovers, that I can not afford to lessen its value by making the secret public at this time. Some day I may do so. The Omaha *World Herald* of January 1st, 1911, gave nearly a page to a description and photographs of this act.

Now it must be evident to the reader that, were I posing as a medium, it would be an easy matter for me to materialize the voices of the departed friends of a sitter in such a manner that he could converse with them; and that this phenomenon would cause as much excitement amongst the world of investigators, as any phenomena that have ever been produced; and that much money could be made by an unscrupulous medium in this manner. However, I have never been a medium and I do not believe in deceiving humanity and spreading a belief in anything upon false premises. Therefore, afterwards, I always tell persons that this is not really a departed spirit conversing; but I must admit that many refuse to believe me when I make such statement. Not long ago a party of strangers, having heard of this experiment, called upon me. I explained that it was not spirits; but upon leaving they insisted that it was, and made every effort to pay me for services as they would a medium. I may say that the secret is based upon a scientific principle and that the means are natural; but that it is not the Herzian waves.

Among magicians there is an old time trick by which a skull is made to click its jaws and answer questions while reposing upon a glass plate upon the stage. The skull is passed for examination and the jaw found to be hinged, but otherwise devoid of preparation. Now the fact is that an invisible thread lies across the glass plate, and extends to the hands of a concealed assistant in the wings, who, by pulling upon this thread, causes it to engage the jaw of the skull which has just been set on the plate above it, and thus to make the skull move its jaw and answer questions by clicking. This is an old time idea. My friend, Joseffy, has invented a skull which gives the same performances, and turns upon its neck, etc., while on a glass plate held by spectators, and there is no thread. I gave a description of this in my pamphlet, "The Marvelous Creations of Joseffy," published by The Open Court Co.

I have since devised an act of this kind; but upon entirely different principles from that of Mr. Joseffy, or in fact any other that I know. The jaw of the skull opens downward about an inch and closes with a click, without material contact of any kind, and does this at any time in response to my will.

I present the act in the following manner: When my parlor has my friends seated within it about the room, I bring from the corner a little tabouret used for a house plant, and set it in the midst of my friends. I now place upon this two Japanese censers containing burning incense, and also a peculiar cup shaped torch having a weird flame.

Next I exhibit the skull, passing it about for inspection. I can use a human skull, but am now using a light one made of papier-mache. It is open at the base, and perfectly empty, and devoid of preparation, except within, at the centre of the top is cemented an ordinary cork; and the lower jaw is pivoted as is usual with skulls. The cork is merely a projecting stud, and it fits into the top of a glass candlestick over which the skull is placed. The glass candlestick is the ordinary article, unprepared, and is used merely as a pedestal or foot for the skull to rest upon. It extends upwards into the skull and engages the cork which just fits it. When in place the skull droops over it like a hood; but the bottom of the skull is about two inches above any surface upon which the candlestick is set. This is to give room for the lower jaw to work. The contrivance with skull in place is quite solid and very simple, and can be separated by the spectators and examined at any time.

I now set this skull amongst the torch and censers; so that the incense rises on each side of it, while the flame gives it a ghastly illumination. I then explain that this is the skull of my old friend, Joseph Balsamo, who himself presented it to me in the year 1795. I also state that, in order to summon from the world of shadows the shade of the departed, and to cause it to animate this skull with life, it will be necessary to lower the lights in the room, and to recite an incantation from the Black Magic of a vanished age. I lower the lights instantly, leaving the skull illuminated by the weird light only.

I now recite:

"When hoot-owls call and lizards creep,  
And Demons hover o'er the deep,  
And all the righteous rest in sleep,  
Let flames leap high."

(Here a flame leaps from the torch to the ceiling.)

"When from graves come ghastly groans,  
And the dead come forth with clanking bones,

While out in darkness some lost soul moans,  
Let flames leap high."

(Again the leaping flame appears.)

"Now, fiends of darkness far or near,  
And Demons who this call do hear,  
Let Balsamo appear. Appear!"

At the last the jaw opens and closes with a click. I ask Balsamo now to give me the sign in the spirit world for "Yes." The jaw clicks three times. I ask for the sign for "No," and it clicks twice. I then ask if I may raise the lights and the skull replies "Yes." The lights are now raised and the skull passed for examination, and a spectator allowed to replace it himself and to see there is no contact. In fact a glass plate may be placed under it if desired.

Next, numbers on a large card are selected by the spectators, and Balsamo correctly tells them by clicking the numbers chosen. He also adds, multiplies, etc.; and there is no forcing of choice, each person being permitted to choose absolutely at random. Cards are then selected by spectators—not forced—but the pack handed to the spectator who is requested to select any card he desires; whereupon Balsamo correctly tells the card. He also tells the time by a watch, etc., etc. After this the spectators are permitted to ask any questions they wish, on any subject, but such as can be answered by yes or no: and to all of these Balsamo makes reply. When the opportunity is right, he also grins at them by opening his jaws in a ghastly grin and looking at them for a time. When all are satisfied, the skull is set upon the piano, mantel, or other convenient place, the tabouret, censers, etc., are removed, and I proceed with other experiments; but at any time during the evening if any one happens to ask Balsamo a question, he answers instantly. There is positively no connection or mechanical contact of any kind to the skull. If he be asked to draw his breath and suck into his mouth the torch, or a photo or anything near him, he opens his mouth and the objects leaps to it. This much I have accomplished in producing motion in objects, without contact, in a manner that mystifies observers.

So far no one has discovered my method, and there is no one concealed anywhere about the building; yet the skull answers as I want it to do at any time. This is the effect as the spectators see it. In fact it is all they can see; yet

I use only natural means; and, naturally, there is a preparation, as there must be in all tricks; and, of course, I have certain limitations and conditions under which I must operate; but so far no one has been able to know just how I do it. Naturally, a secret of this kind while unknown and new, has quite a value to performers; and I have sold the secret to one magician for his own use; but I have agreed not to make it public at present, and in fact, cannot afford to do so just now.

[b] This article *not* from the *Open Court* was included for those not familiar to give examples of David P. Abbott's talents in the presentation of "occult mysteries."

# The Spirit Portrait Mystery: Its Final Solution



David P. Abbott

*The Open Court*, edited by Paul Carus

April 1913, Vol. 27 (No. 4), pg. 221-253

## I.

IT IS NOW about four years since I made a discovery that finally cleared up one of the greatest of mediumistic mysteries. For about fifteen years the feat of producing spirit portraits has baffled all of the investigators that have studied the problem. Through its agency some of our most prominent men have been converted to spiritualism, and conjurers have universally acknowledged it to be the most miraculous phenomenon that ever confronted them. Meanwhile two famous lady mediums of Chicago have continued to produce these wonderful portraits as the work of the spirit world; and while some have disputed the genuineness of this claim without being able to substantiate their view, the large majority that were conversant with the subject have continued to be believers. Editor Francis of *The Progressive Thinker*, a leading spiritualistic journal, for years kept a standing cash offer to be given to any one who could explain this wonder; but there were none who could do so, and he finally died without any one claiming the reward.

Since the discovery of the secret of these productions, the illusion has been presented from the theatrical stage as a magical creation. The English conjurer Selbit, under authority of Dr. Wilmar of London (to whom I had sent

the secret), first toured England and France with it, and then presented it on the Orpheum Circuit in America at a large salary. The great American magician, Mr. Howard Thurston, under direct authority from the writer, has now presented it in his programs for two years, and is still doing so; while Henry Give, the English conjurer, and W. J. Nixon, known as the "Master Mind of Modern Magic," both are now presenting it in vaudeville houses in the east. I am informed that it is also being presented in Australia. The *Pittsburg Post* of Jan, 1, 1913, contained an offer of five hundred dollars made by Mr. Clive for any chemist who would chemically analyze his canvases and find them prepared in any way. These two last-named gentlemen have had a controversy recently through *Variety*, as to who has the American rights, etc., and it has developed in this that salaries as high as five hundred dollars a week are now being paid in vaudeville for it. But this amount is small when compared with the sums paid to mediums for this work.

In the summer of 1908 the two Chicago mediums above mentioned visited Kansas City, Mo., for a few months. It was said that their expenses were paid by a noted "healer" of that city, who usually had some fifty patients at his doors each morning awaiting the "laying on of hands." He was said to have an income of five hundred dollars daily, and was Kansas City's heaviest individual bank depositor.

Mr. C. F. Eldredge of Kansas City, Mo., in a letter speaking of this healer and these mediums, said: "I hope you will expose this work, for it is the greatest mystery in the world. One man of this city spent perhaps ten thousand dollars with these people, and he is to-day just as certain that his pictures were painted by spirit artists as that he lives. He has just published a big book on the subject, [8] all full of these pictures, which he claims was written by his dead wife through their mediumship. He is only one of hundreds who are ready to stake their lives on this work."

Mr. Eldredge is a very intelligent man, and is teaching the mysteries of the human mind, how to effect certain marvelous cures, and how to perform other mental miracles—if I may be allowed the word. It was through a description furnished by him that I was able finally to work out the solution of this mystery, and to settle definitely the extravagant claims of the mediums, besides making the stage illusion possible. Mr. Eldredge had the privilege of witnessing one of the Kansas City séances, and I here give his report:

"Having met by appointment at the residence of the mediums, my doctor friend and myself were ushered into the studio where the sitting took place. The object was to secure a portrait in colors of the doctor's sister who was killed some six years ago in a runaway accident.

"The doctor was requested by the mediums to select two canvases from a dozen or more that were leaning against the wall. This he did from near the middle of the pile, holding them up to the light and rubbing his hand over them in order to determine if there was any coating or film over them. I also examined them very carefully, and was satisfied there was not. One of the mediums now took the two framed canvases and placing them face to face, stood them upon a small table in front of a window which looked out upon the Paseo, one of the great boulevards of our city. The canvases were leaned against the window which faced the south.

"One of the mediums stood upon a chair and pulled down the blind to the top of the canvases, and then each of them drew a soft, dark curtain from the side of the window to the frames, thus darkening all of the window except where light came through the canvases.

"The light from the window passed directly through the canvases and they appeared clear and white. My friend held a picture of his dead sister in his hand, being requested to fix the expression of her face in his mind. We were seated immediately in front of the window, not more than three feet from the canvases while the mediums stood at the two sides of the table holding them and talking to us.

"After waiting possibly five minutes, one of the mediums said, 'You will observe how the canvases are drawing! They are being sized.' The front canvas did seem to be stretching on the frame making a slight noise, as if the thumb were being drawn upon the side of the frame. Presently the noise stopped, and there appeared on the outer edge of the canvases, or rather between the two, a slight shadow. I did not notice it until our attention was called to it by the mediums. It continued to darken while the center remained white and clear. In a few minutes I noticed a pale pink, almost directly in the center. It seemed like the glow of sunrise, but there was no form. Next we noticed an outline. The face was forming. We noticed two dark blurs that grew more distinct, and we saw that they were eyebrows and eyelashes of closed eyes. The lines of the mouth appeared, and the outlines of the head became visible, while the shoulders were distinct; and then the eyes opened out, giving a life-like effect to the portrait.

"Was I dreaming? I felt like pinching myself to see. A woman's face was looking at us from between the canvases, beautiful in form and feature.

"My friend had been told to suggest any changes he wanted during the formation of the picture. He now said that he would like the face turned a little more to the right giving more of a front view. Almost immediately the picture began to fade from the canvas, and it grew fainter until it lost every detail. The outlines of the head became indistinct. The eyes went out into mere dark rings. Presently we saw the face coming as before. The face seemed turned a little this time, though I am not positive that it was. I imagined that it was, and the doctor seemed better satisfied; however, the change was very slight if any. We were so carried away with the marvel of the performance, that reason gave place to sentiment. The very marvel was inspiring. This time the development was more rapid. The eyes opened again as before.

"The doctor now asked that the eyes be made a little darker blue, more of a gray; and while he was speaking I noticed that the eyes were changing to a blue gray, or else my imagination was playing me false. He now suggested a slight change of the nose, which was made, and the lines of the mouth were altered at his suggestion. He now suggested that the face was a little too full, and it seemed to narrow slightly. The picture seemed to follow the doctor's thought. He was asked if he would have, as a hair ornament a crescent, a star or crown. The doctor suggested a crescent, and immediately a crescent of gold with gems of white appeared. Up to this time the shoulders seemed bare. He was asked to choose whether there should be a high or low collar. He suggested one of medium height and it at once appeared. On looking at the photograph, the doctor now saw a string of beads around the neck. Without speaking, the beads came into view about the neck, one bead at a time. They changed in color from white to amber then to gold. He seemed to conjure the picture. As a dream follows the will, so this picture followed the doctor's thought. Meanwhile the background had changed in color several times, from white to light yellow, then to dark yellow or brown, and then to green with a tinge of red, after which it mottled beautifully until the effect was superb. The changes took place like waves of light passing upwards over the whole picture. The two canvases were now laid flat on the table, and a third canvas was then lifted from the floor and placed over them for a cover. We were then asked to place our hands on this, so as to 'set the colors.' Soon the portrait was uncovered, and I found the paint was a kind of greasy substance, as I rubbed

some of it on my fingers.

"My friend had enclosed a photograph of his sister, together with a letter to her spirit, between slates for a time, in the presence of these mediums, some three days before this sitting. It was then his appointment was made.

"I have heard of the Hindu magician who plants a seed and grows a tree before your eyes, and of the turning of water into wine, but here was a phenomenon even greater; one that seemed to contradict every known law of nature; and now as I record this the day after, I am more bewildered than when I saw the work done. I do not believe the picture was painted before our eyes, for that is beyond rational belief, and by no process of reasoning can such an idea satisfy my mind. Where did the colors come from? How did they get between the close fitting canvases, and by what miraculous power were they intelligently spread over one of them?

"We compared the portrait with the photograph; the psychics asked to see it, claiming never to have seen it before. The likeness was perfect. Any one could recognize it. There seemed to have been no opportunity for trickery or fraud, and everything was open and above-board. We could see all over the room at all times, under the table in front of us, and everywhere. Yet the work was contrary to natural law and all human experience.

"One of these mediums said to me when speaking of their marvel, 'We are the only people in the world to-day, who positively and absolutely prove immortality.'

"I expect to work out this problem somehow, somewhere, sometime. But there is no hurry. It will be the result of patient effort.

"Another lady here had quite a large portrait made. It came in about five minutes. She said it seemed like a rain-storm on the canvas, the colors seemingly being pelted on in waves."

I also have a report from Thomas Grinshaw, the spiritualist lecturer, and President of the Missouri State Association of Spiritualists. He saw a portrait produced on a stage in the auditorium at Camp Chesterfield. An attempt was made to produce a portrait in the afternoon, but it resulted in an accident and nearly caused a fire. The attempt was repeated in the evening with more success. Clean canvases were selected by a committee and faced together, and placed in front of an ordinary wooden soap-box.

The box was first placed on a little table near the front of the stage. It had neither front nor back, and an ordinary kerosene lamp was placed in the box to shine through the canvases. A black cloth was then hung over the rear of

the box so as to darken the room, and cut off all light except what passed through the canvases. A medium stood at each side of the box holding them. The portrait gradually materialized, then dematerialized, after which it again reappeared. He was particularly impressed by the making of the lace work around the neck. A large audience witnessed this production, and a large committee was on the stage and helped to select the clean canvases.

This is a very brief summary of his report. It will be seen that all of the main features are about the same as described by Mr. Eldredge.

I also have a report from a gentleman by the name of Odell. He saw a portrait produced in the center of a room with the canvases held upright on a table, and an ordinary incandescent lamp hung behind them to shine through and show the formation of the likeness. Also in a report I have from Dr. Funk, a production is described where the canvases were set on an easel, and he was permitted to walk between them and the window while the picture was coming and going.

These reports are of great length but I have given here in the briefest possible manner such of their contents as I think will best describe what I think it is safe to say is without exception the most remarkable mediumistic performance ever given in the world.

After studying these reports, I decided to begin experimenting to discover the secret of the process, always assuming that nothing but natural means were employed.

Readers of my book *Behind the Scenes with the Mediums* [9], will remember some [correspondence I had through \*The Open Court\*](#) in regard to some spirit portraits produced by certain famous mediums. At that time the descriptions of the act, as furnished me, were very meager and incomplete; and this fact misled me. Naturally, I thought of the old spray method of developing a prepared canvas, and elaborated on the method, thinking that I surely had the principle upon which the act was performed. However, as at a later date, I was furnished the above accurate reports of this remarkable performance, which showed entirely different conditions from those the first reports conveyed to my mind, I soon discovered that the spray method was impossible; and I freely confess that the explanation given in my book is not the correct one.

I now experimented with a graduated gauze screen, as there were rumors that such was used. I soon found this impossible; but after a short time I made a most startling discovery of a subtle principle by which I could cause a

portrait to materialize between canvases, and also again to dematerialize at will. This I worked in my windows and showed it to a number of magicians, spiritualists, and other friends, among them my magician friend, Mr. Gabriel Rasgorshek, and I explained the principle to him at that time. I may say that it is not a spray method, neither is it any principle of developing a picture, from light, chemicals or otherwise. Also it is no system of projection such as the stereoptican idea advanced by Rev. Osborn of Kansas City, Mo. It is something absolutely new up to that time and entirely unknown to every one excepting those using it publicly and possibly a few of their most intimate friends.

Mr. Rasgorshek and I both decided that I had discovered the principle by which this thing was done, and that the famous secret was at last brought to the light of day; but owing to the "over-enthusiasm" of some parts of my reports, we thought there was some other thing used with it as an accessory for producing the after effects, such as the lace work, and hair ornament. Neither had I solved the problem of the composition of the colors. So, for that reason, I did not publish my discovery at the time, but waited until opportunity should enable me to verify whether or not my discovery were the only principle used in the production.

On August 11, 1909, which was nearly six months after my discovery, Dr. Wilmar (William Marriott) of 84 Bushwood Road, Kew, London, S. W., psychic investigator and lecturer, wrote me a letter of inquiry, which I still have and of which I have furnished the editor of *The Open Court* a photographic copy. He stated that two of these paintings had arrived in that country, and he asked me to furnish him the fullest report possible of one of these productions. He did not know I had been working on the case and asked the probable expense of having me see a portrait produced.

I replied to this letter on August 25, 1909, and gave him all of the reports on the work then in my possession, *and I also freely explained to him the principle which I had discovered for causing the portrait to materialize and dematerialize.* After this a number of letters on the subject passed between us. Dr. Wilmar then asked me not to publish my discovery for a time, and I dropped the matter

This was the last I heard of Dr. Wilmar for a long time. Meanwhile I occasionally exhibited the act in the windows of my office to certain magician friends when they happened to call.

On January 31, 1911, Mr. Eldredge again wrote me, requesting me to see

the spirit portraits which were being produced upon the Orpheum Circuit, and which would arrive in Omaha the following week. Amongst other things he said, "The whole work is exactly as performed by the mediums, and the paint was not dry when the pictures were finished. The miracle was repeated twice. There was no switching of canvases, no tables, everything right before the eyes of the committee on the stage. The canvases were handed out to be examined by the audience. The man conducting the work here offered five hundred dollars to any chemist who could tell what substance the colors consisted of. He offered the same amount to any one who could come on the stage and explain how the work was done. This challenge was good all week. The work was exactly like the spirit portrait work performed by the mediums I wrote you about in every detail. There can be no question whatever that it is the same thing as any one who has seen both must admit. If you could solve this you could easily get one thousand dollars a week on the legitimate stage. The mediums made ten times that amount while here. This is certainly as claimed for it—"the riddle of the century."

He also enclosed a program which I here reproduce:

## PROGRAM

MR. P. T. SELBIT

OFFERING A WEIRD AND WONDERFUL EUROPEAN SENSATION

SPIRIT PAINTINGS

DR. WILMAR'S RIDDLE OF THE CENTURY.

FAMOUS PAINTINGS REPRODUCED BY SPIRIT ARTISTS

IN FULL VIEW OF THE AUDIENCE,

UPON ORDINARY CANVASSES CHOSEN BY THEMSELVES.

As soon as I saw the name "Wilmar," I felt assured that my principle was the foundation of the illusion. My wife and I then attended the Orpheum Theater, and, naturally being so familiar with the act followed everything in minutest detail. Not a thing escaped us.

Sure enough it was my principle upon which the act was based, and the whole illusion was built around it, and depended upon it entirely, and was utterly impossible without it.

Later, Mr. Selbit called upon me with a letter of introduction and proved a very fine gentleman indeed. Naturally, I told him how the act was done and of my share in making it possible; and he was courteous enough to take me over to the theater where he worked it for me a number of times at close range. He also presented me with one of the portraits as a souvenir.

He told me that he had contracted with Dr. Wilmar to produce it on the stage, and to pay for such rights enormous royalties. He said that Dr. Wilmar claimed to be the originator of the idea, and when I showed him the letters of this gentleman, stated that this was his first knowledge of where the doctor had obtained the secret. He asked me to keep the secret private for a time, as he had invested heavily in the act, and as an exposure at that time would cause him heavy financial loss. I promised him to do so. He continued to produce the illusion in the name of Wilmar, and I have lately seen a letter wherein he stated, that up to the time of its date, he had paid over ten thousand dollars in royalties for the use of this illusion, and which he said, according to his information, was the highest price ever paid for a single illusion. Since the above date, Mr. Selbit has visited me and he stated that the royalties he has paid, now aggregate about twelve thousand dollars. He said he would furnish me with the dates and amounts of his payments.

Spirit portraits can now be produced in vaudeville all over the world, and will materialize between canvases that are selected from a number of clean ones by the audience, just as has been done in the private séance for a number of years by two of the greatest mediums the world has known.

A number of large, clean, white, unprepared canvases are on the stage. A genuine committee is invited up. They select the canvases that are to be used. These are faced together before every one, and placed in a nice gilt frame, which is then stood upon an easel. The committee is allowed to pass all around this easel, at any time before the frame is set upon it or afterwards during the materializing. They are also permitted to examine it and the frame thoroughly. The body of the easel is some two feet above the floor, and the legs of the committeemen can be seen beneath it when they pass behind. A large arc light is placed just back of the canvases, and they are illuminated a most beautiful white. The performer then places his arm and hand behind the canvases and they are distinctly seen through them. The committee now

selects the name of the portrait desired from a list of some forty which are printed on a screen.

Soon the shadows begin to appear around the margin, then comes the rosy glow like sunrise in the center. Later, the eyes gradually appear as dark rings, and the outlines of the mouth, nose, and head appear. The background is at the same time working in most beautifully; and, lastly, the eyes open, and lacework appears around the neck,—if the portrait asked for requires it. The canvases are now taken down, and the beautiful, finished picture, about forty by fifty inches, is passed down the aisle. The act is then repeated, and at any time one requests it, the light is turned off to show that the picture develops independently of the light. The committeemen can pass all around the canvases during the materialization, and can be within two feet of them.

There surely could not be two principles in nature, that would produce exactly the same results, in a case of this kind, although those who do not understand the secret cannot of course fully realize this as I do. For myself I am confident that the famous secret has at last been discovered, and I feel gratified that I was able to work it out from a mere description of the act without ever seeing the thing done.

Selbit related to me that the night King Edward died he was producing a spirit portrait of him, and that the audience went wild with enthusiasm, the orchestra played "God Save the King," and the demonstration lasted twenty minutes. This was in London.

I was refraining from publishing the secret of this act, at the request of Dr. Wilmar, but as he put the act on the vaudeville stage without notice to me, I feel released from further obligation to him to keep the matter secret.

[8] The book is entitled, *Through the Valley of the Shadow and Beyond*. It has an introduction by "The Supreme Divine Ruler of the Spheres." Among the psychic portraits reproduced in it are one of this dignitary, one of "The Divine Jose," one of "Rose the Sunlight,—one who walked through the Valley of the Shadow, etc.," one of "Emma the Starbeam" and others. See also the book, *Two Years in Heaven* by "Rose the Sunlight."

[9] Chicago, The Open Court Publishing Co., 1009.

## II.

MR. SELBIT HAVING long since finished his tour, and Mr. Thurston, who holds his rights directly from me, having graciously consented, I shall now proceed to relate the history of my discovery, and to explain the long-sought secret.

It will be remembered that in my early reports but one canvas was said to be used, and this was set in a window; but as soon as I learned that two canvases were used and faced together, I knew that a spray developer could not be employed, and I began to search for some other means. I first devised an elaborate system of projection and window traps upwards and downwards, with concealed assistants above and below, etc., by which the effects might be duplicated. I had Mr. Eldredge examine the building used in Kansas City, and he found it to be solid brick with no chance for window traps and no chance for assistants above or below to give any help. So I knew that this could not be the principle.

Mr. Rasgorshek, who has had much experience with mediums, kept insisting that I would find it to be some simple thing that required no apparatus, and that I surely would find a substitution somewhere. He often said: "Abbott, mediums do not dare use apparatus, for the danger is too great. It must be something so simple that if a sitter 'grabs,' nothing can be found to use as evidence."

I also knew that in tricks every little thing is for a purpose, and that nothing superfluous is used when the art is perfect. I analyzed and re-analyzed the problem, and I decided that there was certainly a good reason for using two canvases. Why did the mediums invariably use two faced together? Surely it would be much more simple as well as conclusive if but one were used. Also, if it were possible to produce a portrait when using but one, we certainly would hear of their doing it that way sometimes. Yes, there was a reason for using two canvases; and it surely was merely to have the front one conceal from the sitter what happened to the one behind it. When both were in position in the window, and the side and upper curtains drawn and pinned to the front frame, anything could happen to the rear canvas and the sitter would know nothing of it. Again, there must be a reason for laying the canvases over on the table and covering them with a third canvas under pretense of "setting the colors." What could be the real reason of this? It will be seen later why this is. I was entirely satisfied that a painting was made in advance; and that somewhere before delivery of the portrait at the close of the séance, it was substituted or introduced in some way. I knew that in magic,

substitutions always take place early in the performance—much earlier than one imagines—and hence the real trick is always executed sooner than is thought.

Now, evidently the portrait was really produced on the rear canvas, and it surely was in the window at the time the two were laid over on the table. So it must have been substituted before this time. Then it must really have been in the window during the entire coming and going effects. Laying them over on the table would bring it on top to be handed out first. How did it get in the window, and above all, *how was it made to appear and disappear at will?* Window traps permitting substitutions being impossible, and projection ideas and developers being out of the question, what subtle principle could here be involved? The more I thought, the greater the mystery became; and I finally decided that to take the advice of my friend, Mr. Rasgorshek, and experiment, was the only thing to do. I secured a portrait and a blank canvas, and as I had heard rumors that a graduated silk gauze screen was secretly introduced gradually between the canvases for screening off the portrait, I decided to try this. I made a rectangular frame that was only one-eighth of an inch thick and placed on it rollers and a windlass, so that I could reel up many thicknesses of silk on it. This I placed between the two canvases in the window and began reeling. I did not decide where I would conceal my assistant, or how get rid of the frame or substitute the portrait; I simply wanted to discover how to materialize and dematerialize the latter.

I found that by reeling up many thicknesses of silk the portrait was gradually cut off; but that the canvases were at the same time darkened so that their beautiful transparency was ruined. I saw that this could not be the secret, for the light had to be entirely screened out before the portrait utterly disappeared. As long as there was any light the portrait was visible. I next unreeled the silk and I found that the portrait was indistinct even when it was all withdrawn—that it appeared "out of focus" as it were. I then removed the frame from between the canvases and crowded them closer together; and the portrait, viewed from the front through the blank canvas, immediately became clear and sharp. I again moved the portrait backward, viewing it through the front one. It grew indistinct, more and more "out of focus," until it became an indistinct cloud, then merely some dim shadows; and finally it vanished utterly leaving the canvas clear and white. I brought it forward slowly, and it gradually made its appearance, the dark lines first appearing, then the rosy glow at the center; and finally the features began to form; and at

last the eyes changed from dark shadowy rings, to open, bright eyes.

I looked on in awe. Here was the very thing for which I was searching, and without screen of graduated gauze, or apparatus. Here was the long-sought subtle principle, the famous secret that had baffled scientists and the investigators of the world; and it was a thing so simple that it staggered me. When the canvases were separated, the rays of light passing through the portrait began to diverge and spread evenly over the blank canvas, until, as the distance was sufficiently increased between them, the illumination became evenly diffused over it. This distance was about three inches. At the same time, as the canvases were separated, side light was being admitted between them which helped to illuminate the front canvas evenly, and to obscure the portrait. The greatest portion of the effects were within a distance of a quarter of an inch, and nearly all of them within a half-inch.

So, to precipitate a portrait and erase it, it was but necessary for the two psychics at each side to move slowly—very slowly indeed—the rear canvas forward and backward with the most steady and slightest motion possible. This was easily done with the fingers through the slit in the soft side curtains; and were any one to violate all rules and "grab," he would only find a portrait "just about finished by the spirits." An ideal scheme, just such as mediums would use!

This principle, then, would account for the materializing and dematerializing of the portrait at will; but it necessitated a substitution early in the sitting, just as most magic tricks require. Naturally a substitution for professionals is an easy matter; but for non-performers it seems a great difficulty. Now suppose the portrait really made and finished in advance of the sitting, how was it gotten into the window behind the blank? It will be remembered that after the selection and thorough examination of the two blanks, they were faced together and placed by a table near the window, from where later on the third blank or cover canvas was lifted. Meanwhile one of the two mediums removed the discarded blanks from the wall, taking them out of the room.

Now the mediums undoubtedly use various means for making this substitution, varying them to suit the occasion. But I think that in most cases they have the finished portrait in the room all of the time. It could be left standing on the far side of the table from where the sitter enters the room, and could be leaned with its face against the wall, or more probably facing into the room. If the soft black side curtains reach the floor, one of them can cover

the portrait completely; so that should the sitter happen to get in a position to look on that side of the table, he could see nothing. In this case, one of the mediums would take the two chosen canvases and carry them over to that side of the table, and stand them on the floor in front of the portrait. Now, while the other medium seats the sitter at the end of the table in front of the window, the first one has but to lift into position on the table, the front blank and the rear canvas with portrait, leaving the discarded blank on the floor to be used for the cover canvas later. I think this method, being the simplest, is oftenest used; but more complicated means may be employed at times. For instance, the medium who carries out the discarded blanks may bring the portrait back unobserved when she reenters.

Here is how I should do it if I were a lady medium. I should wear a skirt that was really open in front but lapped over in a fold; and I should suspend the portrait on a hanger between my legs under my skirt. If I were quite large I could carry a good-sized portrait here unobserved by all. Of course it would not have to be in this particular position, and in fact could be hung on the outside of the skirt, if the medium keeps that side away from the sitters. But under the skirt would be much safer; and I have always found that female mediums do not hesitate to take advantage of their sex and the sacredness of their skirts, to cover deception.

As the medium returns from carrying out the blanks and advances to the window to lift up the two blanks and place them in front of it, her person hides them from view and her back is toward the sitter. She now has but to draw out in front, from under her skirt, the real portrait; and this move is invisible to the sitter, as will also be the act of bringing it behind one of the blanks; and then she visibly lifts both to the window while her person hides the discarded blank that will later on be used for a cover canvas. Since the portrait behind the blank *is hidden by the latter from the view of the sitter*, the deception can not be discovered. The blanks have been examined so thoroughly by the sitters that they are tired of examining them, and are really ashamed to exhibit further incredulity. "So the psychics, acting simultaneously, pin the soft black curtains at the side of the window to the front frame, and at the same time allow the back canvas to tilt back out of focus. The top curtain, still being very high, lets so much light into the room, that it helps to obscure what comes through the canvases, when the two are separated but an inch. But before the top curtain is drawn, completely darkening the room, the portrait must be moved or tilted further back. It must

be remembered that the bottoms of the canvases stand on a table end directly in front of a window, with a psychic at each side holding the canvases and discoursing and gesticulating, so as to take and direct the attention where desired. The sitter sits in front of the end of the table facing the window and canvases, and the person of one of the mediums is between him and the third or discarded cover canvas on the floor near the window. The sitter naturally thinks that his two chosen blanks are now in the window, and he seems to be seeing right through them and they appear clear and white. He does not dream that his portrait, all finished, is already in the window behind the front canvas, but merely moved back out of focus.

The psychics have previously watched with sharpest eyes for any marking of canvases, and the one bringing in the portrait has a chance when out of the room to duplicate the markings. Or, if the portrait be already in the room, then one medium must divert the sitter's attention by a slate test or otherwise, until the other medium gets the portrait marked. As to the sitter buying his own canvas, as often reported, it is remarkable that the ones so bought correspond exactly with the ones furnished by the mediums, even to the number of threads per inch in the cloth and the thickness of same, etc. Queer, isn't it? Dr. Wilmar had the canvases of two thoroughly examined in this manner. One was supplied by the psychics and the other the sitter claimed to have bought down town; but they corresponded as above described.

Next, everything being in readiness, the psychics have but to manipulate the rear canvas very slowly to get the effects. Meanwhile they skillfully employ suggestion announcing in advance each effect as it is to appear. The eyes seem to be dark blurs until the tops of the canvases are crowded together very closely, whereupon they appear to open. That is, the dark blurs dissolve into open eyes, giving them the appearance of opening out. This is particularly apparent when the eyes are colored a beautiful sky-blue. The use of suggestion before this effect, by the psychics announcing that "the eyes will now open," impresses this effect upon the sitter's mind. By crowding together the top of the canvases first, the eyes open when the shoulders are still indistinct enough to appear indefinite or bare—that is, mere dark outlines. As the majority of the effects appear the last quarter of an inch, and nearly all of them in the last half-inch, if it be remembered that four or five minutes are used in this amount of motion, one can realize how very slowly the rear canvas must approach the front one. Also the use of so much time

greatly adds to the effect when a miracle is supposed to be in the act of performance. The psychics seem to be trying so hard to hurry it up, and the stress of desire is so great, that the slowness of production produces the effect on the sitter's mind of great effort on the part of the spirits.

After the eyes open, if one psychic crowds up the bottom of the canvas on her side, the lace work will begin to form on her side and the beads, etc., to appear. Then if the other psychic slowly crowds up the bottom on her side, this causes the lace work to finish and the beads to come one at a time. There is also an apparent change of color as each object takes on clear-cut detail. Naturally during this movement the background is working in most beautifully like waves of light, etc. The changes of color are, however, to a certain extent imagination; and this occurs easily among so many confusing details all coming at the same time. The hair ornament can be made to appear by skillfully pulling off a patch on the back of the portrait which has been stuck on with wax and with a thread attached, but I hardly think this necessary. The choice is undoubtedly "forced" by suggestion; and if this occurs early in the performance, before the ornament appears, the psychics can announce its appearance when the right time arrives and thus produce that effect. For instance, one psychic would say to the other, "She ought to have a hair ornament. I think a crescent would be beautiful, don't you? Or would a star, or crown, be better?" The other would say, "Oh, it should be a crescent by all means; for I think a crown or star would be out of place and not at all artistic. Which do you think would be best, Mr...?" Naturally he would choose a crescent, and would afterwards think he had free choice. Should he choose a crown or a star, it would only be necessary to explain to him that a crescent is much more artistic, and he would be sure to yield to "superior persons who wield supernatural powers."

The effects of narrowing the visage, or of slightly turning it, or of altering the lines of the nose or mouth slightly, can be apparently effected by a slight jostling of the rear canvas and the use of suggestion at the time. Thus, if the sitter request the visage to narrow, the psychic can say "all right," and at that instant cause the portrait behind to move sidewise the slightest amount. The sitter will see the portrait move, and construe it to be a slight narrowing, for the vision being at the time concentrated on the point in question, will see only its movement. The same will apply to the lines of the nose or mouth. Also, at any time, a slightly tighter crowding of the canvases so as to make any feature come out brighter and clearer, coupled with suggestion, will carry

the effect of an alteration of the portrait in response to the sitter's request. All of this is the real art of the performance, and what makes it "strong." It is not what you do, but how you do it. The strong way this has been dressed up and presented to believers, is the secret of the marvel and has made it what it is. The principle alone was not so much, but embellished with this incomparable art of presentation, it has been one of the wonders of the world.

Any time that the sitter expresses dissatisfaction with a portrait, the psychics say, "All right, the spirit artist will erase it," and instantly it begins to fade from the canvas. They slowly recede the rear canvas until every vestige of the portrait is gone, and then again slowly materialize it.

From all I can learn, all of the objections offered by the sitters are invariably at the psychics' request, which shows they are the result of suggestion. Mr. Eldredge in a letter said: "The psychics kept insisting that we ask for changes in the portrait, and seemed very anxious to please us in every detail." The psychics cause the sitters to think certain things should be changed, and then apparently make the change. The sitter thus thinks every detail was altered to suit his will. As an example: One fine portrait of a beautiful girl was produced for a wealthy farmer of my acquaintance. It was supposed to be his daughter, now twenty years old in the spirit world, but who died when but two. He said: "When the portrait started to come, the hair seemed to be 'done up on a rat'; and I said, 'Hold on! I don't want the hair like that,' and immediately it faded out." Now I saw this portrait, and the hair was hanging over the shoulders in the most beautiful and artistic golden ringlets and curls; but the top of the head with the hair thereon was much more deeply colored, or rather covered with the paints; as these portions of the picture must be heaviest. As a result they appeared as dark shadows before the curls were visible, and the mediums had but to say: "Do you like the hair that way? It seems to be coming done up on a rat;" and naturally he would say "no." If not, they would advise him to change it, but there would be no trouble in getting him to take the suggestion; and then the psychics would fade the portrait and cause it to reappear, with the beautiful curls coming out as it progressed. Naturally the old gentleman thinks the portrait was actually changed at his request. Thus the reader can see how adroit are these psychics at the art of suggestion. They always manage to change a portrait to some form more beautiful and artistic, knowing a suggestion will be readily taken that way. They never attempt, for instance, to change beautiful ringlets and curls to an old-fashioned mode of dressing the hair.

When the portrait is finished, naturally the extra canvas would be discovered and would arouse suspicion. But if one of the mediums lifts it for a cover, as if it had been there all along for this especial purpose, its existence is thought nothing of, and hence it does not have to be "got rid of." Of course every one could not put this act on in so "strong" a manner; but ladies with plenty of "nerve" and years of experience and practice, coupled with a natural aptitude for such work, can do so. It must be remembered that suspicious persons get no portrait. Witness Carrington who was sent by Dr. Funk, and who tried for hours with no success. The ability to choose whom to work for, is part of the art of the psychic. This is why some of them are so successful for so many years. They are so cunning at judging the dispositions and mental characteristics of persons that they make no mistake, and only get results for persons whom they are sure they can "handle."

Readers may doubt the possibility of this great effect by such simple means. Let them try it with good light, and nicely colored portraits on transparent canvases. If still in doubt, I will wager that if anyone who is not under the ban of suspicion, goes for a portrait and suddenly grabs the canvases as soon as placed in the window, he will find the finished portrait in the rear, right on the start.

An observer trying to catch the psychics would doubtless (if he took notice) see no third, or cover canvas, near the window before the lifting of the two to the window by one of the mediums; but should they see him directing his attention there he would be under the ban of suspicion at once, and might get no portrait. The psychics control the situation, and their task is to see that the sitter does right, and that his attention is constantly taken and concentrated; and they are both talking and gesticulating so as to take it. If they observe that the sitter is not giving attention where they direct, but looking elsewhere, "where he has no business to," then look out. They will immediately be suspicious and something may happen.

Of course it is unnecessary to explain how the photograph can be extracted from slates, or from pockets of coats which were left out in the hall, etc., so as to enable the mediums to get a "snap shot" of it. Any one reading the many slate tricks in my book will not need further enlightenment on this point. Where a portrait conforms to a photograph, an interval of a day or so is taken after the first sitting, before the psychics will give the portrait sitting. If forced to try for a portrait at once no results will be obtained, and it will have to be tried again later. This gives them time to make the portrait.

Probably it might be well for me to give some extracts from a very accurate report I have of a sitting which took place in the year 1909, and which shows the nature of this part of their work very well. The gentleman making this report seems very intelligent, and the report is remarkably accurate for a non-performer. He seems to have remembered a large portion of the details very well, and to have forgotten but little which would at the time have seemed to him to be unimportant. Here is part of this report.

"Jack went in first, and when he came out just before I went in, he remarked to me that he would like to have a portrait. He said that the artist had told him that it would be better for the party who sat for the portrait *to have a picture of the subject on his person* [10] and handed me his watch, on the lid of which was an etching of his wife's face. I put it in my pocket and went into the room. After I had received my letter from the slate, the artist remarked to me that Jack wanted to have a picture made of Minnie. I said, 'Very well, I will sit for it.' She asked me whether I had a picture of Minnie on my person. I said, 'yes.' She called her sister, and they produced two framed canvases, which they placed face to face and set up before me, placing them on a table close to a window. They pulled the window shade down to the top of the canvas and draped the curtains along the two sides of the two canvases, and one sitting on one side and the other on the other at the two ends of the table, they held the canvases together while I in front of the table waited for developments. Some shading presently appeared on the canvases but nothing satisfactory resulted. While one of the artists left the room for a few minutes, leaving the canvases in their positions on the table, the artist who remained again said, 'You have a picture, have you?' I said, 'Yes.' She said, 'What is it?' I said, 'It is an etching on the lid of a watch.' She said, 'Let me see the watch.' I handed it to her without opening it. She took it in her hands a moment, but did not open it. *She put it in an envelope*, and sealed the envelope, and placed the latter with the picture in it between the slates; and she and I held the slates pressed together for a few moments. Still nothing resulted on the canvas. We then opened the slates and *she handed me the envelope* containing the watch which I took from it and returned to my pocket. I do not see how it is possible that she could have seen the etching, and it would be almost impossible to convince me that the watch left the room even for a moment. I sat a little while longer before the canvases, but nothing resulted. I left the studio. When I reached the hotel that evening I returned the watch to Jack. So much for the first day. I returned to the studio

the next afternoon, etc., etc."

This reminds me of a lady in South Omaha who a few years ago allowed a medium to seal two thousand dollars of her money in an envelope in her presence. He handed it to her *without its leaving her sight*, and she wore it on her person for thirty days.

This woman insisted that nothing could convince her that this money left her sight; yet when friends induced her to open the envelope nothing but pieces of paper were found in it. The police of Omaha are still looking for the medium, but he has dematerialized. This lady believed in the spiritualist philosophy that "like attracts like"; and the medium had no trouble in convincing her that our wealthy men possess "the money influence and that money is attracted to them because of the vast sums they handle or carry on their persons." She was to wear this money after the medium magnetized it in order to obtain this "money influence."

Now in the case of the gentleman above, why did not these mediums place the watch between the slates *without sealing it in the envelope*? There could then have been no question but that it was between the slates. What he saw was an envelope resembling the one with the watch in it placed between them.

Here is how I would make the substitution if I were the lady doing the trick. Just as I dampen the flap of the envelope and seal it, I would leave it in my left hand and reach with my right for the slates on the table. I would follow my right hand with my eyes. This is called "misdirection." The sitter's eyes would involuntarily follow mine, and my right hand; and during this instant I would allow my left to drop below the level of the table top, and leave the envelope with the watch in my lap, and instantly withdraw from a pocket in the fold of my dress, a duplicate envelope made up in advance for the purpose. When the medium went out to call her sister she could easily explain to her, and that sister could slip her the "dummy" when she came in to do what in the language of the profession is called the "stalling" with the canvases, wherein the rear blank was slipped sidewise far enough for its solid frame to make the shadow effects by the advancing and receding motions.

At the instant that the right hand grasps the slates, the left comes forward with the "dummy" and inserts it in the slates. When the time comes to take out the envelope I should remove it with my right hand, and ask the sitter to "see if there is any writing on the slates"; and at the instant he is looking at the slates again drop the hand and change the "dummy" for the watch

envelope. During the holding of the slates the canvases were evidently watched for developments, which was simply "stalling for time." Now the other sister could come in and hold the canvases for a short time, standing close to her sister, and finally leave the room after secretly receiving the watch from her hand. By coming in again after photographing the etching, she could return it to her sister's lap in the same way. Or they might have a small floor trap through which the second lady opening it, could reach up and get the watch and return it from below. In this case she would have overheard the conversation about the watch, and would have prepared the dummy and handed it up without any conference with her sister. Having this same work to do so much they must have a thorough understanding of the method to be pursued in all cases. Of course many methods can be used for these substitutions, and to tell the exact method used I should have to see them done; but the matter is very simple for professionals.

These mediums always, or nearly always, frame and pack a portrait before delivery. At such times they very frequently retouch it or add some new thing which the sitter afterwards reports as having appeared on his way home. I quote some more of the above gentleman's report, which illustrates some work of this character:

"We spent a good deal of the forenoon sitting for my father's picture without obtaining any result excepting some shading of the canvases... Nothing however resulted, as I have remarked, during the forenoon interview; so I retired for lunch and came back early in the afternoon and went into the studio and went through the same process as on previous occasions. In twenty minutes from the beginning of the afternoon sitting, my father's face appeared upon the canvas; and it was indeed a most exact reproduction and conformed more exactly to his face in life than even to the photograph. During the first part of the afternoon sitting the face alone appeared on the canvas without any background, neither did the first result reproduce his clothing, simply his face and beard. They then in my presence *placed the picture in a dark closet that opened off the room*, left it there a few minutes and brought it out, at which time all the background was completed, as well as the clothing. They then had the portrait framed.

"I was so profoundly impressed with this result that I acceded to their request to sit for a picture of my daughter which was made in the course of fifteen or twenty minutes. They remarked to me *before framing and packing the portrait* that the work would be retouched by the mysterious artists who

were doing the work, after leaving the studio. The lady who accompanied me told me, in the absence of the artists from the room, that she was making a very careful study of the face so as to be able to detect any changes. The picture was then framed and I carried the two with me to the hotel. *On opening*, the lady remarked that there had been a change, viz., that the hair falling back over the shoulders had been curled. I could not corroborate this point; and if I could *it would not be very satisfactory*. As you know, *I had no picture of my daughter who died in her early infancy*. All I can say in regard to the picture is that it sustains a close resemblance to her mother's family. I had it inspected by a prominent scientist, who has lectured occasionally for the purpose of exposing the work of mediums. When he first saw it, he asked me instantly whether there was any peculiarity about the eyes of my child, calling my attention to the peculiarity referred to. My wife, on being questioned by him, affirmed that such a peculiarity marked the eyes of more than one member of her family.

"The purport of some messages my friend and I received was that my daughter was very anxious to have me know that she did this portrait work for me, or at least her teacher did with her help.

"I had at least half a dozen interviews with as many different psychics in New York and Chicago, within a few months after the painting of my daughter was made. It was utterly impossible that I should have been known to these psychics or that any one of them should have known that I had interviewed any other one. In every case something was said to me about my daughter's painting."

It is quite evident that on the opposite side of the dark closet is a second door which permitted the sister or an assistant to withdraw the portrait on that side, fill in the background and clothes and replace it. Professionals naturally fix their houses to suit the work by which they make their livelihood.

I have known cases in Denver and elsewhere when a "rounder," as the mediums call a believer who visits various mediums, was, in the language of the profession, "tipped off" by telephone to the various brothers of the profession. Also, by adroit conversation his interest was always aroused in some other medium before leaving the home of a medium with whom he would be finishing a sitting. This was professional courtesy on their part to their fellows. These stories were related to me personally by mediums who took part in the deception.

Some very large portraits have been made; but from all I can learn these

are not made in a window, but are covered with a curtain in some way. They are made evidently for the "dead-easies" only, who have been thoroughly converted by small portrait production in windows, and who now merely want a large portrait made and are willing to pay for it. Hence the psychics in such cases can use such means as may be required in these larger productions. One of these of which I heard was a very large portrait of the "guide" of the sitter, who wanted his guide's portrait made large and was not bothering about the method of production. An analysis of the paints used proved them to be pastels mixed in a vegetable fat. The canvases are thin and transparent. Some of them seem to have a coating of thin paper and the base of some of the paintings is a solar print.

Readers may feel in doubt that such a marvelous performance as these mediums gave is effected by such a simple principle as a moving rear canvas which contains a portrait; but they need only remember that this same principle enables magicians to give stage performances at big salaries. If it is good enough for that, and for critical theater audiences, it is also capable of the other use when in the hands of expert mediums. Let no one dispute this fact until he "grabs" the canvases at the instant the first shadows appear; and then let him say whether or not a finished portrait was at that instant on the rear canvas. But the psychics take good care that they are not grabbed at such a time; for they particularly remarked at the Eldredge sitting, "If you were to touch the canvases now the picture would instantly fade out." This gave them a good excuse to resist physically any attempt at touching or "grabbing." A bolder investigator might grab and search the mediums' persons and canvases just as they go to lift them up; but there would be the chance of this being a case where no portrait is to be produced.

For myself, I am confident that I have given the correct solution of this mystery: and although I have never seen the work personally, I could hardly be more certain of anything than I am that I have solved this mystery in its principal details.

The mode of substitution may be different, *but substitution it is, and that is certain*; and beyond any doubt the materializing and dematerializing is produced on this principle of the moving rear portrait canvas viewed through a blank canvas by transmitted light. Readers who doubt, and sitters who assert that there is no substitution, are cautioned to remember that in every magic performance they have ever seen there were substitutions right before their eyes which could not be detected. Remember how deftly the great

performers of the stage make their substitutions, and how impossible they are to discover except by an expert. Did not Mr. Eldredge assert in his letter to me about Selbit's performance, that there was no substitution? Yet we know there was and I will further on show just how it was made, but it escaped the eyes of that theater audience. That was Selbit's business; and unless he could make substitutions that are undetectable, he could not successfully run the business.

I turned to my wife when I saw this performance and told her when the substitution occurred, because I understood the trick; but I could not see it, for it took place in such a way that no one could. I simply knew it because it was his only opportunity. I afterward proved I was right. So let not the believer think substitutions which he can not see are impossible in his presence. The thing is, to know when and where to look for them.

But all believers in spiritualism are not ready to acknowledge the work of their mediums to be trickery, even when the trick is thoroughly explained to them. Frequently they will insist that the conjurer uses one means and the medium another for producing identically the same effect. They are not all so reasonable as is their President. Dr. George B. Warne of the National Spiritualist Association. I revealed this secret to him early enough to enable him to witness a stage performance in Chicago, and to make it possible for him to follow every move and trace the trickery. He said it had been very educational to him, and had opened his eyes to possibilities of which he had never before dreamed. He said that he felt it now to be the duty of the mediums to admit the trickery, or else to give a test sitting, under conditions that would positively disprove the fact that they use the method I have discovered.

Now, in order to assist in making this conclusive, I make the following offer to these mediums, good for one year, and I shall faithfully keep my obligation: If these mediums will produce a portrait under the conditions given below. I shall pay them the sum of five hundred dollars for it, and shall publicly acknowledge that they do not use the means I have published.

This portrait must be produced either for me or for any one of three others chosen by myself. I offer this, so that if the spirit artist shall refuse to paint for a skeptic like myself, there will be an opportunity for him to paint for others who are not so hard-headed. This portrait must be produced in my home, or in a room or house selected by myself, and prepared in advance under their directions by myself, with a suitable table, window curtains, etc. I

shall retain the key to this room, or have my assistant remain in charge of it until their arrival. This is to prevent the smuggling in of a portrait in advance. On arrival of the mediums, they shall permit two ladies, chosen by myself, to examine their persons and clothing for the purpose of disproving that they bring any portrait or canvas with them. This portrait shall be produced in the day-time on one of two canvases faced together and stood in a window as previously described. These canvases together with a third one shall be furnished by myself. I shall keep them in my possession until time to stand them in the window. I shall then stand them there myself; or, if I allow the mediums to do this, shall require the privilege of separating the canvases when in the window, at the beginning of the sitting, so that I can see that no portrait has been substituted. The third canvas which I shall furnish must be used for the cover canvas, if any be used for such purpose. The portrait is then to be materialized upon one of the two canvases in the window, in my presence and in the presence of at least two others selected by myself who shall have been present during the preparation. I do not refuse the right of a believer to be present, if he submit to the same conditions and examination to which the mediums are to submit.

The portrait produced must be a reasonable likeness of a photograph which I shall have with me at the time; but which—if there be a requirement to place it between slates, or to seal it in an envelope—I shall have the privilege of sealing it myself and placing it in the slates and helping to hold them. Or, if it be necessary for the mediums to seal and place this photograph, I require the privilege of occupying any position I desire, so that I may satisfy myself that the photograph, envelope, or slates are not substituted. I require both mediums to remain in the room during the entire sitting; and if a second sitting be necessary, I shall retain the photograph and canvases myself meanwhile, and shall have the same privileges as outlined for the first sitting. Of course I shall prepare the frames with special tools, grooving them in certain ways impossible to duplicate in a short space of time, and I shall stain the wood certain tints so I can follow them easily. Also, I shall make upon the canvases certain markings so that there can be no question of identity.

In case the photograph must be sealed or placed between slates, I shall furnish the envelope and slates myself, and shall mark or stain them in any way I desire. If a second sitting is necessary I shall require the privilege of changing slates, canvases, and envelope for this sitting.

I shall select the house to be used in my own city, providing my own be objected to, and the mediums must give the sitting there.

I make this offer in the friendliest spirit and assure the mediums of the most courteous treatment if they will only respond. If I can prove that natural means are not employed, I can well afford to pay this sum; and I shall be only too glad to do so, and to give the public a statement of the facts that will be worth many times more to the mediums. In view of the benefit this will be to science and to an inquiring and longing world, I sincerely hope that these mediums will accept my offer.

Nevertheless, I feel sure it will be ignored, even though I double the price. I am so confident that my explanation is correct, that I feel sure my readers will never have the pleasure of hearing that the mediums have proven that they do not use this method. If they ignore this fair and sincere offer, I feel that my readers will be justified in assuming that they dare not give a sitting under these fair conditions, and that my explanation is tacitly admitted to be the correct one.

[10] Italics in all these reports are the author's.

### III.

Now the stage illusion. The difference between the mediumistic and the stage production of this illusion is merely the difference between hand-work and machine-work. In one case only the hands are employed to execute the movement; while in the other a mechanism is used.

Soon after my discovery, I designed a mechanical easel to use in my parlors with electric light, intending to use a floor trap to effect the substitution, but having but little use for it. I did not build it. However, but little of this idea was original with me; for the use of an easel upon which to stand the canvases was suggested to me by Dr. Funk's report of a séance where the mediums used one. Only the idea of a floor trap was my own, but this has been in general use in many illusions for many years.

Mr. Odell's report describing a séance where an electric light was placed behind the canvases, suggested the use of the same for an illusion on the stage, or in parlors when not using a window.

Thomas Grinshaw's report of the use of a box without front or back, just behind the canvases, suggested to me the idea of using a box-like affair

without front or back, to be placed on the easel just back of the canvases, for the purpose of concealing the motion of the rear canvas. I designed a sliding affair to use in this, and to move the portrait canvas backward and forward. After delaying in building this mechanical easel, I decided to use a sliding mechanism in my windows; and I partly completed it, intending to use a worm screw from my stereopticon light for executing the movement. If this could not be concealed, I intended to use threads or wires for the same purpose. These were secretly to pass through the floor to an assistant.

On receipt of Dr. Wilmar's earnest inquiry, in August 1909, thinking he was an investigator like myself making research for the satisfaction of acquiring knowledge, and not knowing he was interested in stage work for professional purposes, I sent him all of these reports describing these things and ideas, together with a plain explanation of the secret I had discovered. Also, I sent my various ideas for making the substitution, including floor and window traps, nested canvases, slitted skirt, etc. In the construction of the stage easel, most of these ideas were utilized.

The first working model of this easel was built by Mr. Selbit, after he secured the secret and information from Dr. Wilmar by agreeing to pay this gentleman a royalty for its use.

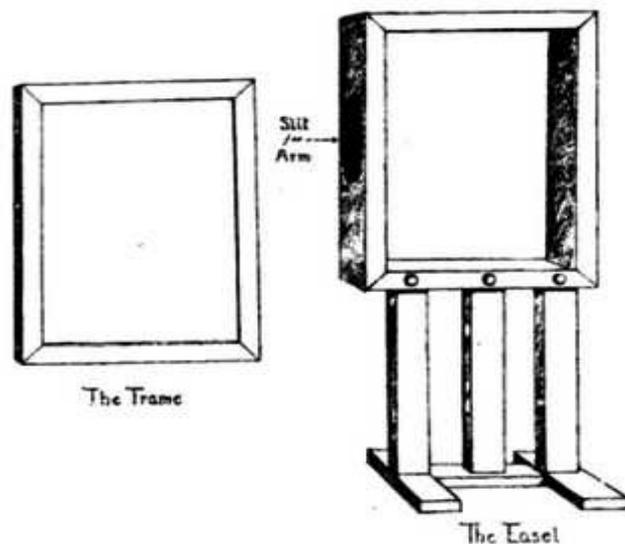
Mr. Selbit was quite ingenious; and he presented the illusion very well indeed, but he only produced a portrait. He did not dematerialize it, probably because he used cords instead of worm screws and cog wheels for executing the movement. Also he did not change the colors of any of the parts at request, as my original design calls for.

It is evident that, if the rear or portrait canvas is to be mechanically moved to and from the front one while the big gilt frame rests on a kind of easel, this motion would be visible to parts of the theater unless concealed by something. Accordingly this portrait has to move backwards into a kind of hollow box without front or back. This box is a mere skeleton frame covered with dark cloth, and is larger than the canvas, but smaller than the big gilt frame; so that the latter can be attached to its open front end and so that the portrait can be attached to a sliding carriage within it. This carriage with the portrait can be slid backwards away from the front canvas and gilt frame into the hollow box-like affair, which is also open at the back to admit the powerful light.

Therefore the easel is really such a box-like affair set on suitable legs to hold it some two feet above the stage floor. The skeleton frame of the box-

like affair is about one foot or more wide, and has the sliding carriage within it. There are buttons for attaching the rear canvas to this carriage when the big gilt frame containing the canvases is buttoned on to the front of the easel.

The sliding carriage has strings or wires running over little pulleys and down through the legs of the easel through the stage floor to a drum under the stage which at the right time an assistant slowly winds up. These strings then slowly draw the picture up to the front canvas permitting it to gradually materialize. The performer announces that the box-like contrivance on his easel is for concentrating the light from an arc light on a stand which is directly behind it; but he does not explain how black cloth and black paint that do not reflect, can concentrate light.



MECHANISM USED IN THE STAGE PRODUCTION.

His committee is genuine, and blanks clean. The blanks are usually on the left side of the stage viewed from the audience. The committee first thoroughly examine the easel and large gilt frame that is to hold the blanks. The large gilt frame is made of quite wide material. When it is set upon the easel front, it is buttoned to it in some way. The cloth sides of the box part of the easel have a slit so that the performer can introduce his arm in between the canvases when the rear one has been slid backwards after the frame is put up with the canvases in it.

The manner of presentation is like this. The curtain goes up on a fully lighted stage with the easel in the center and an assistant standing on each side of it. The performer now enters, and taking a number of blank canvases,

exhibits them and invites a committee from the audience to examine them. The committee comes on the stage, and selects three that they are sure are unprepared.

The easel being on castors is now shifted to the front of the stage and turned all around so that all can see its simplicity. The committee are invited to inspect it and they do so, walking all around it. The arc light on a stand is also brought forward and shown. These are now shifted to the rear of stage on the left and the big gilt frame is taken down by the assistants and carried to the right center of the stage where it is stood upon the floor facing the audience, and supported by an assistant holding it at each side. There is a narrow trap in the floor of the stage just behind the big gilt frame, but it is concealed from view by the carpet. This however is slitted and held in position by suitable springs. An assistant is directly under this trap with the portrait that is to be produced. The performer now steps through the big frame from the front and comes out from behind. This is apparently to show that there are no mirrors, but it is also later on to convince any spectator who may be thinking it over, that there was no floor trap behind the frame. Of course when passing through this frame, he steps over the opening.

The performer now hands one of the selected canvases over the top of the big frame down into position behind it, and the assistants instantly button it in. But just at that instant, the assistant under the stage shoves up the portrait, and in reality both are buttoned in at once. The audience sees the front canvas go down into position, but can not see the portrait come up behind it immediately after for the reason that the front canvas, the wide frame, and the assistants' persons conceal from view what happens behind. Next, the performer hands over the top of the frame the second selected canvas, and the assistants make a pretense of buttoning it in; but in reality it goes on down under the stage in an assistant's hands which had been shoved up through the trap waiting to grasp it.

The big frame, containing one blank and the portrait, is now carried to the committee who puts marked stickers upon the edges of the canvas frames to prevent substitution. As the painted side of the portrait is next to the blank canvas, the committee thinks that it is also a blank, and the one they have just selected and examined.

The easel is now shifted to the center of the stage with its center leg directly over a small "pull trap" in the floor, and the big frame is lifted upon the easel and apparently buttoned to it. During this process the rear or portrait

canvas is secretly released from the big frame, and buttoned to the sliding carriage of the box-like contrivance; and then it is slid backwards six or more inches, out of focus.

Next the arc light is turned on, illuminating the canvases to a beautiful transparent white; but the portrait, being back out of focus, does not show. The performer now introduces his arm through the slit in the side of the box-like contrivance on the easel, and it can be seen through the front canvas by the audience, who imagine they are looking through both canvases.

Next the committee chooses the portrait that they desire the performer to produce. Inasmuch as the one that is to be produced is already in the mechanism, this selection must be "forced." This is done in different ways.

One performer exhibits about one hundred post cards of Paris art subjects, and shows them to the audience, showing that they are all different. These are now divided into two heaps and one given to each of two committeemen to shuffle. When well mixed, the performer takes them and states that he will lift off one card at a time, and for some one to call out when they desire him to use the picture at that time in his hand. This is done and the picture in his hand is of course the one the mechanism is set for. He effects this "force" as follows: In the first place all of the edges of the cards are black and he has them on a little black tray. He takes them up and shows them to be different, which they are, and has them shuffled and returned. Now he has twenty cards all like the one he desires to force, lying on the tray; but the top one of this pile has its top blackened just like the tray; and when he lifts the tray his thumb rests on this black pile and keeps the cards from scattering about. Of course this pile is invisible at a slight distance; and when the shuffled cards are returned, he lays them on the tray, but directly on top of this invisible pile. He now picks up the entire pile with the twenty cards all alike underneath, and as quick as a flash, makes a "pass" well known to magicians which brings about fifteen of these to the top. Now he takes the cards off slowly one at a time, and the impatience of the audience causes some one to choose long before the fifteen are all taken off.

Another method used is a process of elimination. Fifty blocks, all numbers from one to fifty are used. These are separated into two piles and a committeeman asked to point to one of the piles. If the committeeman points to the pile containing the desired number (which corresponds to some numbered art subjects whose names are on a large screen) he uses the pile pointed to; and scrapes off of the table the other pile, discarding them. But if

he points to the other pile the performer discards it just as if he had it selected for that purpose. Next he separates the remaining blocks into two or more piles, and asks the committeeman to point to one or two of these piles. If he points to two that do not contain the desired block they are scraped off and discarded; but if he points to the piles containing the desired block the performer discards the other, pile. Next he asks the committeeman to point to one of the remaining piles and continues this method of elimination until only the desired block remains on the table, or is pointed to directly.

The performer next commands the spirits to paint the chosen portrait, and the confederate under the stage works either the winding drum and wires (which he has secretly drawn through the pull trap), or rods with cog wheels and worm screws, which causes the portrait to advance slowly towards the blank canvas in front and gradually to materialize. If requested by any one, the spirits will erase this portrait; or at least it is possible in my original design of the illusion. The confederate under the stage has but to work the mechanism that recedes the portrait, and it will gradually dematerialize beautifully until every vestige of it disappears. The spirits can now paint it over; and when it is finished the performer lifts down the big frame, and unfastening the canvases, adroitly gives them a half turn, so as to bring the portrait to the front; then taking off the front frame, he deliberately turns its face to the audience, and passes it down for examination. A second portrait is now sometimes produced with the remaining blank, and the extra one chosen; but this is of slight importance, so I shall here omit the explanation of the means used in substituting this portrait from the wings.

It may be well to state that it is possible to change the color of eyes, hair, flowers or tie, etc., at the second production of a portrait. If some of the committee object to the color of these parts of the picture, the performer can have the spirits erase it and paint it over in the desired colors. Of course this committeeman must be a confederate. Here the principle of compound colors must be utilized. A thin piece of cloth, preferably white silk, can be dyed or have the colors placed upon it and then be fastened on the back of the portrait with conjurors' wax. In this case it might be necessary to omit the affixing of the marked stickers, as, unless adroitly held, the committee might see this. Now the light, on passing through the double coloring for the first production would be compound. For instance, if the tie is really red and the screen behind is green, then the tie will appear brown; as green and red make brown. If the green screen extend over other parts of the picture they too will appear

in compound colors. Upon someone requesting the performer to change the color of the tie to red, he simply has the portrait faded out; and then a cord running through the hollow leg of the easel can be pulled and draw off the piece of colored silk to which it must have been attached when affixing the big frame, and this must then be drawn into the hollow leg of the easel. The next materialization will show the tie red.

The same effect could be produced by a transparent colored screen of small proportions being concealed in the arc light and which should be revolved at the right time into position. This could be done by pulling a string running through its base and the stage. This must afterwards at the right time be revolved out of the way. The screen in the first place would have to be revolved into position just as the colors begin to appear with cloud-like effect. This would look like waves of color passing and changing on the canvas. Then the portrait should be fully materialized under this colored light. Now when upon request the spirits erase the painting, just as the portrait becomes confused, indefinite, or cloud-like, the screen must be revolved out of the light. The second materialization under white light would then show the portrait in its true colors which are the ones requested. I consider this method preferable to the other. Colored glass or gelatine films can be used for this revolving screen in the arc light.

For the canvases, stage performers use quite stiff white artists' paper pasted on tarleton. This is so thin and transparent that the arc light gives an unusually beautiful effect. The paints are pastels pulverized and dissolved in sweet gin, or some good liquid fixative. This is "the spiritual paint" that "defied the chemists of the world." It works nicely on a paper surface, but can be put on in only one coat like water colors. Pastels show beautiful tints under transmitted light and are well suited for this particular work. In making the canvas frames, their surfaces must be kept absolutely level and true, for if warped the slightest they will not contact with each other nicely, and will not show the portrait clear and sharp. This causes performers more trouble than any part of the illusion. The front surface of the sliding carriage must also be perfectly true, and the portrait must be buttoned to it perfectly tight. The big frame must also be held rigidly and perfectly parallel to the portrait, so that the contact will be perfect.

When in Portland, Oregon, Selbit produced the portrait of a lady's mother, who had died sixteen years before in Germany and of whom no photograph existed; the lady recognized the portrait.

Here is how this happened, according to Mr. Selbit who related it to me. Representatives of the press challenged Mr. Selbit to permit a physician to examine and mark two canvases and then to produce a portrait that the latter should choose on one of them. Selbit accepted the challenge. The physician did not want to use Selbit's list of portraits, so Selbit took a list that had been published in the *Review of Reviews*, and the physician agreed to use this list. Each portrait Mr. Selbit had would fit about three titles, and he secretly arranged and numbered a list in advance to correspond.

Here is how the feat was accomplished. Instead of two blanks, Selbit took six to the physician; and he examined them and then wrapped them, affixing a seal. This was Selbit's suggestion; as he said the audience would feel better if the two were selected and marked in their presence. The physician and Mr. Selbit then deposited these at the box office until evening. This was to prevent the physician from opening and secretly marking them in advance. When the physician first came upon the stage, Selbit asked him if he had chosen a portrait; and he drew out his list, and Selbit saw which number was checked. Pretending not to have seen the number, he requested the physician to keep the list until they were ready. Meanwhile he secretly sent word to the assistant under the stage what portrait to use, which was a subject that would fit the title of the one selected.

Next the physician opened the canvases and selected one, permitting the committee to select the other. Mr. Selbit suggested that they omit affixing marked stickers in the usual way, but to use a different means of marking these. He then had his assistants place first one canvas in the big frame as usual, and then apparently place the second one in. The assistants then brought the big frame to the physician, who wrote his name on the frame of each canvas. Of course the portrait was already in the frame.

This made such a stir in the press that a gentleman who seemed to believe in spiritualism very strongly, wanted his mother-in-law's portrait made. The next evening Mr. Selbit used the only old lady picture he had; and after its production, it was taken into the box office to see if the gentleman's wife could identify it. The lady and her relatives went in, and she denied its resemblance at first; but her husband and relatives insisted so strongly that it was correct that, by taking a feature at a time and shading off the rest of the portrait, they induced the lady to acknowledge that there was a resemblance in each separate feature when viewed by itself. They then with great emphasis insisted it was the lady's mother; and the lady apparently quite

timid, reluctantly acquiesced. Then returning to the theater it was announced from the stage that the lady had recognized her mother's portrait. If a conjurer who lays no claim to mediumship got this effect, what could a medium do?

When the reader remembers what a profound and absolute mystery this illusion was, and then reflects what simple means are employed for its production, it should be a lesson well remembered when dealing with the mysterious performances of mediums.

# Spiritualistic Materializations and Other Mediumistic Phenomena



David P. Abbott

*The Open Court*, edited by Paul Carus

May 1919, Vol. 33 (No. 5) No. 756, pg 257-276

**MATERIALIZATION!** CAN IT be that in this advanced age intelligent people believe in such things? you ask. There are those who most certainly do; and they are by no means the ignorant class. A few years ago there were over eighteen million spiritualists in the world. There are to-day, especially in Europe, many of the greatest scientists who are leaders in the investigation of the phenomena of spiritualism. I will not attempt to name more than a few of them.

The published report of Sir William Crookes, on the materialization of the spirit of "Katie King" at his home, is to-day widely circulated and believed. The story is very pretty; and the account of the visits of "Katie" to the Crookes home on many occasions, until her final leave-taking, when she bade them all good-bye and left this world for the last time, makes interesting reading. The scene at her last visit was dramatic and pathetic, for during her many visits they had all learned to love her. She sat in the middle of the room on the floor, with her beautiful hair falling about her, and tearfully bade her friends a last good-bye. All knew it was their last meeting this side of eternity. The reader will remember that this is not a report of some ignorant person, but that of Sir William Crookes, the great scientist, and inventor of the Crookes tube, which invention later led to the discovery of the X-rays.

Thus investigations were opened that led to the discovery of radium, the disintegration of matter, and all of the late knowledge of its constitution.

Then there were the materializations at the "Villa Carmen" in Algiers, where Professor Richet of Paris journeyed and spent considerable time in investigating and photographing the spirit "Bien Boa." His book, giving an account of these investigations together with photographs, is quite interesting. But such cases are too numerous for me to attempt to name them all.

People who believe in mediumistic phenomena also believe in Diakka, or evil spirits, not necessarily of human origin, who make all the trouble at séances and who impersonate the spirits of mortals and bring them into disrepute by their conduct. There also is a belief that when a spirit is "grabbed" the spirit substitutes the medium in its place, in order to save the medium's life, etc., etc.

Probably the greatest case of materialization in the world at the present time is in Europe. Just before the war, the Baron von Schrenck-Notzing, of the University of Munich, Bavaria, a hitherto pronounced skeptic, held some experiments with a lady medium and published an account of the same. Many photographs were taken also.

Mme. Juliette Alexandre-Bisson published an account in French which received the endorsement of the above-named gentleman and also of Dr. J. Maxwell, a judge in the higher courts of France. A few extremely brief extracts from a translation of this will be given here.

First we shall state that the medium, Mile. Eva C., was always undressed before each séance and then dressed in dancers' tights. These were sewed around the wrists, making it impossible for her to introduce her hands under her clothing. At each séance she sat in a cabinet formed by curtains stretched across the corner of a room. Then, most of the time during the séances, her hands and feet were controlled or held by the investigating scientists. I may also state that she underwent a medical examination before each séance to prove that she had not concealed upon her person appliances of any kind with which to produce phenomena. A subdued light was used, and sometimes a net was stretched about her, separating her from the apparitions. She was generally entranced by hypnotism before each séance. I now quote mere fragments from the translation, selected at intervals without regard to the dates, merely to illustrate the type of phenomena.

## PHENOMENA OF MILE. EVA C.

"AFTER WAITING PERHAPS a dozen minutes, a white form appeared and manifested itself several times. It was photographed. It was a human form with bright eyes and a tall turban-like hat, and a rather clear black spot covering the nose. The form appeared beyond the netting which separated the medium from it."

Again, "After waiting an hour, some white substance appeared over the medium at her right side. Immediately a figure covered by the same substance appeared and disappeared. Some seconds after, the medium appeared to be entirely covered by this matter. This formed into something like a turban on her head and fell down on each side. Baron P. went into the cabinet. When he resumed his place there followed him an apparition which came from the left side of the medium and was immediately reabsorbed in her.

"Baron von Schrenck-Notzing went into the cabinet and sat beside the medium and took one of her hands. The other hand of the medium held the curtain. A mass of substance came from the mouth of the medium and enlarged. It was gray in color and seemed to be living matter. It moved slowly and disappeared behind the curtains. Baron von Schrenck-Notzing resumed his seat without letting go the hand of the medium and Dr. Vi took the other hand. Thus controlled, the medium appeared to be entirely covered by a white substance which fell down to her knees.

"Some substance appeared extending from the medium's chin to her stomach, seeming to flow from the mouth. It detached itself and fell on her knees, leaving the impression of folding itself up. Some seconds later the same phenomenon was repeated and then vanished. Some matter coming from about the cabinet fell on the medium. This matter seemed to be animated by motion. The medium held the curtains, took hold of the hands of Baron von Schrenck-Notzing, let them go a few seconds, and immediately a figure of a woman appeared enveloped in white substance. It disappeared at once.

"Luminous appearances occurred, especially on the stomach and knees of the medium. One of these manifestations consisted of a long ribbon which seemed to issue from the middle of the face and extend to the medium's feet, which supported it. The doctor said in a whisper to Mme. B. that the ribbon, which was undulating, had the appearance of issuing from the mouth of the

medium. Immediately the medium took the doctor's hand between her teeth, and he reported that there was nothing in her mouth. Two little white balls appeared and moved about each foot of the medium. One round figure appeared above her. This was an apparition of a man's head.

"We asked for a hand, earnestly. A hand formed on the right and close to the arm of the medium, which was held by Dr. B.

"The apparition advanced toward Mme. B., who called it. As far as it came forward you could see the forearm. The hand and forearm were about five to ten centimeters distant from the body of the medium. The fingers were large and knotted, and moved. It was the right hand whose thumb was on the right side of the medium's body. The color was white like mother-of-pearl and resembled that of other manifestations, and that which was not white took on the yellow color of the chair. The hand reached to touch that of Mme. B., lingered a few moments and then disappeared.

"We took hold of her hands. After some minutes a large mass of white substance appeared which covered the whole of the medium's stomach. Gradually it took the form of a foot and the end of the leg. The toes were slow in forming. The medium drew her hand from the doctor who was holding it. He felt the substance, and it was cold and moist. The apparition then vanished.

"The medium raised herself, and a long train of white substance hung from her head to the floor. Mme. B. (without letting go the hand of the medium) seized this substance and drew it gently outside the curtains. She had the sensation of holding something living. The medium was groaning, and the doctor asserted that the phenomenon so produced was formed from the same stuff as the cloak which covered the arm of the medium. This substance was humid, viscous, heavy, and cold.

"A head immediately appeared by the side of the medium's head, united with it by a rigid cord of substance. Both heads came forward to Mme. B. The face of the apparition was veiled. You could distinguish the features only imperfectly.

"There was then a respite. The medium opened the curtains wider. We could see a head develop some distance from the medium's head. This figure, heavy and solid, fell on Mme. B.'s head. The shock was brutal. The phenomenon disappeared, no one knows how, into the body of the medium.

"Some minutes later, a hand with the forearm appeared moving forward. It was small, thick, and moved the fingers. The fingers were bound together

as if webbed. The hands of the medium were on her knees in full light during the whole of the phenomena. A fourth time a hand presented itself, and at the request of Dr. B. it beat his head hard. The medium then gave her hands. Almost immediately a third hand with the forearm appeared on her belly. The forearm was placed across the arm of the medium. The hand moved, but it seemed soft and imperfectly formed."

Again, "Almost immediately on being entranced, some matter appeared over the medium. The hands which appeared were ill formed, and then the medium appeared to be covered with the substance. On her brow was a bandage which appeared brilliant, and hanging from her mouth was a mass of matter which fell over her. It was photographed.

"Immediately on her knees and then on her head came a form. Near her head there was the profile of a woman which was photographed. Above the light of magnesium there came a face rather flat and imperfectly formed between the curtains near Mme. B.

"On the 5th of August the figure of a man appeared immediately, but it remained but a short time. A woman appeared and was photographed. After the flash of the light for taking the picture the same woman reappeared and was photographed a second time. The face showed itself in a new form, and a third photograph was taken of it. We could then see the mass of material roll over on the medium and then disappear."

I could give many more of the same sort of occurrences, but space forbids. Necessarily I have had greatly to curtail these reports and omit much more than I have given; but the reader can gain a fair idea of the best materializing of the day, and of a case that so far as I know has not yet been rationally explained. Not having witnessed it, I make no attempt to explain it but shall explain some other materializing.

## OTHER EXPERIMENTS.

I HAVE NEVER been a medium; but I am a performer of occult mysteries, and for years I have been personally acquainted with many of the best mediums in the land. In most cases they have been willing to trade their secrets for mine. This has enabled me to produce nearly all of their effects, but afterward I always explain to my guests that my performance is simply art. I shall now describe some of the materializing that I have seen, and some

that I myself produce, together with other phenomena. I shall further on explain the methods used.

Cabinets are nearly always used for materializing. Subdued light or darkness is always required. Sometimes the medium is searched and given perfect freedom. Sometimes her hands and feet are held or controlled. Sometimes the medium is tied and sometimes other means are employed.

In my case I use a cabinet, and the effect is always in proportion to the thoroughness with which the guests or a committee examine everything. So I let them erect the cabinet for me.

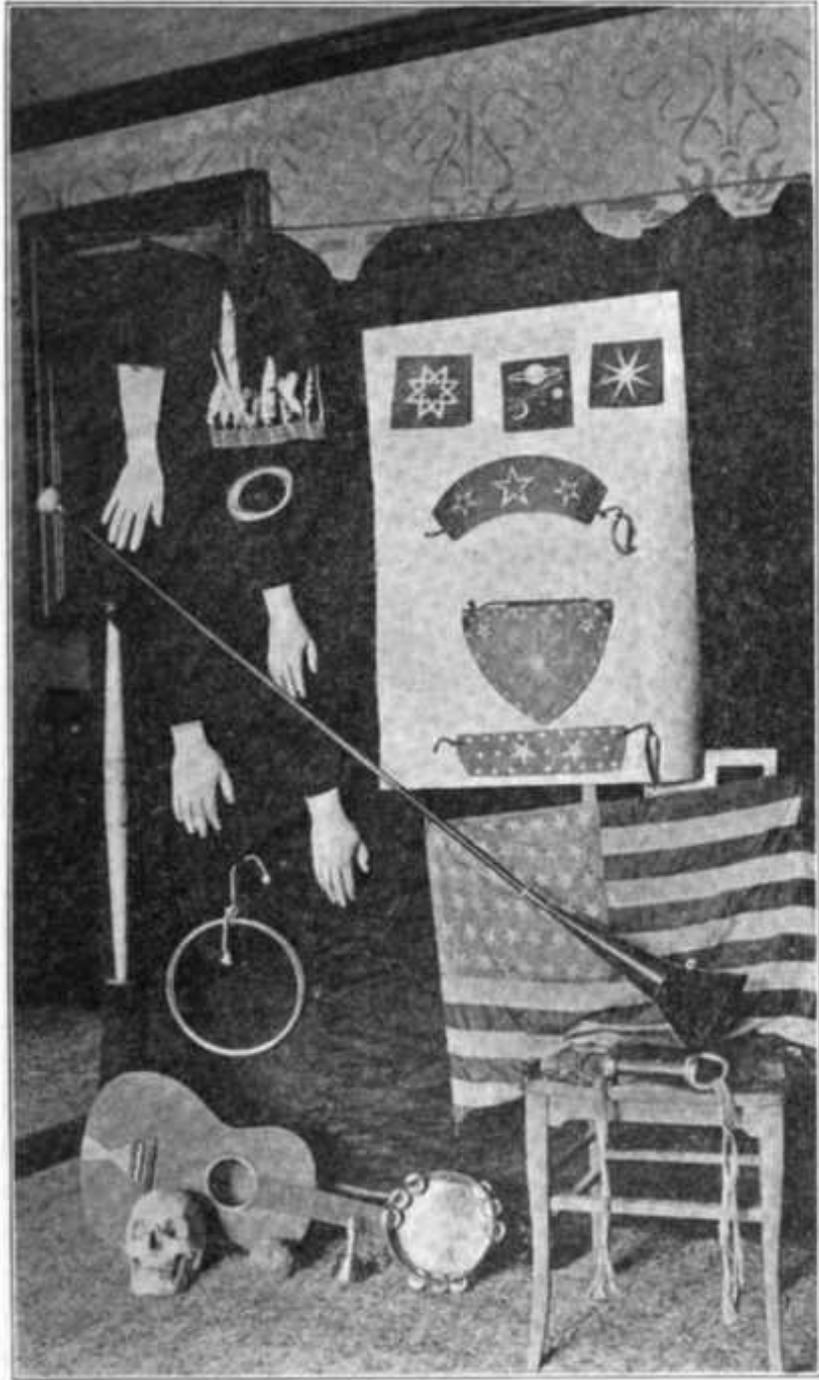


CABINET, PERFORMER, AND APPLIANCÉS.

A glance at the photograph will show the solid floor, with the solid upright attached by braces, and with curtains on a frame. The reader may also see the hands tied and sewed to the big solid steel bolt, and the knots are both sewed and sealed with sealing-wax. The end ring of the big bolt is first removed with a wrench by the committee, and it is passed through the solid

upright; and then the ring is solidly fastened on with the wrench. In the next photograph, the big bolt may be seen on the chair before it is inserted. The feet are sewed, tied, and sealed to the big floor rings, and the neck is tied to the screw-eye in the top of the post.

A chair may be seen on the above photograph, on which the committee have placed a guitar, tambourine, bell, ball, small trumpet, glass of water, hoop, and a flag without a staff. That is all.



MEDIUMISTIC PARAPHERNALIA.

The committee, after fastening all thoroughly, examine everything and satisfy themselves that for the performer to manipulate or to reach any of the articles is a physical impossibility. Then they take their seats in front, and the assistant draws the curtain. The curtain scarcely reaches the side, when

pandemonium breaks loose in the cabinet. The guitar is twanged, the bell rung, the tambourine played, the flag waved above the cabinet, the ball thrown out, and in the midst of this racket I cry "Curtain!" The assistant, who has been standing at some distance, fairly leaps for the curtain and throws it open in a flash. As this is done, the bell goes up over the cabinet, the tambourine falls to the floor; but I am sitting as in the first place, all tied and sealed, and apparently I have not moved. The committee or guests now examine me thoroughly and find everything, including the seals, intact; but upon my arm is the hoop, thus proving that matter has penetrated matter. Also the water is found to be gone from the glass. The articles are replaced, the guests reseated, and the curtain drawn. As before, instantly bedlam begins to reign, and the whole performance is repeated, the bell and tambourine falling over the cabinet curtain as it opens; but I am sitting as before.

Again I am examined very thoroughly; the sewing and seals are all found intact, and the things are replaced. This time I announce that I shall attempt materialization, and that I do not want the curtain closed: but that I must have absolute darkness, and that each guest must continuously hold his neighbor's hand in order to develop magnetism and to give me psychic strength; that no guest must permit his neighbor to withdraw his hand. All of this is deeply impressed on my guests. The room is now examined, the door locked, and the guests seated. *My assistant is seated among them, and his hands held, so that no living being in the room is at liberty*, and there is no chance to produce phenomena by ordinary physical means.

## THE PHENOMENA

SOON A FAINTLY LUMINOUS spot is seen on the floor. It moves about slowly and then vanishes. Again it is seen in the air in front of the guests but entirely out of the cabinet. Now it floats about, first here, then there, like a firefly. It looks like something white; but as it comes nearer the eyes it is seen to be a beautiful star. It floats up to the ceiling and then vanishes.

What is that white thing over there in the corner on the floor? All look. It seems to move up the wall, then it comes floating toward the guests. It is seen to be the hand of a lady, a very beautiful hand and forearm, with bright, shining jewels on the bracelet which it wears. It passes the guests and it seems that it will touch them. Then it floats up to the ceiling and vanishes.

Next, a ribbon of white substance creeps along the floor, up the wall, and then moves out through the air, undulating. Then it falls to the floor, folding itself into a ball of something white. Again it elongates, and moving toward me, is absorbed by my organism.

Now a ball, faintly seen, is perceptible. It floats from me toward the guests. Soon a face may be seen. It is the head and face of a beautiful girl, with faintly shining hair. It moves in front of the guests and gazes at them sadly, and a faint sigh comes from it. I may be heard at the same time, in the cabinet, moving restlessly and moaning faintly. Then it floats back to me and is reabsorbed into my body. Then there is a wait, and the trumpet may be dimly seen floating in the air over the guests' heads. It seems to be visible by spiritual light, and lo, from out of it a whispering voice issues and talks softly to the guests! There is no mistake. The trumpet is over their heads and goes up to the ceiling with the voice still in it. While this takes place I may again be heard in the cabinet, as I move restlessly. The guests each assert that no one is loose, and my assistant is still tightly held by them.

After the trumpet-talking, the trumpet floats back into the cabinet. Soon on the floor may be seen a luminous patch of light which moves about and advances in front of the cabinet, when lo, what is it doing? Surely it is slowly growing upward and assuming human form. It may now be seen that it is a beautiful girl. Her dress is beautifully embroidered and her garments are somewhat shining, as is also her face: but she moves in front of the guests and seems to breathe and be alive, as her face comes near them. They actually feel her breath on their faces and hear her sigh: then she floats upward to the ceiling and then down to the floor, and then settles down, into a formless thing, and disappears.

My assistant now asks for some one to come fresh from the grave. The guests usually insist. Then there is a repetition of the gradual appearance of the luminous thing on the floor, and its growing upward until it is seen to be a hideous skeleton. It floats about and up and down, settles into a shapeless mass of white substance, and vanishes into my body.

The philosophy of the Diakka being understood by the guests, I am asked to summon one of these beings from the unseen realm. Soon again a shapeless thing appears which rises into a very giant; but oh, such a hideous face and mouth and such awful eyes! It approaches each face as closely as the guests will permit, and seems to breathe and be alive; but as they usually scream, it rises up, and its awful, shining beard and terrible visage may be

seen; then it, too, vanishes like the rest.

Then there is some twanging of the guitar in the cabinet and some restless moving about; and as I am very weak, I ask for lights. The lights are turned on. I am sitting as in the beginning, all tied and sealed, and there is nothing in the cabinet but what was left on the chair in the beginning. The guests break the seals, untie me, rip the stitches, and I am free. Everything is examined, but nothing suspicious can be found.

I am going to explain the secret of how I accomplish all of this in every detail; but before going into the explanation I shall first describe some materializing done by a professional medium which is passed for reality.

## PROFESSIONAL MATERIALIZATION

IN THIS SÉANCE, subdued light is used and soft strains of music are furnished by a phonograph or music-box. First the committee stretch a curtain across the corner of the room, enclosing the corner in a kind of closet or cabinet. The room is perfectly bare except for plain chairs for the guests and the medium, and its one door is locked and guarded by the guests. The curtain extends from the ceiling of the room entirely to the floor: and the space enclosed, which is about ten feet wide and five deep, is perfectly empty and is bounded by solid walls of the building, which may be of brick, with no window or opening.

Sometimes the medium sits in the cabinet while the guests hold each other's hands securely. Spirits come out of the cabinet in the very dim light, and approach and even whisper to the guests. Frequently they are recognized by some tearful guest as a dead relative.

It is at such times that spirits of little ones, completely formed and beautiful, come out on the floor in front of the guests; sometimes fragments of bodies appear. Even the Diakka are materialized, which are usually small sprites or demons. I reproduce [a photograph] I made. ... They look very weird and grotesque when moving and whining and talking. They are no larger than a big doll...



PHOTOGRAPH OF A DIAKKA.

Sometimes ancient personages are materialized. One of these was the materialization of the Witch of Endor. I here reproduce [one] of her poses; but the pictures give only the faintest idea of the awful feeling that comes over all when this hideous specter is seen to be alive, to move, to moan, and

to whine, as it talks. The awful death-like pallor in the subdued light produces an effect on the weak-nerved that is not for their good. I have seen women and children almost thrown into hysteria and even men badly frightened when this hideous living thing was right against them.



MATERIALIZATION OF AN ANCIENT WITCH.

Necessarily, using light strong enough to photograph this creature, brings it into light of day, showing every detail distinctly which, in subdued light, is left largely to the imagination. This, with the dim light and surroundings, produces an effect that can hardly be imagined when viewing the photographs in full light.

In this séance, before it finishes, the medium comes among the guests and they hold his hands. At the same time a number of living spirits emerge from the cabinet and move about the room.

Upon retiring to the cabinet the lights are raised and the room is searched. Not a thing suspicious is found. Nothing living but the guests and the medium are in the room. The door has never been disturbed.

## THE EXPLANATION OF THE MYSTERIES



THE BOLT EXPLAINED.

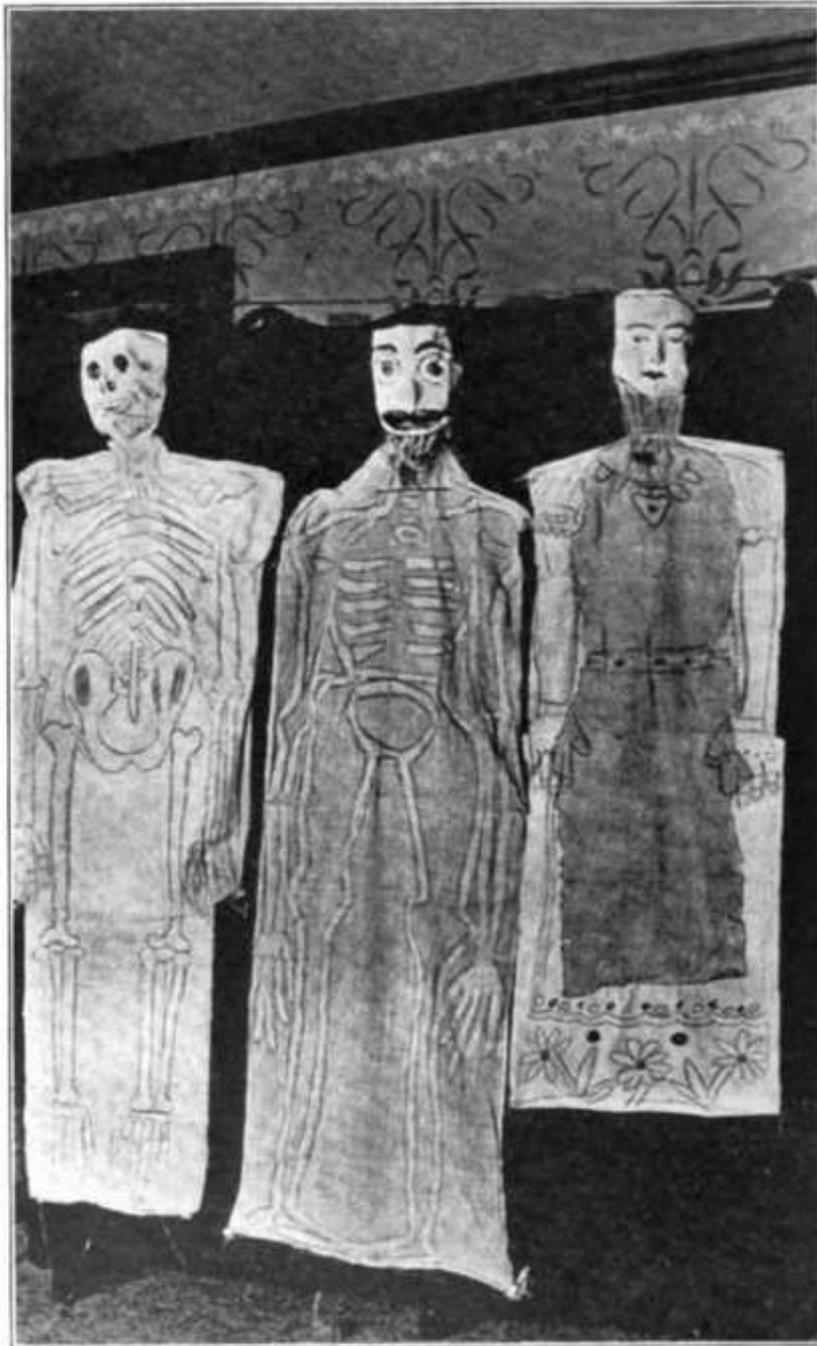
First, as to my own performances, I must have free use of my hands to do these things, and the bolt is a trick affair of very fine workmanship. It seems solid, even under a jeweler's eye-glass; but upon twisting it very hard, the reverse from the way you unscrew a nut from a bolt, it separates in the center

and is seen to be held by reverse threads on the projecting portion. The lathe work is extremely accurate, and the joint is further obscured by twisting the bolt when joined, in the hands, one holding and encircling it with a piece of emery-cloth. This entirely obliterates the faintest sign of the joint. I also have rubber bands in my cuffs, under which to tuck the dangling ends of tapes while I work.

In the first part of the act, after producing the noisy manifestations, and when nearly through, I keep up the noises and get the bell in one hand and the tambourine in the other. Keeping up the sounds, I insert the bolt and give it a reverse twist, relocking it in position. I now rattle the tambourine and ring the bell and at the same time cry "curtain." As my assistant leaps, I drop the tambourine and throw the bell over the cabinet. Of course I drink the water and place the hoop on my arm before doing this. I can untie my neck, as it is not sealed, and stand up to wave the flag above the cabinet. I can upset the rear chair and do all kinds of things which pass for manifestations.

But now you will ask about the materializations. Where do I get the spirits? Simply from within the guitar. It is specially made, and by twisting the button on the end, and pressing at the same time, the end piece separates and comes off. A cavity is disclosed in which the luminous things are packed, also a piece of black cloth with which to cover them when out and not in use, and a reaching-tube which is nothing but the leg of a kodak tripod with the plug removed from the big end and the solid rod from the small end. This tube, as most know, is telescoping. I insert a mouthpiece in the small end and then place the trumpet, which has a small amount of luminous paint on it, on the big end. In the darkness I can now reach it out over the heads of the guests and talk softly into the mouthpiece and produce all the effects as described. This trumpet and tube, partly extended, may be seen in the photograph "Mediumistic Paraphernalia." The first head and also the hand and forearm are painted on flat, tough, tan-colored press-board, with luminous paint made by mixing luminous calcium sulphide in dammar varnish. They are blackened on the reverse side. They have a small tube attached, into which I push the small end of the reaching-tube. I can then float them out in the darkness; and by giving the tube a half turn, the black side faces the guests, and the apparition becomes invisible and seems to vanish. It can again appear elsewhere by giving another half turn to the tube. The luminous star and other figures are floated and vanished the same way, and this tube is used for a staff when waving the flag. It collapses and is

packed secretly in the guitar when not in use.



FIGURES OF SKELETON, GIANT DIAKKA, AND LADY.

When spirit forms are being floated in front of the guests, I simply have slipped the end of the tube into a short tube in the back of the figure's head and can then move it about as desired. It shines faintly from the luminous

paint on it, and is visible in a kind of spectral light. By blowing my breath into the tube, it passes out upon the guests, and is felt as the breath of the spirit. I can sigh faintly, also, with success. The hair on the cardboard head and the other figures of a lady consist of a long piece of very fine silk gauze which is saturated with a weak solution of the luminous preparation. I pin it on the head before floating it out. It thus looks like a vapor, it is so thin, gauzy, and ghostly. When the luminous figures approach near one, and he can hear sighs, feel the warm breath, and even hear faint words, the effect is pronounced.

All of the more prominent parts that are most distinct, such as the jewels, embroidery, flowers, etc., are painted with pure paint applied thickly; while the body of dresses, skirts, etc., have only a weak solution on them. They are thus quite dim and vapory.

I use luminous calcium sulphide, which comes in ounce bottles, for the chief ingredient of my luminous paints or mixtures. For a powerful luminosity, I mix the powder in ordinary banana oil, or in Lowe Brothers' preparation of dammar varnish. It does not smell. This dries so that the cloth is flexible. The amount of sulphide determines the degree of luminosity. For the fine silk gauze I prefer to mix the sulphide in some starch or sizing, such as is used on new silk, and thus fasten the powder into the goods. Enough will be retained to make it faintly luminous, but it will not stand washing. The sulphide is made in Germany but can be supplied by most any big drug supply house.

A short time before the performance I burn a piece of magnesium wire (seen in a bundle on the curtain in the photograph of "Mediumistic Paraphernalia") in front of the luminous objects. After this they will retain the light and emit it slowly for a half hour or so. They must be exposed to an intense light if kept for any time before using.

Only the faintest idea of how the figures look in darkness, by the spectral light of the sulphide, can be gained from the pictures, which show parts which in darkness are entirely invisible. In darkness only the painted figures can be seen, surrounded by the faint spectral glow which dimly illuminates the beard or other details. If the object is beautiful, such as a child or lady with flowers, the effect in darkness is just as beautiful as that of the grotesque figures is hideous.

These can be vanished at any time by covering with a piece of black cloth. Then all is packed back into the guitar and the end locked on. Nothing

can be seen from the sound-hole but darkness.

The secret of the professional materializing described, I mentioned in *The Open Court* once before; it lies in a secret trap-door over the cabinet in the ceiling of the séance room. The ceiling is papered in designs, and certain lines hide the cuts of this secret door, which is on hinges and hooked up from the room above. When the music starts, the assistants above, all "made up" for the occasion, descend on a padded ladder which they slip down into the cabinet. It cannot be seen in the room for the curtains. They retire up this ladder, drawing it up and locking the trap from above, at the end of the séance. Nothing can be learned or found by an examination of the ceiling from below, as the work on the trap is extra well done.

The witch "make-up" is done by spreading over the face a layer of ordinary flour dough, freshly rolled out, and soft. Holes are torn for eyes, mouth, and nostrils. As it dries it forms the hideous cracks. I have known a lady to use this "dough-face" at parties with disastrous results. It is not safe without first warning the guests that they must control their nerves.

The Diakka [picture was] not taken during a séance, neither were those of the witch; but I had them specially posed at a different time. The former are made by the human hand draped with fur. Two burnt matches are used for eyes, and the thumb makes the tongue, which protrudes and moves about as the mouth widely opens. This with ventriloquial talking effects, certainly produces a sensation in a dim and uncertain light. I am indebted to Mrs. May Wheeler for posing these figures specially for me.

[Anthology editor's note: This articles was lightly edited to exclude several pictures of Daikka and The Witch of Endor. The exclusions were done to keep the file size reasonable. –Katherine Nabity]

# About the Editor



Katherine Nabity is a writer and, since the autumn of 2012, a magic history enthusiast. More information about Katherine can be found at [Entangled Continua Publishing](#).

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